

The Canterbury Tales Disaster

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March, 2005

Oh how I love assigning students tales
Though some consider them as tough as nails.
This project gets imaginations roaring
The thoughts within their heads all go a-soaring
But look a group that's in distress! A mess!
I'll go and see if I can help, I guess.
"Christina, Dana and that's Dani too,
Tut tut, have not you three a single clue?"

"In truth, kind sir," then Dani, she replied
"A good idea has not yet been supplied."

"Now that's not true," brash Dana quickly snapped.
"For my idea will keep our audiences rapt!"

Christina then replied, "Your idea's just
Mere melodrama, we need something—"

"Christina, your idea is far too merry.
We two are not inclined to merely tarry
On something shallow and so childish seeming.
Nay, we need something with a lot more meaning!
Not something that's so plainly frivolous,
We'd something rather bold and chivalrous"

Then Dr. Boerth attempted to advise.
He had suggestions thoughtful and most wise.
He opened up his mouth and said, "My dears—"
But Dani interrupted, "We need tears!"

"But Dani," said Christina, "Heaven's sake!
Your tale is far too grim for us to take!"
She pleaded and her voice became most coy,
"My tale will give delight and bring them joy,
Not fan our readers' homicidal urges
And bring up last week's lunch in reflex purges."

Then Dana said, "See here you two are wrong
We're trying to paint pictures that are strong
Of one deceased who is both young and old,
A day that's wet and windy and quite cold."

"No Dana," Dani said, "now listen, phony.
Your story's dull as yesterday's bologna."

Then Dana said, "Now Dani that's not fair
You've not enough blind sense to even spare.
So can't you see the plainest truth of all
That mine's the better tale among them all?"

Christina said, "If Dani's tale is grim,
Then yours is too, and also far too dim.
My tale's a tale that has a certain twist
It's setting's cool, a valley full of mist."

"Christina I'm surprised that you would do
Such nonsense that it makes my face turn blue.
To understand your fairyland most dumb
Requires I remove my brain – it's numb.
Now I admit my tale is something serious
It will not make the audience delirious."

Then Dr. Boerth rebuked them with a shout,
"Now wait a minute, get this sorted out!
You girls must try to get the story straight,
You each have thoughts the others think not great,
But if you can't agree on one to choose
I'll have to pick one; then you all will lose!
Now here's a thought: just tell your tales to me,
I'll tell you which is best – and there's no fee."

Christina said "You've got this thing all wrong.
If meaningful this tale need not be long.

Nor to be good need it be very sad
In fact, to make it so would be quite mad.
That's not my point, but I will tell you now,
My point is this, so do not have a cow!

My tale is not intended to depress,
My tale brings joy and even happiness,
And it's a tale about a good, kind tree
Whose soul is destined to be soon set free."

(Christina's and Dana's Tales omitted)

Prologue To Dani's Tale

No, that tale's too silly, listen here.
That my idea is best is all too clear.
My tale will leave a very strong impression,
Because its form is true artist's expression.
While you may find that it is not in rhyme
That's not because I didn't spend the time,
It's not because to rhyme is all that hard
I simply didn't want a Hallmark Card.
Thus the tale is written in blank verse;
To tell it elsewhere, it would just sound worse.

Dani's Tale

A mission set off from Canaveral
To explore space. And on that fateful trip
Were several worthy hearts whose tale I tell
The end: destruction of their vessel frail.

There was their steadfast Captain Brooks and too
The second in command; there also was
A team of fine technicians, one of whom
Grew close to their calm Captain through the games
Of chess they played together in his room.

The oddest member of the worthy crew
Was the computer, fast and smart and sure
Almost alive with vast intelligence,
So large its banks of memory as to make
All older circuits seem as but mere toys.
And it – or he, as it preferred –
Performed the navigation of the ship.

The life onboard was spent in mostly waiting.
The Captain passed the hours deep in thoughts
Of chess against the lovely Kathryn Sky,
A young, ambitious woman, and chess player.

This tale begins when that fine crew passed through
The field of asteroids that circle round our sun
Between the planet Jupiter and Mars.
Ill-fated voyagers, they did not know
The asteroids were ruins of a race
That had destroyed its planet in a war
And left untouched by hand of time there was
One weapon waiting deep within black space.

Doomed ship passed close within its range
And silently it came to life and launched.
The Captain and his crew were thrown about
Explosions rocked the tiny ship.
As fate befell the weapon missed the place
Wherein the crew lived, slept and ate,
But ripped a huge hole through the air reserves.
The hungry vacuum of dark space then sucked
The precious air away without
A second's pause to save
The vital stuff they needed to have life.
The souls aboard that ship were now marooned,
Propulsion out, the lighting flickered dim
And without enough air to last a single day.
The Captain did not show his fear to them
As to the crew he said these fateful words,
“As you have felt, we've struck a weapon dire,
It's ripped apart our air tanks and has left
No hope of a safe way to journey home.
I will be frank, you know there is no way,
Our air will fade away within a day.
Six hours time, that's all that we have got,
However we will not show fear, my friends.
As Officers we are of Mother Earth
And we will act as such until the end.
A fine crew all you are, a loyal crew
And I am sorry I cannot do more
To save you from the end that must await.
And now, record a message for your friends
Back home on Earth and we will then deploy
A message buoy and point it toward the Earth,
And we'll include our logs so that the world
Will know the fate that has afflicted us
And how much we have done in these two years.”
With only a short time to make a log
He headed to his cabin deep in thought.

Young Kathryn headed to her quarters, too.
She brought computer up on line. It said,
“Computer active, please state your request.”
“Computer, record log for Kathryn Sky.”
She paused, collecting thoughts, and then went on:
“Hi Mom. I don't think that I told you
How very much I love you, and how I ...
Appreciate the things you've done for me
And now it's almost grown too late, I fear.

But never mind, I cannot tell you now
Of my adventures on this final trip.
I made two friends aboard this tiny ship.
One's name is Tanya, Tanya Wintersmith.
And, oh, the Captain, too... I think... I hope.
I know he's dedicated to the crew
But though we've spent much time absorbed in chess,
He's distant, and I guess, a little cold.
I do look up to him and always try
To impress on him just how much I care
About the job, I mean, and well, you know
When we play chess I sometimes let him win.
You always wanted me to settle down...
And now at last the perfect man I've found
A bit too late, I know, but still... I wish...
But you don't need to hear these ramblings now.
Hey guess what I did, and don't laugh at me,
I grew a garden, right up here in space,
I know it's silly that when I was young
I hated gardens and the work they brought.
But here in space I wanted something green.
I know it's silly but it's brought me joy.
I hope you get this, Mom, I love you. Kate."
She said "Computer end." And went to tend
Her little plants with water one last time.

The log of Tanya Wintersmith was made
As she stood by her nightstand in her room.
She gazed at photos resting thereupon
Of happy people smiling in a way
That she had near forgotten out in space.
The picture showed her one true love and her –
A time of fond remembrance back on Earth.
"Computer, record log of Tanya Wintersmith,"
She said the words to photo and computer, too.
"Hi Michael, you know who this, I'm sure.
Remember me? Your long lost love? And now
I really am lost, after all this time.
I won't get sentimental for I know
How much you hate when I do, but still...
I'd like to tell you all the things I've done
Since you last saw me long ago on Earth.
First there was Mars, it really is bright red.
We scanned it but we found no life at all.
I guess it's not a very gentle place.
I'm sorry that I signed up for this trip.

I know you didn't want me to at all.
And now I know that you were right again.
But don't go mooning over me for years,
Or I will never speak to you again.
I want you to be happy even if
It's not with me. Find some nice girl
And settle down. Just think of me a bit
From time to time, and know it when I say
I love you always and forever, Michael dear.
Look, I don't have much time left, so I'll say
I love you, and no more. No tears and such.
And now I'm signing off," she said and stopped.
She wiped a tear away and glancing down
She saw through blurry eyes the diamond ring
He'd placed there, and she wept.

The Captain paced his quarters, back and forth
Until at last he sank into his chair
"Computer record log, Chase Brooks," he said.
"Hey Thom, How is my favorite little bro?
We've been out here for nearly two full years.
We scanned for life on Mars for most of that.
It's beautiful – the sun on sharp red hills,
Enough to take one's breath away." He coughed.
Bad choice of words he new, but hurried on.
"Since we last met I've played a lot of chess.
I finally figured out how to defeat
That opening move of yours, the one you loved.
It's Kathryn Sky who showed the trick to me.
She told me 'castle' with my rook and king,
It works quite well. Of course it would,
For Kathryn's brilliant as I've said before.
I value her, a friend but maybe more.
She was so timid here at first, you know,
Whenever I'd inspect her work she'd go
Quite quiet and would say, 'Yes sir' to all
The questions put to her until dismissed.
But when I told her I played chess, she changed,
So I invited her to play a game
With me, and it became a weekly thing.
Her eyes could melt a heart of stone, I swear.
Her smile is like the sun when it comes out.
And yet I cannot tell her how I feel,
For I'm the Captain and this ship is small.
So I have always acted properly.
I shouldn't burden you with this, I know.

Before I go, take care of Mom, OK?
I love you both, and now I'll take my leave."

He stopped recording as there came a knock
And Kathryn entered, chess set in her arms.
"No sense in wasting precious time, is there?"
She set the pieces in their places then.
He meant to say a different thing but said,
"You are so beautiful," and then he paused.
Her hand knocked pieces from the board.
"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Kathryn."
He met her gaze and saw that it was past
The time for hesitation and he kissed
Her, taking in each small detail
Her warmth, her smell, the way she clung to him.

Another knock came and they sprang apart.
In Tanya came, a bottle in one hand,
A Grande Champagne, a 2215.
Her eyes a little red from tears it seemed,
She said, "Perhaps you don't want company right now?"
They waved her in, the Captain poured a toast,
"To friends, new found, and friends long absent, too."

The hours marched on, the messages were sent,
The probe's flare faded in the dark of space.
Three hours left, the air was getting thin,
Three friends together, they spoke about the past.
First Tanya's head, then Kathryn's drooped and fell.
Just as the Captain's world began to fade
A blinking sensor reading caught his eye.
With one last effort he reached for a switch,
Engaged computer circuits, then he slumped.
The ship turned, rocket fired and headed toward
A planetoid where atmosphere had showed.
And as crew slept Computer guided them,
For how it wished to get them there in time,
As now it felt it knew them from their letters.

Christina's has a certain puerile charm.
I mention this, for it will do no harm.
I like a tale of creatures cute and cuddly
Although their thoughts are sometimes rather muddly.
However Dana's Tale has something new.
It's quite refreshing with its different view.
At first I thought it would be quite depressing
But on the whole I found it kept me guessing.
Then Dani's Tale has benefits to reap.
Though rhymeless, it's one I would like to keep.
I must admire the way it makes me feel,
Emotional, with characters so real.
And yet it's clear that one tale is the best,
In fact it's far superior to the rest.
And it's a tale I'd give an 'A' to any day,
The winning tale is—"

But as he spoke the bell began to ring...

and ring...

and ring...

and ring...

and ring...

and ring.

Conclusion

"I see your problem now," said Dr. B.
It is that all your tales seem good to me.
However say no more for I proclaim
I know which tale it is that's won the game.