

CRUISE TO  
NOWHERE TALES

A MODERN VERSION  
OF CHAUCER'S  
CANTERBURY TALES

THE THERAPIST'S TALE

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## THE THERAPIST'S TALE

### THE THERAPIST'S PROLOGUE

All through this tale the therapist seemed wroth,  
Staring at the entrepreneur, a broth  
Of anger and resentment seated there  
Within her long and unabated stare.

At last, the tale over, she said to the wife,  
"That was an honest tale, upon my life!  
For who finds joy in others' joy but those  
Who find no joy in self? The idea arose  
In ages dark, when priest and lord held sway  
To take a person's liberty away,  
As well as goods, and all that they could steal.

"But one cannot forget the commonweal,  
Even as one cultivates the self  
And finds luxuriant richness in the gulf  
Between what is and should be. Now the greed  
Of certain parasites exceeds the need,  
Entrepreneurs who roam the globe to find  
The cheapest labor, they do not care what kind –  
Slave or free, child or adult –"

"Enough," said the bartender. "Let's not revolt  
Against the rules here! Tales! We want but tales!  
And not some petty payback swathed in veils!"  
"Don't worry," said the entrepreneur. "I can

Play tit for tat as well as any man.  
My turn is coming, in which the therapist  
Will have, for once, good reason to be pissed!"

"Believe me, I'm not worried," the therapist said.  
"But all of you, please, let me go ahead."  
"Tell on!" the bartender said. "I'll not intrude.  
But make the tale rewarding, not just rude."  
"That I'll do," the therapist said, and told  
The tale that now before you shall unfold.

### THE THERAPIST'S TALE

There once was a successful entrepreneur  
Who traveled to a faraway place to tour  
Factories that made what he was selling,  
Where people were too poor to be rebelling  
Against low wages and pitiful conditions,  
And where the government set few restrictions  
On what a manufacturer might do  
To make the most of his investment. Few  
Such opportunities existed where  
He lived, and so he came to look elsewhere.

He met his guide at the airport, a fiendish man  
Who looked like an overseer, whip in hand,  
In times of slavery. He had a scar  
From ear to chin, and missing teeth to mar  
His devilish smile. His very eyes seemed cruel,  
And mounded muscle played against the cool  
White linen of his boxy, well-pressed clothes.

An odor faintly sulfurous arose  
From him, as though just lately come from Hell.

This fiend behaved as though he knew him well,  
And they had much in common, often poking  
Him playfully in the ribs, or loudly joking  
About sex and women's body parts and such.

But though the entrepreneur didn't like him much,  
He saw in him a man who could control  
The labor needed to achieve his goal  
Of making more for less. He could depend  
On such a man, and so he called him friend,  
And made it seem they shared a kindred spirit,  
Though he took precious little pleasure in it.

The guide then took him to a factory,  
And said, "All these laborers that you see  
Are from the country, landless peasants who  
Would starve, were it not for folks like you –  
Entrepreneurs out to make a buck,  
Providing jobs for people out of luck."  
Hundreds of workers hunched over sewing machines  
At long, low tables, stitching hand-held seams.  
The light was low, the ventilation poor;  
The pace was fast, their movements deft and sure.

"They work 12 hours a day, seven days a week,"  
The fiend said, " – just the workers that you seek.  
We meet our quota at the quoted price,  
And yet each garment is inspected twice,

And any faults are traced back to the source,  
Whom we fire on the spot, of course.

"We pay them just enough so they can live  
To work the next day. Anything more would give  
Our competitors the advantage. You would go  
Immediately to them – this we know.  
And yet, of course, we cannot pay them less,  
Or they wouldn't have the strength to stitch a dress.  
And so the market sets the rate of pay  
At what it takes to live another day."

"How much would a hundred dozen cost?"  
The entrepreneur asked. "Well, at the most ..."  
The guide then gave a number so much less  
Than he expected or could possibly guess  
That he could scarce contain his ecstasy  
At what he thought his annual net might be.

Soon the millions would be rolling in,  
While all the while the workers would thank him,  
Grateful for providing them with work  
When otherwise they'd starve. No guilt ought lurk  
Within his heart, thought the entrepreneur,  
Who was quite thrilled with this stop on his tour.

"Come to the next circle down below.  
The returns get even better as we go,"  
The fiend said. "These are prisoners of the state  
Who get paid nothing." They then passed through a  
gate

In a barbed wire fence with watchtowers all around,  
Manned by guards, their guns trained on the ground,  
And into a low-slung building filled with men  
Pulling bolts of cloth through presses. When  
Each press pressed down, steam hissed out. The heat  
Was almost unbearable. Each new-pressed sheet  
Burned the hand, yet the workers held it steady  
As it rolled towards the cutting machine, now ready  
For blades that reached across the narrow table,  
Ripping right near hands just barely able  
To avoid them as they held the hot cloth taut.

The entrepreneur said, "Perhaps the workers ought  
To stay a little further from the blades."  
The fiend laughed. "What's the difference? They're  
not paid,  
They're prisoners. One dies, we get another.  
They're dead men anyway – why should we bother?  
If not enough die here, we execute more.  
We sell their organs, need to stock the store."

And then he told the entrepreneur how much  
Each bolt would cost, a figure that was such  
A bargain he was delighted, and soon forgot  
To think about the prison laborers' lot.

And anyway, who knew what crimes they had  
Committed? They were surely very bad,  
Villains all, who clearly deserved their fate.  
Besides, why should the citizens of the state  
Pay to subsidize such evil men?

It was right to make them work, and then  
To save lives with their organs! The entrepreneur  
Felt positively righteous. But on with the tour!

The way lay downward towards a factory  
In which only children toiled. "As you see,"  
The fiend said, "We need small fingers and sharp eyes  
To make these rugs, so many thousand ties  
Per inch, a child can make but one, and then  
Her eyesight's ruined." "What happens to them when  
They can no longer work?" the entrepreneur  
Asked. "We sell them to a brothel," the tour  
Guide answered, laughing. "The children do not need  
Their eyes for that! And get a good price, indeed –  
More than we paid their parents, that's for sure,  
Who sold them for a pittance, they were so poor.

"The best are trained for the highest quality,  
Two years to make one rug. Can you see  
How beautiful they are?" He took one out,  
A small one, and he turned it all about,  
Showing the entrepreneur how colors changed,  
So close the work, so perfectly arranged.

"Such hand-made rugs are worth a great, great deal,  
But we can let you have them for a steal  
Since they are made by child slaves. Don't think  
That that's so bad. Here there's food and drink,  
While at home there's nothing but disease.  
Most would die even earlier. So ease  
Your conscience with the thought that, slave or free,



Most of us must live in poverty.  
These children have helped their families to survive,  
And if they're forced to work, well, they're alive.  
In the meantime you and I can make out well.  
Are you ready for the final circle of Hell?"

The entrepreneur nodded, and off they went,  
Down, down on a twisting, steep, and dark descent  
To a river engulfed in sulfurous fumes, where flames  
Leaped up from the boiling liquid. Men in chains  
Labored on the other side, all sweaty  
From the heat, naked, burned, and bloody,  
Whipped by demons as they pulled huge boulders  
Up steep hills, or carried them on their shoulders.

"What profit could I get from these poor souls?"  
The entrepreneur asked. "What production goals  
Are met by what they do? And who are they,  
Who labor in so purposeless a way?"

"They are the damned!" the fiend replied. "And you  
Will profit nothing from the things they do,  
But now will join them for eternity!"  
"What?" cried the entrepreneur. "Help! Help! Why  
me?"

The fiend then laughed, snapped his fingers, and  
The scene just disappeared, as he had planned.  
"This was a hologram," the fiend explained,  
"To show you how the world was. We were chained  
To a morality that censured greed,

The engine that supplies our every need,  
And brings us wealth and plenty. Never fear,  
There's neither Hell nor Heaven waiting here,  
No afterlife to punish or reward,  
No ideal to travel ever toward,  
Nothing but our own good health and pleasure.

"So come! Let's join to maximize our treasure,  
And do what for our own sakes will be best,  
For here the only blessed must be self-blessed!"  
So ends my tale – I need not tell you more  
About the fiend and his friend, the entrepreneur.