

“The Miller’s Tale”



As you listen jot down what you will – but above all listen, listen, listen. Remember, you were introduced to the Miller in the general prologue.

THE MILLER from The General Prologue

The miller was a stout churl, be it known,
Hardy and big of brawn and big of bone;
Which was well proved, for when he went on lam
At wrestling, never failed he of the ram.
He was a chunky fellow, broad of build;
He'd heave a door from hinges if he willed,
Or break it through, by running, with his head.
His beard, as any sow or fox, was red,
And broad it was as if it were a spade.
Upon the coping of his nose he had
A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,
Red as the bristles in an old sow's ears;
His nostrils they were black and very wide.
A sword and buckler bore he by his side.
His mouth was like a furnace door for size.
He was a jester and could poetize,
But mostly all of sin and ribaldries.
He could steal corn and full thrice charge his fees;
And yet he had a thumb of gold, begad.
A white coat and blue hood he wore, this lad.
A bagpipe he could blow well, be it known,
And with that same he brought us out of town.



Characters in the Tale – taken from Shmoop

John the Carpenter: An old man, among the first things we learn about John is that, because he has married a much younger wife, he's constantly afraid that she'll cheat on him. Consequently, says the narrator, he's extremely jealous about Alisoun, keeping her on a tight leash. Yet John's actions actually contradict this characterization.

Nicholas is the poor young scholar who rents a room in John's house. He sets his sights on Alisoun and fairly quickly manages to get her seduce her. Nicholas is the mover and shaker behind most of the action in the tale: it's he who meets with Alisoun and tricks John.

Absolon the clerk: "The Miller's Tale" gives us a second student in love with the parish clerk Absolon. Like Nicholas's portrait, Absolon's makes him seem somewhat effeminate: he has curly golden hair, which he carefully parts down the middle. He always makes sure that his hair is combed nicely, his breath smells sweet, and his shirt is free from wrinkles. With this fastidious personality comes a phobia important to the plot: Absolon is "somdeel squaymous / Of fartynge" (229-230), or disgusted by farting, a point that becomes very important at the end of the story.

Alisoun, John's wife, Nicholas's lover, and a reputed local beauty, is the only character in "The Miller's Tale" who goes apparently unpunished at its conclusion.

The narrator: **Stanley Augustus Holloway**, (1 October 1890 – 30 January 1982) was an English stage and film actor, humourist, singer, poet and monologist. He was famous for his comic and character roles on stage and screen, especially that of Alfred P. Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. He was also renowned for his comic monologues and songs, which he performed and recorded throughout most of his 70-year career.