

“The Pardoner’s Tale” Summary

To begin, the Pardoner repeats that his theme is always "Money is the root of all evil" because, with this text, he can denounce the very vice that he practices: greed. And even though he is guilty of the same sins he preaches against, he can still make other people repent. The Pardoner admits that he likes money, rich food, and fine living. And even if he is not a moral man, he can tell a good moral tale, which follows.

In Flanders, at the height of a black plague, three young men sit in an inn, eating and drinking far beyond their power and swearing oaths that are worthy of damnation. The revelers mark the passing of a coffin and ask who has died. A servant tells them that the dead man was a friend who was stabbed in the back the night before by a thief called Death. The young revelers, thinking that Death might still be in the next town, decide to seek him out and slay him.

On the way, the three men meet an old man who explains that he must wander the earth until he can find someone willing to exchange youth for old age. He says that not even Death will take his life. Hearing him speak of Death, the revelers ask where they can find Death, and the old man directs them to a tree at the end of the lane. The revelers rush to the tree and find eight bushels of gold coins, which they decide to keep.

They decide to wait for night to move the gold and draw straws to see which one will go into town to get food and wine. The youngest of the three draws the shortest straw. When he leaves, the two others decide to kill him and divide his money. The youngest, however, wanting the treasure to himself, buys poison, which he adds to two of the bottles of wine he purchases. When the youngest reveler approaches the tree, the two others stab him and then sit down to drink the wine before they dispose of his body. Thus, all three indeed find Death.