

The Faerie Queene Poem

Writer: Edmund Spenser | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

from The Faerie Queene: Book I, Canto I

By Edmund Spenser

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske, As time her taught in lowly Shepherds weeds,
Am now enforst a far unfitter taske, For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds, And
sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds; Whose prayes having slept in silence long, Me, all too
meane, the sacred Muse areeds To blazon broad emongst her learned throng: Fierce warres
and faithful loves shall moralize my song. Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine, Thy weaker
Novice to performe thy will, Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne The antique rolles, which
there lye hidden still, Of Faerie knights and fairest Tanaquill, Whom that most noble Briton
Prince so long Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill, That I must rue his
undeserved wrong: O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong. And thou most
dreaded impe of highest Jove, Faire Venus sonne, that with thy cruell dart At that good knight
so cunningly didst rove, That glorious fire it kindled in his hart, Lay now thy deadly Heben bow
apart, And with thy mother milde come to mine ayde: Come both, and with you bring
triumphant Mart, In loves and gentle jollities arrayd, After his murdrous spoiles and bloody rage
allayd. And with them eke, O Goddesse heavenly bright, Mirrour of grace and Majestie divine,
Great Lady of the greatest Isle, whose light Like Phoebus lampe throughout the world doth
shine, Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne, And raise my thoughts too humble and too
vile, To thinke of that true glorious type of thine, The argument of mine afflicted stile: The
which to heare, vouchsafe, O dearest dred a-while.

i A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine, Y cladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine, The cruell markes of many a bloody field; Yet
armes till that time did he never wield: His angry steede did chide his foming bitt, As much
disdayning to the curbe to yield: Full jolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt, As one for
knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

ii But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore, The deare remembrance of his dying Lord, For
whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore, And dead as living ever him ador'd: Upon his
shield the like was also scor'd, For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had: Right faithfull
true he was in deede and word, But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad; Yet nothing did

he dread, but ever was ydrad.

iii Upon a great adventure he was bond, That greatest Gloriana to him gave, That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond, To winne him worship, and her grace to have, Which of all earthly things he most did crave; And ever as he rode, his hart did earne To prove his puissance in battell brave Upon his foe, and his new force to learne; Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

iv A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside, Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow, Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide Under a vele, that wimpled was full low, And over all a blacke stole she did throw, As one that inly mournd: so was she sad, And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow; Seemed in heart some hidden care she had, And by her in a line a milke white lambe she lad.

v So pure an innocent, as that same lambe, She was in life and every vertuous lore, And by descent from Royall lynage came Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore Their scepters stretcht from East to Western shore, And all the world in their subjection held; Till that infernall feend with foule uprore Forwasted all their land, and them expeld: Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compeld.

vi Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag, That lasie seemd in being ever last, Or wearied with bearing of her bag Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past, The day with cloudes was suddeine overcast, And angry Jove an hideous storme of raine Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast, That every wight to shrowd it did constrain, And this faire couple eke to shroud themselves were fain.

vii Enforst to seeke some covert nigh at hand, A shadie grove not far away they spide, That promist ayde the tempest to withstand: Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride, Did spread so broad, that heavens light did hide, Not perceable with power of any starre: And all within were pathes and alleies wide, With footing worne, and leading inward farre: Faire harbour that them seemes; so in they entred arre.

viii And forth they passe, with pleasure forward led, Joying to heare the birdes sweete harmony, Which therein shrouded from the tempest dred, Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky. Much can they prayse the trees so straight and hy, The sayling Pine, the Cedar proud and tall, The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar never dry, The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all, The Aspine good for staves, the Cypress funeral.

ix The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still, The Willow worne of forlorne Paramours, The Eugh obedient to the benders will, The Birch for

shaftes, the Sallow for the mill, The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound, The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill, The fruitfull Olive, and the Platane round, The carver Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.

x Led with delight, they thus beguile the way, Untill the blustering storme is overblowne; When weening to returne, whence they did stray, They cannot find that path, which first was showne, But wander too and fro in wayes unknowne, Furthest from end then, when they nearest weene, That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne: So many pathes, so many turnings seene, That which of them to take, in diverse doubt they been.

xi At last resolving forward still to fare, Till that some end they finde or in or out, That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare, And like to lead the labyrinth about; Which when by tract they hunted had throughout, At length it brought them to a hollow cave, Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout Eftsoones dismounted from his courser brave, And to the Dwarfe a while his needlesse spere he gave.

xii Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde, Least suddaine mischief ye too rash provoke: The danger hid, the place unknowne and wilde, Breeds dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke, And perill without show: therefore your stroke Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made. Ah Ladie (said he) shame were to revoke The forward footing for an hidden shade: Vertue gives her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade.

xiii Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place I better wot then you, though now too late To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace, Yet wisdomes warnes, whilst foot is in the gate, To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate. This is the wandring wood, this Errours den, A monster vile, whom God and man does hate: Therefore I read beware. Fly fly (quoth then The fearefull Dwarfe:) this is no place for living men.

xiv But full of fire and greedy hardiment, The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide, But forth unto the darksome hole he went, And looked in: his glistring armor made A litle glooming light, much like a shade, By which he saw the ugly monster plaine, Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine, Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

xv And as she lay upon the durty ground, Her huge long taile her den all overspred, Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound, Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed, Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, eachone Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favored: Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone, Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

xvi Their dam upstart, out of her den effraide, And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile About her cursed head, whose folds displaid Were stretcht now forth at length without entraille. She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe; For light she hated as the deadly bale, Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine, Where plaine none might her see, nor she see any plaine.

xvii Which when the valiant Elfe perceiv'd, he lept As Lyon fierce upon the flying pray, And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept From turning backe, and forced her to stay: Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray, And turning fierce, her speckled taile advaunst, Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay: Who nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst: The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glaunst.

xviii Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd, Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round, And all attonce her beastly body raizd With doubled forces high above the ground: Tho wrapping up her wrethed sterne arownd, Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine All suddenly about his body wound, That hand or foot to stirre he strove in vaine: God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine.

xix His Lady sad to see his sore constraint, Cride out, Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee, Add faith unto your force, and be not faint: Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee. That when he heard, in great perplexitie, His gall did grate for grieve and high disdaine, And knitting all his force got one hand free, Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine, That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

xx Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw A floud of poyson horrible and blacke, Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw, Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe: Her vomit full of bookes and papers was, With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke, And creeping sought way in the weedy gras: Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.

xxi As when old father Nilus gins to swell With timely pride above the Aegyptian vale, His fattie waves do fertile slime outwell, And overflow each plaine and lowly dale: But when his later spring gins to avale, Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male And partly female of his fruitfull seed; Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.

xxii The same so sore annoyed has the knight, That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke, His forces faile, ne can no longer fight. Whose corage when the feend perceiv'd to shrink, She poured forth out of her hellish sinke Her fruitfull cursed spawn of serpents small, Deformed

monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke, Which swarming all about his legs did crall, And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

xxiii As gentle Shepherd in sweete even-tide, When ruddy Phoebus gins to welke in west, High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide, Markes which do byte their hasty supper best; A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest, All striving to infixe their feeble stings, That from their noyance he no where can rest, But with his clownish hands their tender wings He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

xxiv Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame, Then of the certaine perill he stood in, Halfe furious unto his foe he came, Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win, Or soone to lose, before he once would lin; And strooke at her with more then manly force, That from her body full of filthie sin He raft her hatefull head without remorse; A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse.

xxv Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare They saw so rudely falling to the ground, Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare, Gathred themselves about her body round, Weening their wonted entrance to have found At her wide mouth: but being there withstood They flocked all about her bleeding wound, And sucked up their dying mothers blood, Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.

xxvi That detestable sight him much amazde, To see th'unkindly Impes of heaven accurst, Devoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd, Having all satisfide their bloody thirst, Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst, And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst; Now needeth him no lenger labour spend, His foes have slaine themselves, with whom he should contend.

xxvii His Ladie seeing all, that chaunst, from farre Approcht in hast to greet his victorie, And said, Faire knight, borne under happy starre, Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye: Well worthy be you of that Armorie, Wherein ye have great glory wonne this day, And proov'd your strength on a strong enimie, Your first adventure: many such I pray, And henceforth ever wish, that like succeed it may.

xxviii Then mounted he upon his Steede againe, And with the Lady backward sought to wend; That path he kept, which beaten was most plame, Ne ever would to any by-way bend, But still did follow one unto the end, The which at last out of the wood them brought. So forward on his way (with God to frend) He passed forth, and new adventure sought; Long way he travelled, before he heard of ought.

xxix At length they chaunst to meet upon the way An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray, And by his belt his booke he hanging had; Sober he
seemde, and very sagely sad, And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent, Simple in shew, and
voyde of malice bad, And all the way he prayed, as he went, And often knockt his brest, as one
that did repent.

xxx He faire the knight saluted, louting low, Who faire him quited, as that courteous was: And
after asked him, if he did know Of straunge adventures, which abroad did pas. Ah my deare
Sonne (quoth he) how should, alas, Silly old man, that lives in hidden cell, Bidding his beades
all day for his trespas, Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell? With holy father sits not with
such things to mell.

xxxi But if of daunger which hereby doth dwell, And homebred evill ye desire to heare, Of a
straunge man I can you tidings tell, That wasteth all this countrey farre and neare. Of such
(said he) I chiefly do inquire, And shall you well reward to shew the place, In which that wicked
wight his dayes doth weare: For to all knighthood it is foule disgrace, That such a cursed
creature lives so long a space.

xxxii Far hence (quoth he) in wastfull wilderness His dwelling is, by which no living wight May
ever passe, but thorough great distresse. Now (sayd the Lady) draweth toward night, And well I
wote, that of your later fight Ye all forweared be: for what so strong, But wanting rest will also
want of might? The Sunne that measures heaven all day long, At night doth baite his steedes
the Ocean waves among.

xxxiii Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest, And with new day new worke at once
begin: Untroubled night they say gives counsell best. Right well Sir knight ye have advised bin,
(Quoth then that aged man;) the way to win Is wisely to advise: now day is spent; Therefore
with me ye may take up your In For this same night. The knight was well content: So with that
godly father to his home they went.

xxxiv A little lowly Hermitage it was, Downe in a dale, hard by a forests side, Far from resort of
people, that did pas In travell to and froe: a little wyde There was an holy Chappell edifyde,
Wherein the Hermite dewly wont to say His holy things each morne and eventyde: Thereby a
Christall streame did gently play, Which from a sacred fountaine welled forth alway.

xxxv Arrived there, the little house they fill, Ne looke for entertainment, where none was: Rest
is their feast, and all things at their will; The noblest mind the best contentment has. With faire
discourse the evening so they pas: For that old man of pleasing wordes had store, And well
could file his tongue as smooth as glas; He told of Saintes and Popes, and evermore He strowd

an Ave-Mary after and before.

xxxvi The drouping Night thus creepeth on them fast, And the sad humour loading their eye liddes, As messenger of Morpheus on them cast Sweet slombring deaw, the which to sleepe them biddes. Unto their lodgings then his guesstes he riddes: Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe he findes, He to his study goes, and there amiddes His Magick bookes and artes of sundry kindes, He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy mindes.

xxxvii Then choosing out few wordes most horrible, (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame, With which and other spelles like terrible, He bad awake blacke Plutoes griesly Dame, And cursed heaven, and spake reprochfull shame Of highest God, the Lord of life and light; A bold bad man, that dar'd to call by name Great Gorgon, Prince of darknesse and dead night, At which Cocytus quakes, and Styx is put to flight.

xxxviii And forth he cald out of deepe darknesse dred Legions of Sprights, the which like little flyes Fluttring about his ever damned hed, A-waite whereto their service he applyes, To aide his friends, or fray his enimies: Of those he chose out two, the falsest twoo, And fittest for to forge true-seeming lyes; The one of them he gave a message too, The other by him selfe staide other worke to doo.

xxxix He making speedy way through spersed ayre, And through the world of waters wide and peepe, To Morpheus house doth hastily repaire. Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe, And low, where dawning day doth never peepe, His dwelling is; there Tethys his wet bed Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed, Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spred.

xl Whose double gates he findeth locked fast, The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yvory, The other all with silver overcast; And wakefull dogges before them farre do lye Watching to banish Care their enemy, Who oft is wont to trouble gentle Sleepe. By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly, And unto Morpheus comes, whom drowned deepe In drowsie fit he findes: of nothing he takes keepe.

xli And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft, A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe And ever-drizling raine upon the loft, Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne: No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes, As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne, Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes, Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.

xl ii The messenger approaching to him spake, But his wast wordes returnd to him in vaine: So sound he slept, that nought mought him awake. Then rudely he him thrust, and pusht with

paine, Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe Shooke him so hard, that forced him to speake. As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine In tost with troubled sights and fancies weake, He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake.

xlili The Sprite then gan more boldly him to wake, And threatned unto him the dreaded name Of Hecate: whereat he gan to quake, And lifting up his lumpish head, with blame Halfe angry asked him, for what he came. Hither (quoth he) me Archimago sent, He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame, He bids thee to him send for his intent A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent.

xliv The God obeyde, and calling forth straight way A diverse dreame out of his prison darke, Delivered it to him, and downe did lay His heavie head, devoide of carefull carke, Whose sences all were straight benumbed and starke. He backe returning by the Yvorie dore, Remounted up as light as chearefull Larke, And on his litle winges the dreame he bore In hast unto his Lord, where he him left afore.

xliv Who all this while with charmes and hidden artes, Had made a Lady of that other Spright, And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes So lively, and so like in all mens sight, That weaker sence it could have ravisht quight: The maker selfe for all his wondrous witt, Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight: Her all in white he clad, and over it Cast a blacke stole, most like to seeme for Una fit.

xlvi Now when that ydle dreame was to him brought, Unto that Elfin knight he bad him fly, Where he slept soundly void of evill thought And with false shewes abuse his fantasy, In sort as he him schooled privily: And that new creature borne without her dew, Full of the makers guile, with usage sly He taught to imitate that Lady trew, Whose semblance she did carrie under feigned hew.

xlvi Thus well instructed, to their worke they hast, And comming where the knight in slomber lay, The one upon his hardy head him plast, And made him dreame of loves and lustfull play, That nigh his manly hart did melt away, Bathed in wanton blis and wicked joy: Then seemed him his Lady by him lay, And to him playnd, how that false winged boy, Her chast hart had subdewd, to learne Dame pleasures toy.

xlvi And she her selfe of beautie soveraigne Queene, Faire Venus seemde unto his bed to bring Her, whom he waking evermore did weene, To be the chastest flowre, that ay did spring On earthly braunch, the daughter of a king, Now a loose Leman to vile service bound: And eke the Graces seemed all to sing, Hymen {i}{_o} Hymen, dauncing all around, While freshest Flora her with Yvie girlond crownd.

xlix In this great passion of unwonted lust, Or wonted feare of doing ought amis, He started up, as seeming to mistrust Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his: Lo there before his face his Lady is, Under blake stole hyding her bayted hooke, And as halfe blushing offred him to kis, With gentle blandishment and lovely looke, Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.

I All cleane dismayd to see so uncouth sight, And halfe enraged at her shamelesse guise, He thought have slaine her in his fierce despight: But hasty heat tempring with sufferance wise, He stayde his hand, and gan himselfe advise To prove his sense, and tempt her faigned truth. Wringing her hands in wemens pitteous wise, Tho can she weepe, to stirre up gentle ruth, Both for her noble bloud, and for her tender youth.

li And said, Ah Sir, my liege Lord and my love, Shall I accuse the hidden cruell fate, And mightie causes wrought in heaven above, Or the blind God, that doth me thus amate, For hoped love to winne me certaine hate? Yet thus perforce he bids me do, or die. Die is my dew: yet rew my wretched state You, whom my hard avenging destinie Hath made judge of my life or death indifferently.

lii Your owne deare sake forst me at first to leave My Fathers kingdome, There she stopt with teares; Her swollen hart her speach seemd to bereave, And then againe begun, My weaker yeares Captiv'd to fortune and frayle worldly feares, Fly to your faith for succour and sure ayde: Let me not dye in languor and long teares. Why Dame (quoth he) what hath ye thus dismayd? What frayes ye, that were wont to comfort me affrayd?

liii Love of your selfe, she said, and deare constraint Lets me not sleepe, but wast the wearie night In secret anguish and unpittied plaint, Whiles you in carelesse sleepe are drowned quight. Her doubtfull words made that redoubted knight Suspect her truth: yet since no'untruth he knew, Her fawning love with foule disdainefull spight He would not shend, but said, Deare dame I rew, That for my sake unknowne such grieve unto you grew.

liv Assure your selfe, it fell not all to ground; For all so deare as life is to my hart, I deeme your love, and hold me to you bound; Ne let vaine feares procure your needlesse smart, Where cause is none, but to your rest depart. Not all content, yet seemd she to appease Her mournfull plaintes, beguiled of her art, And fed with words, that could not chuse but please, So slyding softly forth, she turnd as to her ease.

lv Long after lay he musing at her mood, Much griev'd to think that gentle Dame so light, For whose defence he was to shed his blood. At last dull wearinesse of former fight Having yrockt a sleepe his irkesome spright, That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine, With bowres, and beds, and Ladies deare delight: But when he saw his labour all was vaine, With that misformed spright he backe returnd againe.