

he returned again to his friends. When the young ruffian returned, the other two enacted their plan—stabbing him in the side and ending his life.

RUFFIAN THREE: (*dying sound*) Ack!

RUFFIAN ONE: Ha! He's dead! Now the gold is ours!

RUFFIAN TWO: Yes...I'm just trying to remember. Why did we come here? I mean, before we found the gold?

RUFFIAN ONE: Ah, who can remember? Let us sit and drink and make merry for a minute, and then we will bury his body.

PARDONER: With that the ruffian happened to take up one of the poisoned bottles, and he drank it up and gave his friend a drink also. Therefore, they both died soon from the horrible poison. (*dying sounds of the ruffians*) Thus the two murderers and the poisoner all met a suitable end—and Death was victorious over them all. And that is the end of my tale.

KNIGHT: A grisly tale! And well-told! I always enjoy a good, moral lesson.

HOST: Ha! I don't know which is a better warning against greed—the story or the storyteller himself.

PARDONER: (*dramatically*) Oooooh, gentle-people! May God forgive your trespasses and save you from the sin of greed! It is the evil that lurks in every man's heart! But if you fall, do not worry! My holy pardons will cure you—provided you pay me the correct price. Just so you know, in

addition to gold coins, I also accept rings, brooches, or spoons of that same metal. I am not picky. Now who would like one of these pardons I carry here in my sack?

HOST: (*angrily*) Stop your bellowing, you miserable fraud! Your devotion to God is about as authentic as those relics you carry!

PARDONER: (*in complete shock*) What? How dare you!

HOST: I wish you were neutered—if it has not been done already. Your precious relics deserve to be enshrined in a hog's turd.

(*all the pilgrims laugh at the Pardoner*)

PARDONER: I—I—I...

NARRATOR: This Pardoner answered not a word. He was so angry that he would not speak.

HOST: Get as angry as you want! I will not talk to you any longer!

NARRATOR: When the worthy Knight saw all the people laughing at the Pardoner, he spoke up.

KNIGHT: Enough of this! Sir Pardoner, be cheerful. And I pray you, Sir Host, make up with the Pardoner. Let us laugh and make sport as we did before.

HOST: (*sigh*) Very well. Perhaps I spoke too harshly. My apologies.

NARRATOR: Without delay the Host and the Pardoner made up, and we rode on toward Canterbury.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is repellent or odd about the character of the Pardoner?
2. Do the three ruffians deserve to die as they did?
3. What is the theme of this story?
4. Is it futile to “take on Death” as these ruffians did? Explain.
5. What purpose does the deathless, old man serve in the story?
6. What do you think was the source of the gold that the three ruffians found?
7. Why is it ironic that it is the Pardoner who is telling this story?
8. Why do you think the Host is so hostile toward the Pardoner?
9. In modern times people try to slow the aging process. What are some techniques they use to do this? Is it successful? Explain.