

Now I was crying. This Goodelief was making me look like a saint, and that took some doing. I had been hard on the unholy trinity, but they'd offended first—and they'd been nothing like the man Harry was—sensitive, gentle, courteous—a rare enough combination—and on top of all that a warm, generous lover. I wondered briefly what my life would have been like if he'd been my first husband—but that would not have been possible—my father must go for the best offer, get the highest price. Of course. I knew I'd survived by growing an ever thicker skin, by learning to laugh and learning to lie. I wondered how Harry had managed.

"Harry—oh Harry," I cried, and hugged him to me. "How is it possible you are still so sweet? How can you live with such pain and not be angry?" I really wanted to know.

"Dear Alison, I'm not so wonderful. Don't forget I'm a man, and I'm not stuck at home as you were. To tell the truth, the reason I offered to come on this pilgrimage was to escape. My position at the Tabard allows me to get away often. Now don't think there are other women—you may believe it or not, but you're the first, and after our wonderful night I don't mind if you're the last—after you anyone else would be a disappointment.

"No, I go with the pilgrims when I can, and I try—I try

to pull them together, to head off or to settle grievances, to make sure they have a good time, love one another if they can, be healed of their hurts, feel somehow—it's different with each one—but somehow better about themselves and their lives for having come to Canterbury. And you know, it's not so bad. There's a lot of gratitude—people realize I've made a difference, and then that makes me see that Goodelief must be wrong, there are other ways to be strong than to go after someone with a knife. And I do see them feeling better. Many a time—most times—pilgrims think they are just going for a lark—but they are changed—almost despite themselves—by this journey. There's something about it that moves people, makes them more open, more able to love. . . . I don't know how else to describe it. But for me, to be a part of it makes life worth living—you might almost say, restores my faith. So there you have it, Alison. I hope you don't think me an ape."

"Hardly, milord—you're as fine as a man can be." I hugged him some more, and we lay down beneath the monk's fur and cried together until we slept, close in one another's arms.

Frances Reed is a Toronto teacher and editor with an abiding admiration for that feisty proto-feminist, the Wife of Bath.

MONIKA LEE

sun, pines and prophecy

beneath the pines splayed needles abound,
 spiky to eye — yet unthinkable soft.
 are visors for the sun, pine trees
 with such glare; no eyes should unite
 rays' caress direct and while skin welcomes the solar
 unatoned,
 in those fields she wanders
 a Cassandra cursed, deviant and prophetic.
 vision and knowledge are merciless solar fire
 piercing an eggshell retina.
 let eyelids enfold and encrust to grant a
 willing blindness, to fulfill a mope-eyed,
 glare-resistant urge, this time to unknow,
 so an eyeless wanderer, purged of prophecy,
 stroke her body with sunlight and pine.
 may

Monika Lee is an English Professor at Brescia College. She has published poems in literary journals such as The Antigonish Review and Canadian Literature.