

# Merciless Beauty

## a triple roundel

*Geoffrey Chaucer*

*fourteenth century lyric in Middle English*

**Translated and recast into Modern English prose**

**by**

**Richard Scott-Robinson**

This poem has been translated and interpreted using a copy from: Walter W Skeat (Ed), 1912. Chaucer: Complete Works, edited from numerous manuscripts. Oxford University Press. With reference to The Riverside Chaucer, 2008 Edition. Oxford University Press.

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# Merciles Beaute

Geoffrey Chaucer  
*fourteenth century lyric*

**Y**our yēn two wol slee me sodenly · I may the beauté of hem not sustene · so woundeth hit through-out my herte kene · and but your word wol helen hastily – Your two eyes will suddenly kill me. I am unable to endure their beauty, so keen is the wound that they make in my heart, and without the quick reassurance of your voice to heal this wound whilst it is fresh

*Your two eyes will suddenly kill me. I am unable to endure their beauty.*

Upon my word, I tell you sincerely that you preside over my life and my death like a queen, and when I die, the truth of this shall be seen.

*Your two eyes will suddenly kill me. I am unable to endure their beauty, so keen is the wound that they make in my heart.*

*Chaucer's lyric Merciles Beaute is written in the form of a triple roundel, three verses with a refrain to be sung and danced to. It is known from only one other surviving manuscript, Magdalene Collage Cambridge MS Pepys 2006.*



2.

So greatly has beauty chased pity from your heart that it is useless for me to complain. Jeopardy, with his power to harm, holds your mercy in his chain, and therefore you have given me my death; this is the truth, I have no reason to lie.

*So greatly has beauty chased pity from your heart that it is useless for me to complain.*

Alas! that nature has given you such beauty that there is no mercy in you, even though a man might die in an attempt to find it.

*So greatly has beauty chased pity from your heart that it is useless for me to complain. Jeopardy, with his power to harm, holds your mercy in his chain.*

3.

Since I have escaped so completely from Love, I will never contemplate returning to his meagre prison. Now I am free, I consider him to be worthless. He may answer, and say this or that, but I don't care, I shall say whatever I wish.

*Since I have escaped so completely from Love, I will never contemplate returning to his meagre prison.*

Love has struck my name from his register, and I have removed him from all my books, for evermore. There is no other way.

*Since I have escaped so completely from Love, I will never contemplate returning to his meagre prison. Now I am free, I consider him to be worthless.*

