The Faerie Queene, Book I

Edmund Spenser · *1590 · Book I; original English text (Wauchope edition, older spelling)*

The hosted work is Book I only: the legend of the Knight of the Red Cross, or of Holiness. A gentle knight in armor, with a bloody cross on his breast, rides with Una against a dragon. Archimago, Duessa, Orgoglio, and Despair try him; the House of Holiness restores him; the dragon is slain. This map is of Book I, not of the unhosted later books.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a knight of holiness, deceived and fallen, be raised to finish the fight that was given him?

"Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:"
Una · Book I, Canto I

The Redcrosse knight is true, and he is deceiveable. He leaves Una, takes Duessa, falls to Orgoglio, and sits with Despair. Una does not abandon him. In the House of Holiness he is taught; in the last fight she bids him add faith unto his force. Holiness here is not a mood. It is a faith that must be added when the arm fails.

KEY CHARACTERS

The Redcrosse Knight
The Knight of Holiness, St. George in the making, true and deceiveable

Una
Truth, in a black stole, who will not abandon the knight who has abandoned her

Archimago
A hypocrite magician, maker of false dreams and false images

Duessa
Falsehood, disguised as Fidessa, the knight's chosen snare

Orgoglio
The giant of pride, who throws the unarmed knight into a dungeon

Prince Arthur
The helper who bears a shield of diamond and looses Redcrosse

Despair
The counselor of self-murder, almost successful until Una intervenes

Lucifera
Queen of the House of Pride, whose palace is a warning and a lure

A CROSS, AND FAITH ADDED TO FORCE

> *"And on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore ... The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,"*
> **The poet** · Book I, Canto I

> *"Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:"*
> **Una** · Book I, Canto I

Grades 9–12
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01
The Knight and the Cross
BOOK I, CANTO I, OPENING
A knight, a lady, and a mark of his dying Lord.

- A gentle knight is pricking on the plain, armed, though he has not yet wielded those arms in his own person
- On his breast he bears a bloody cross, the dear remembrance of his dying Lord
- Una, in a black stole, rides with him, leading a lamb; they are sent by the Faerie Queene against a dragon
- They come to Error's den; the knight must learn that force without faith is not enough

> *"And on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore ... The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,"*
> **The poet** · Book I, Canto I

02
Archimago and Duessa
CANTOS I—II
A hermit's house, a false dream, and a false lady.

- They lodge with Archimago, a seeming hermit, who sends a false dream and a false Una to shame the knight
- Redcrosse, deceived, leaves the true Una and rides off alone
- He meets Duessa, disguised as Fidessa, and takes her for a distressed lady
- Una, abandoned, is in danger from Sansloy and is later helped by a lion and by satyrs—truth without her knight is not safe, and not finished

03
The House of Pride
CANTOS IV—V
A palace of the worldly, and a first fall.

- Duessa leads Redcrosse to the House of Pride, Lucifera's court, with its six counselors the sins
- He jousts and seems to prosper, but the house is built on sand, and a dungeon of fallen princes is under it
- He leaves before the worst, yet is already far from Una
- Sansjoy, Duessa's interest, and the first signs of the knight's weakening belong to this stay

04
Orgoglio and Despair
CANTOS VII—IX
A giant, a prison, and a temptation to self-murder.

- Redcrosse, unarmed and drinking at a fountain, is overthrown by the giant Orgoglio; Duessa is the giant's consort
- Una finds Prince Arthur, who defeats Orgoglio and looses the knight from the dungeon
- The rescued knight is a shadow of himself; Una leads him on
- In a cave Despair nearly persuades him to end his own life; Una snatches the dagger and rebukes the faint-hearted knight

> *"Fie, fie, faint harted knight,"*
> **Una** · Book I, Canto IX

05
Holiness and the Dragon
CANTOS X—XII
A house of instruction, a three-day fight, and a betrothal.

- Una brings him to the House of Holiness: Fidelia, Speranza, Charissa, and a school of repentance and of mercy
- He is led to the hill of Contemplation and shown the city that is his last end, and the fight that is still his duty
- He meets the dragon that has wasted Una's land; the battle lasts three days; he is helped by a well and a tree of life
- The land is freed; Una is unveiled in her brightness; they are betrothed, and a further call still waits

> *"Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:"*
> **Una** · Book I, Canto I

Holiness · Truth and Falsehood · Faith · Pride · Despair resisted · Perseverance

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted work is Book I only (PG #15272, the Wauchope / Macmillan text). Do not write as if the later books of Temperance, Chastity, and the rest were here.
2. Spenser's older spelling is kept: brest, bloudie, Crosse, plaine, harted. Quote it as printed.
3. The first line of the poem in this edition is "A GENTLE Knight[*] was pricking on the plaine," with a footnote mark. Safer quotations start after that line, or use the clean lines of the second stanza.
4. "Add faith unto your force" is Una's cry in the fight with Error, Canto I, and it names the whole book's lesson.
5. Una's unveiled face ("made a sunshine in the shadie place") belongs to Canto III; do not confuse it with the betrothal in Canto XII.
6. Allegory here is not a puzzle only. Redcrosse is a Christian man, and the dragon-fight is the work he was given, after a fall and a restoration.

Quotations are verbatim from the Book I; original English text (Wauchope edition, older spelling), Project Gutenberg #15272, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-faerie-queene/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.