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*The Canterbury Tales and  
Other Poems  
Part 7: The Wife of Bath's  
Tale*

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by Geoffrey Chaucer

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# THE PROLOGUE

(*Note 1*)

Experience, though none authority<sup>1</sup>  
Were in this world, is right enough for me  
To speak of woe that is in marriage:  
For, lordings, since I twelve year was of age,  
(Thanked be God that is etern on live<sup>2</sup>),  
Husbands at the church door have I had five, (*Note*  
2)  
For I so often have y-wedded be,  
And all were worthy men in their degree.  
But me was told, not longe time gone is  
That sithen<sup>3</sup> Christe went never but ones  
To wedding, in the Cane<sup>4</sup> of Galilee,  
That by that ilk<sup>5</sup> example taught he me,  
That I not wedded shoulde be but once.  
Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the nonce<sup>6</sup>,  
Beside a welle Jesus, God and man,

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<sup>1</sup>authoritative texts.

<sup>2</sup>lives eternally.

<sup>3</sup>since.

<sup>4</sup>Cana.

<sup>5</sup>same.

<sup>6</sup>occasion.

Spake in reproof of the Samaritan:  
"Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he;  
"And thilke<sup>7</sup> man, that now hath wedded thee,  
Is not thine husband:" (Note 3) thus said he certain;  
What that he meant thereby, I cannot sayn.  
But that I aske, why the fifthe man  
Was not husband to the Samaritan?  
How many might she have in marriage?  
Yet heard I never tellen in mine age<sup>8</sup>  
Upon this number definitioun.  
Men may divine, and glosen<sup>9</sup> up and down;  
But well I wot, express without a lie,  
God bade us for to wax and multiply;  
That gentle text can I well understand.  
Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband  
Should leave father and mother, and take to me;  
But of no number mention made he,  
Of bigamy or of octogamy;  
Why then should men speak of it villainy<sup>10</sup>?  
Lo here, the wise king Dan<sup>11</sup> Solomon, (Note 4)  
I trow that he had wives more than one;  
As would to God it lawful were to me  
To be refreshed half so oft as he!  
What gift<sup>12</sup> of God had he for all his wives?  
No man hath such, that in this world alive is.  
God wot, this noble king, as to my wit<sup>13</sup>,  
The first night had many a merry fit  
With each of them, so well was him on live<sup>14</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup>that.

<sup>8</sup>in my life.

<sup>9</sup>comment.

<sup>10</sup>as if it were a disgrace.

<sup>11</sup>Lord.

<sup>12</sup>special favour, licence.

<sup>13</sup>as I understand.

<sup>14</sup>so well he lived.

## THE PROLOGUE

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Blessed be God that I have wedded five!  
Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall.  
For since I will not keep me chaste in all,  
When mine husband is from the world y-gone,  
Some Christian man shall wedde me anon.  
For then th' apostle saith that I am free  
To wed, a' God's half<sup>15</sup>, where it liketh me.  
He saith, that to be wedded is no sin;  
Better is to be wedded than to brin<sup>16</sup>,  
What recketh<sup>17</sup> me though folk say villainy<sup>18</sup>  
Of shrewed<sup>19</sup> Lamech, and his bigamy?  
I wot well Abraham was a holy man,  
And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can<sup>20</sup>.  
And each of them had wives more than two;  
And many another holy man also.  
Where can ye see, in any manner age<sup>21</sup>,  
That highe God defended<sup>22</sup> marriage (*Note 5*)  
By word express? I pray you tell it me;  
Or where commanded he virginity?  
I wot as well as you, it is no dread<sup>23</sup>,  
Th' apostle, when he spake of maidenhead,  
He said, that precept thereof had he none:  
Men may counsel a woman to be one<sup>24</sup>,  
But counseling is no commandement;  
He put it in our owen judgement.  
For, hadde God commanded maidenhead,

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<sup>15</sup>on God's part.

<sup>16</sup>burn.

<sup>17</sup>care.

<sup>18</sup>evil.

<sup>19</sup>impious, wicked.

<sup>20</sup>know.

<sup>21</sup>in any period.

<sup>22</sup>forbade.

<sup>23</sup>doubt.

<sup>24</sup>a maid.

Then had he damned<sup>25</sup> wedding out of dread<sup>26</sup>;  
 And certes, if there were no seed y-sow<sup>27</sup>,  
 Virginitie then whereof should it grow?  
 Paul durste not commanden, at the least,  
 A thing of which his Master gave no hest<sup>28</sup>.  
 The dart<sup>29</sup> is set up for virginitie; (*Note 6*)  
 Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see.  
 But this word is not ta'en of every wight,  
 But there as<sup>30</sup> God will give it of his might.  
 I wot well that th' apostle was a maid,  
 But natheless, although he wrote and said,  
 He would that every wight were such as he,  
 All is but counsel to virginitie.  
 And, since to be a wife he gave me leave  
 Of indulgence, so is it no reprove<sup>31</sup>  
 To wedde me, if that my make<sup>32</sup> should die,  
 Without exception<sup>33</sup> of bigamy;  
 All were it<sup>34</sup> good no woman for to touch  
 (He meant as in his bed or in his couch),  
 For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble  
 Ye know what this example may resemble.  
 This is all and some, he held virginitie  
 More profit than wedding in frailty:  
 (Frailty clepe I, but if<sup>35</sup> that he and she  
 Would lead their lives all in chastity),

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<sup>25</sup>condemned.

<sup>26</sup>doubt.

<sup>27</sup>sown.

<sup>28</sup>command.

<sup>29</sup>goal.

<sup>30</sup>except where.

<sup>31</sup>scandal, reproach.

<sup>32</sup>mate, husband.

<sup>33</sup>charge, reproach.

<sup>34</sup>though it might be.

<sup>35</sup>frailty I call it, unless.

I grant it well, I have of none envy  
 Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy;  
 It liketh them t' be clean in body and ghost<sup>36</sup>;  
 Of mine estate<sup>37</sup> I will not make a boast.  
 For, well ye know, a lord in his household  
 Hath not every vessel all of gold; (*Note 7*)  
 Some are of tree, and do their lord service.  
 God calleth folk to him in sundry wise,  
 And each one hath of God a proper gift,  
 Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift<sup>38</sup>.  
 Virginitie is great perfection,  
 And continence eke with devotion:  
 But Christ, that of perfection is the well<sup>39</sup>,  
 Bade not every wight he should go sell  
 All that he had, and give it to the poor,  
 And in such wise follow him and his lore<sup>40</sup>:  
 He spake to them that would live perfectly, –  
 And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;  
 I will bestow the flower of mine age  
 In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.  
 Tell me also, to what conclusion<sup>41</sup>  
 Were members made of generation,  
 And of so perfect wise a wight<sup>42</sup> y-wrought?  
 Trust me right well, they were not made for  
 nought.  
 Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,  
 That they were made for the purgatioun  
 Of urine, and of other thinges smale,  
 And eke to know a female from a male:

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<sup>36</sup>soul.

<sup>37</sup>condition.

<sup>38</sup>appoint, distribute.

<sup>39</sup>fountain.

<sup>40</sup>doctrine.

<sup>41</sup>end, purpose.

<sup>42</sup>being.



And for none other cause? say ye no?  
Experience wot well it is not so.  
So that the clerkes<sup>43</sup> be not with me wroth,  
I say this, that they were made for both,  
That is to say, for office, and for ease<sup>44</sup>  
Of engendrure, there we God not displease.  
Why should men elles in their bookes set,  
That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?  
Now wherewith should he make his payement,  
If he us'd not his silly instrument?  
Then were they made upon a creature  
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.  
But I say not that every wight is hold<sup>45</sup>,  
That hath such harness<sup>46</sup> as I to you told  
To go and use them in engendrure;  
Then should men take of chastity no cure<sup>47</sup>.  
Christ was a maid, and shapen<sup>48</sup> as a man,  
And many a saint, since that this world began,  
Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.  
I will not vie<sup>49</sup> with no virginity.  
Let them with bread of pured<sup>50</sup> wheat be fed,  
And let us wives eat our barley bread.  
And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can, (*Note*  
8)  
Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.  
In such estate as God hath cleped us<sup>51</sup>,

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<sup>43</sup>scholars.

<sup>44</sup>for duty and for pleasure.

<sup>45</sup>obliged.

<sup>46</sup>equipment.

<sup>47</sup>care.

<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>49</sup>contend.

<sup>50</sup>purified.

<sup>51</sup>called us to.

I'll persevere, I am not precious<sup>52</sup>,  
 In wifhood I will use mine instrument  
 As freely as my Maker hath it sent.  
 If I be dangerous<sup>53</sup> God give me sorrow;  
 Mine husband shall it have, both eve and morrow,  
 When that him list come forth and pay his debt.  
 A husband will I have, I will no let<sup>54</sup>,  
 Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall<sup>55</sup>,  
 And have his tribulation withal  
 Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife.  
 I have the power during all my life  
 Upon his proper body, and not he;  
 Right thus th' apostle told it unto me,  
 And bade our husbands for to love us well;  
 All this sentence me liketh every deal<sup>56</sup>.

Up start the Pardoner, and that anon;  
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and by Saint  
 John,  
 Ye are a noble preacher in this case.  
 I was about to wed a wife, alas!  
 What? should I bie<sup>57</sup> it on my flesh so dear?  
 Yet had I lever<sup>58</sup> wed no wife this year."  
 "Abide<sup>59</sup>," quoth she; "my tale is not begun  
 Nay, thou shalt drincken of another tun  
 Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale.  
 And when that I have told thee forth my tale  
 Of tribulation in marriage,  
 Of which I am expert in all mine age,

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<sup>52</sup>over-dainty.

<sup>53</sup>sparing of my favours.

<sup>54</sup>will bear no hindrance.

<sup>55</sup>slave.

<sup>56</sup>whit.

<sup>57</sup>suffer for.

<sup>58</sup>rather.

<sup>59</sup>wait in patience.

(This is to say, myself hath been the whip),  
Then mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip  
Of thilke tunne<sup>60</sup>, that I now shall broach.  
Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach,  
For I shall tell examples more than ten:  
Whoso will not beware by other men,  
By him shall other men corrected be:  
These same wordes writeth Ptolemy;  
Read in his Almagest, and take it there."  
"Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"  
Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,  
Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,  
And teach us younge men of your practique."  
"Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.  
But that I pray to all this company,  
If that I speak after my fantasy,  
To take nought agrief<sup>61</sup> what I may say;  
For mine intent is only for to play.

Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.  
As ever may I drinke wine or ale  
I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had  
Three of them were good, and two were bad  
The three were goode men, and rich, and old  
Unnethes mighte they the statute hold<sup>62</sup>  
In which that they were bounden unto me.  
Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie<sup>63</sup>.  
As God me help, I laugh when that I think  
How piteously at night I made them swink<sup>64</sup>,  
But, by my fay, I told of it no store<sup>65</sup>:

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<sup>60</sup>that tun.

<sup>61</sup>to heart.

<sup>62</sup>they could with difficulty obey the law.

<sup>63</sup>by God.

<sup>64</sup>labour.

<sup>65</sup>by my faith, I held it of no account.

## THE PROLOGUE

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They had me giv'n their land and their treasure,  
Me needed not do longer diligence  
To win their love, or do them reverence.  
They loved me so well, by God above,  
That I tolde no dainty<sup>66</sup> of their love.  
A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one<sup>67</sup>  
To get their love, where that she hath none.  
But, since I had them wholly in my hand,  
And that they had me given all their land,  
Why should I take keep<sup>68</sup> them for to please,  
But<sup>69</sup> it were for my profit, or mine ease?  
I set them so a-worke, by my fay,  
That many a night they sange, well-away!  
The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,  
That some men have in Essex at Dunmow. (*Note 9*)  
I govern'd them so well after my law,  
That each of them full blissful was and fawe<sup>70</sup>  
To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.  
They were full glad when that I spake them fair,  
For, God it wot, I chid them spiteously<sup>71</sup>.  
Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand,  
Thus should ye speak, and bear them wrong on  
hand<sup>72</sup>,  
For half so boldely can there no man  
Swearen and lien as a woman can.  
(I say not this by wives that be wise,

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<sup>66</sup> cared nothing for.

<sup>67</sup> constantly.

<sup>68</sup> care.

<sup>69</sup> unless.

<sup>70</sup> fain.

<sup>71</sup> rebuked them angrily.

<sup>72</sup> make them believe falsely.

But if<sup>73</sup> it be when they them misadvise<sup>74</sup>.)  
 A wise wife, if that she can<sup>75</sup> her good,  
 Shall beare them on hand<sup>76</sup> the cow is wood,  
 And take witness of her owen maid  
 Of their assent: but hearken how I said.  
 "Sir olde kaynard, (*Note 10*) is this thine array?  
 Why is my neigheboure's wife so gay?  
 She is honour'd over all where<sup>77</sup> she go'th,  
 I sit at home, I have no thrifty cloth<sup>78</sup>.  
 What dost thou at my neigheboure's house?  
 Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?  
 What rown'st<sup>79</sup> thou with our maid? benedicite,  
 Sir olde lechour, let thy japes<sup>80</sup> be.  
 And if I have a gossip, or a friend  
 (Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,  
 If that I walk or play unto his house.  
 Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,  
 And preachest on thy bench, with evil prefe<sup>81</sup>:  
 Thou say'st to me, it is a great mischief  
 To wed a poore woman, for costage<sup>82</sup>:  
 And if that she be rich, of high parage<sup>83</sup>; (*Note 11*)  
 Then say'st thou, that it is a tormentry  
 To suffer her pride and melancholy.  
 And if that she be fair, thou very knave,  
 Thou say'st that every holour<sup>84</sup> will her have;

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<sup>73</sup>unless.

<sup>74</sup>act unadvisedly.

<sup>75</sup>knows.

<sup>76</sup>make them believe.

<sup>77</sup>wheresoever.

<sup>78</sup>good clothes.

<sup>79</sup>whisperest.

<sup>80</sup>tricks.

<sup>81</sup>proof.

<sup>82</sup>expense.

<sup>83</sup>birth.

<sup>84</sup>whoremonger.

She may no while in chastity abide,  
 That is assailed upon every side.  
 Thou say'st some folk desire us for richness,  
 Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,  
 And some, for she can either sing or dance,  
 And some for gentilles and dalliance,  
 Some for her handes and her armes smale:  
 Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;  
 Thou say'st, men may not keep a castle wall  
 That may be so assailed over all<sup>85</sup>.  
 And if that she be foul, thou say'st that she  
 Coveteth every man that she may see;  
 For as a spaniel she will on him leap,  
 Till she may finde some man her to cheap<sup>86</sup>;  
 And none so grey goose goes there in the lake,  
 (So say'st thou) that will be without a make<sup>87</sup>.  
 And say'st, it is a hard thing for to weld<sup>88</sup>  
 A thing that no man will, his thanks, held<sup>89</sup>.  
 Thus say'st thou, lorel<sup>90</sup>, when thou go'st to bed,  
 And that no wise man needeth for to wed,  
 Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.  
 With wilde thunder dint<sup>91</sup> and fiery leven<sup>92</sup>  
 Mote<sup>93</sup> thy wicked necke be to-broke.  
 Thou say'st, that dropping houses, and eke smoke,  
 And chiding wives, make men to flee  
 Out of their owne house; ah! ben'dicite,  
 What aileth such an old man for to chide?

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<sup>85</sup>everywhere.

<sup>86</sup>buy.

<sup>87</sup>mate.

<sup>88</sup>wield, govern.

<sup>89</sup>hold with his goodwill.

<sup>90</sup>good-for-nothing.

<sup>91</sup>stroke.

<sup>92</sup>lightning.

<sup>93</sup>may.

Thou say'st, we wives will our vices hide,  
 Till we be fast@wedded.@@, and then we will them  
 shew.

Well may that be a proverb of a shrew<sup>94</sup>.  
 Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds,  
 They be assayed at diverse stounds<sup>95</sup>,  
 Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy,  
 Spoonses, stooles, and all such husbandry,  
 And so be pots, and clothes, and array<sup>96</sup>,  
 But folk of wives make none assay,  
 Till they be wedded, – olde dotard shrew! –  
 And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.  
 Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,  
 But if<sup>97</sup> that thou wilt praise my beauty,  
 And but<sup>98</sup> thou pore alway upon my face,  
 And call me faire dame in every place;  
 And but<sup>99</sup> thou make a feast on thilke<sup>100</sup> day  
 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;  
 And but thou do to my norice<sup>101</sup> honour, (*Note 12*)  
 And to my chamberere<sup>102</sup> within my bow'r,  
 And to my father's folk, and mine allies<sup>103</sup>;  
 Thus sayest thou, old barrel full of lies.  
 And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,  
 For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine,  
 And for he squireth me both up and down,  
 Yet hast thou caught a false suspicioun:

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<sup>94</sup>ill-tempered wretch.

<sup>95</sup>tested at various seasons.

<sup>96</sup>raiment.

<sup>97</sup>unless.

<sup>98</sup>unless.

<sup>99</sup>unless.

<sup>100</sup>that.

<sup>101</sup>nurse.

<sup>102</sup>chamber-maid.

<sup>103</sup>relations.

I will him not, though thou wert dead to-morrow.  
 But tell me this, why hidest thou, with sorrow<sup>104</sup>,  
 The keyes of thy chest away from me?  
 It is my good<sup>105</sup> as well as thine, pardie.  
 What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?  
 Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame,  
 Thou shalt not both, although that thou wert  
     wood<sup>106</sup>,  
 Be master of my body, and my good<sup>107</sup>,  
 The one thou shalt forego, maugre<sup>108</sup> thine eyen.  
 What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen?  
 I trow thou wouldest lock me in thy chest.  
 Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee lest;  
 Take your disport; I will believe no tales;  
 I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales<sup>109</sup>.'  
 We love no man, that taketh keep<sup>110</sup> or charge  
 Where that we go; we will be at our large.  
 Of alle men most blessed may he be,  
 The wise astrologer Dan<sup>111</sup> Ptolemy,  
 That saith this proverb in his Almagest: (*Note 13*)  
 'Of alle men his wisdom is highest,  
 That recketh not who hath the world in hand.  
 By this proverb thou shalt well understand,  
 Have thou enough, what thar<sup>112</sup> thee reck or care  
 How merrily that other folkes fare?  
 For certes, olde dotard, by your leave,  
 Ye shall have (pleasure) (*Note 14*) right enough at

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<sup>104</sup>sorrow on thee!

<sup>105</sup>property.

<sup>106</sup>furious.

<sup>107</sup>property.

<sup>108</sup>in spite of.

<sup>109</sup>Alice.

<sup>110</sup>care.

<sup>111</sup>Lord.

<sup>112</sup>needs, behoves.



eve.

He is too great a niggard that will werne<sup>113</sup>  
 A man to light a candle at his lantern;  
 He shall have never the less light, pardie.  
 Have thou enough, thee thar<sup>114</sup> not plaine<sup>115</sup> thee  
 Thou say'st also, if that we make us gay  
 With clothing and with precious array,  
 That it is peril of our chastity.  
 And yet, – with sorrow! – thou enforcest thee,  
 And say'st these words in the apostle's name:  
 'In habit made with chastity and shame<sup>116</sup>  
 Ye women shall apparel you,' quoth he, (*Note 15*)  
 'And not in tressed hair and gay perrie<sup>117</sup>,  
 As pearles, nor with gold, nor clothes rich.'  
 After thy text nor after thy rubrich  
 I will not work as muchel as a gnat.  
 Thou say'st also, I walk out like a cat;  
 For whoso woulde singe the catte's skin  
 Then will the catte well dwell in her inn<sup>118</sup>;  
 And if the catte's skin be sleek and gay,  
 She will not dwell in house half a day,  
 But forth she will, ere any day be daw'd,  
 To shew her skin, and go a caterwaw'd<sup>119</sup>.  
 This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew,  
 I will run out, my borel<sup>120</sup> for to shew.  
 Sir olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?  
 Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen

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<sup>113</sup>forbid.

<sup>114</sup>need.

<sup>115</sup>complain.

<sup>116</sup>modesty.

<sup>117</sup>jewels.

<sup>118</sup>house.

<sup>119</sup>caterwauling.

<sup>120</sup>apparel, fine clothes.

To be my wardecorps<sup>121</sup>, as he can best  
 In faith he shall not keep me, but me lest<sup>122</sup>:  
 Yet could I make his beard<sup>123</sup>, so may I the.

"Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three<sup>124</sup>,  
 Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,  
 And that no wighte may endure the ferth<sup>125</sup>:  
 O lefe<sup>126</sup> sir shrew, may Jesus short<sup>127</sup> thy life.  
 Yet preachest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife  
 Y-reckon'd is for one of these mischances.  
 Be there none other manner resemblances<sup>128</sup>  
 That ye may liken your parables unto,  
 But if a silly wife be one of tho<sup>129</sup>?  
 Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;  
 To barren land where water may not dwell.  
 Thou likenest it also to wild fire;  
 The more it burns, the more it hath desire  
 To consume every thing that burnt will be.  
 Thou sayest, right as wormes shend<sup>130</sup> a tree,  
 Right so a wife destroyeth her husbond;  
 This know they well that be to wives bond."  
 Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,  
 Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand<sup>131</sup>,  
 That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;  
 And all was false, but that I took witness  
 On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.

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<sup>121</sup>body-guard.

<sup>122</sup>unless I please.

<sup>123</sup>make a jest of him.

<sup>124</sup>thrive.

<sup>125</sup>fourth.

<sup>126</sup>pleasant.

<sup>127</sup>shorten.

<sup>128</sup>no other kind of comparison.

<sup>129</sup>those.

<sup>130</sup>destroy.

<sup>131</sup>made them believe.

## THE PROLOGUE

---

O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,  
'Full guilteless, by Godde's sweete pine<sup>132</sup>;  
For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;  
I coulde plain<sup>133</sup>, an'<sup>134</sup> I was in the guilt,  
Or elles oftentime I had been spilt<sup>135</sup>  
Whoso first cometh to the nilll, first grint<sup>136</sup>;  
I plained first, so was our war y-stint<sup>137</sup>.  
They were full glad to excuse them full blive<sup>138</sup>  
Of things that they never aguilt their live<sup>139</sup>.  
"Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three<sup>140</sup>  
Which thinges greatly trouble all this earth,  
And that no wighte may endure the ferth<sup>141</sup>:  
O lefe<sup>142</sup> sir shrew, may Jesus short<sup>143</sup> thy life.  
Yet preachest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife  
Y-reckon'd is for one of these mischances.  
Be there none other manner resemblances<sup>144</sup>  
That ye may liken your parables unto,  
But if a silly wife be one of tho<sup>145</sup>?  
Thou likenest a woman's love to hell;  
To barren land where water may not dwell.  
Thou likenest it also to wild fire;  
The more it burns, the more it hath desire

---

<sup>132</sup>pain.

<sup>133</sup>complain.

<sup>134</sup>even though.

<sup>135</sup>ruined.

<sup>136</sup>is ground.

<sup>137</sup>stopped.

<sup>138</sup>quickly.

<sup>139</sup>were guilty in their lives.

<sup>140</sup>thrive.

<sup>141</sup>fourth.

<sup>142</sup>pleasant.

<sup>143</sup>shorten.

<sup>144</sup>no other kind of comparison.

<sup>145</sup>those.

To consume every thing that burnt will be.  
Thou sayest, right as wormes shend<sup>146</sup> a tree,  
Right so a wife destroyeth her husbond;  
This know they well that be to wives bond."

Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand,  
Bare I stiffly mine old husbands on hand<sup>147</sup>,  
That thus they saiden in their drunkenness;  
And all was false, but that I took witness  
On Jenkin, and upon my niece also.  
O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe,  
'Full guilteless, by Godde's sweete pine<sup>148</sup>;  
For as a horse I coulde bite and whine;  
I coulde plain<sup>149</sup>, an<sup>150</sup> I was in the guilt,  
Or elles oftentime I had been spilt<sup>151</sup>  
Whoso first cometh to the nilll, first grint<sup>152</sup>;  
I plained first, so was our war y-stint<sup>153</sup>.  
They were full glad to excuse them full blive<sup>154</sup>  
Of things that they never aguilt their live<sup>155</sup>.  
Of wenchens would I beare them on hand<sup>156</sup>,  
When that for sickness scarcely might they stand,  
Yet tickled I his hearthe for that he  
Ween'd<sup>157</sup> that I had of him so great cherte<sup>158</sup>,  
(Note 16)

---

<sup>146</sup>destroy.

<sup>147</sup>made them believe.

<sup>148</sup>pain.

<sup>149</sup>complain.

<sup>150</sup>even though.

<sup>151</sup>ruined.

<sup>152</sup>is ground.

<sup>153</sup>stopped.

<sup>154</sup>quickly.

<sup>155</sup>were guilty in their lives.

<sup>156</sup>falsely accuse them.

<sup>157</sup>though.

<sup>158</sup>affection.

I swore that all my walking out by night  
 Was for to espy wenches that he dight<sup>159</sup>:  
 Under that colour had I many a mirth.  
 For all such wit is given us at birth;  
 Deceit, weeping, and spinning, God doth give  
 To women kindly, while that they may live<sup>160</sup>.  
 And thus of one thing I may vaunte me,  
 At th' end I had the better in each degree,  
 By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing,  
 As by continual murmur or grudging<sup>161</sup>,  
 Namely<sup>162</sup> a-bed, there hadde they mischance,  
 There would I chide, and do them no plesance:  
 I would no longer in the bed abide,  
 If that I felt his arm over my side,  
 Till he had made his ransom unto me,  
 Then would I suffer him do his nicety<sup>163</sup>. (*Note 17*)  
 And therefore every man this tale I tell,  
 Win whoso may, for all is for to sell;  
 With empty hand men may no hawkes lure;  
 For winning would I all his will endure,  
 And make me a feigned appetite,  
 And yet in bacon<sup>164</sup> had I never delight (*Note 9*)  
 That made me that I ever would them chide.  
 For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,  
 I would not spare them at their owen board,  
 For, by my troth, I quit<sup>165</sup> them word for word  
 As help me very God omnipotent,  
 Though I right now should make my testament

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<sup>159</sup>adorned.

<sup>160</sup>naturally.

<sup>161</sup>complaining.

<sup>162</sup>especially.

<sup>163</sup>folly.

<sup>164</sup>i.e. of Dunmow.

<sup>165</sup>repaid.

I owe them not a word, that is not quit<sup>166</sup>  
 I brought it so aboute by my wit,  
 That they must give it up, as for the best  
 Or elles had we never been in rest.  
 For, though he looked as a wood<sup>167</sup> lion,  
 Yet should he fail of his conclusion.  
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe<sup>168</sup> tak keep<sup>169</sup>  
 How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!  
 Come near, my spouse, and let me ba<sup>170</sup> thy cheek  
 (*Note 18*)  
 Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,  
 And have a sweet y-spiced<sup>171</sup> conscience,  
 Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.  
 Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,  
 And but ye do, certain we shall you teach<sup>172</sup>  
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.  
 One of us two must bowe<sup>173</sup> doubteless:  
 And since a man is more reasonable  
 Than woman is, ye must be suff' rable.  
 What aileth you to grudge<sup>174</sup> thus and groan?  
 Is it for ye would have my (love) (*Note 14*) alone?  
 Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal<sup>175</sup>,  
 Peter! (*Note 19*) shrew<sup>176</sup> you but ye love it well  
 For if I woulde sell my belle chose<sup>177</sup>,

---

<sup>166</sup>repaid.

<sup>167</sup>furious.

<sup>168</sup>dear.

<sup>169</sup>heed.

<sup>170</sup>kiss.

<sup>171</sup>tender, nice.

<sup>172</sup>unless.

<sup>173</sup>give way.

<sup>174</sup>complain.

<sup>175</sup>whit.

<sup>176</sup>curse.

<sup>177</sup>beautiful thing.

## THE PROLOGUE

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I coulde walk as fresh as is a rose,  
But I will keep it for your owen tooth.  
Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."  
Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.  
Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.  
My fourthe husband was a revellour;  
This is to say, he had a paramour,  
And I was young and full of ragerie<sup>178</sup>,  
Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie<sup>179</sup>.  
Then could I dance to a harpe smale,  
And sing, y-wis<sup>180</sup>, as any nightingale,  
When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.  
Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,  
That with a staff bereft his wife of life  
For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,  
Never should he have daunted me from drink:  
And, after wine, of Venus most I think.  
For all so sure as cold engenders hail,  
A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.  
In woman vinolent<sup>181</sup> is no defence<sup>182</sup>,  
This knowe lechours by experience.  
But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me  
Upon my youth, and on my jollity,  
It tickleth me about mine hearte-root;  
Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot<sup>183</sup>,  
That I have had my world as in my time.  
But age, alas! that all will envenime<sup>184</sup>,  
Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith<sup>185</sup>:

---

<sup>178</sup>wantonness.

<sup>179</sup>magpie.

<sup>180</sup>certainly.

<sup>181</sup>full of wine.

<sup>182</sup>resistance.

<sup>183</sup>good.

<sup>184</sup>poison, embitter.

<sup>185</sup>vigour.

Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.  
 The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,  
 The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.  
 But yet to be right merry will I fand<sup>186</sup>.  
 Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,  
 I say, I in my heart had great despote,  
 That he of any other had delight;  
 But he was quit<sup>187</sup>, by God and by Saint Joce: (*Note*  
 21)  
 I made for him of the same wood a cross;  
 Not of my body in no foul mannere,  
 But certainly I made folk such cheer,  
 That in his owen grease I made him fry  
 For anger, and for very jealousy.  
 By God, in earth I was his purgatory,  
 For which I hope his soul may be in glory.  
 For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,  
 When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung<sup>188</sup>.  
 There was no wight, save God and he, that wist  
 In many wise how sore I did him twist. (*Note* 20)  
 He died when I came from Jerusalem,  
 And lies in grave under the roode beam<sup>189</sup>:  
 Although his tomb is not so curious  
 As was the sepulchre of Darius,  
 Which that Apelles wrought so subtly.  
 It is but waste to bury them preciously.  
 Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,  
 He is now in his grave and in his chest.  
 Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:  
 God let his soul never come into hell.  
 And yet was he to me the moste shrew<sup>190</sup>;

---

<sup>186</sup>try.

<sup>187</sup>requited, paid back.

<sup>188</sup>pinched.

<sup>189</sup>cross.

<sup>190</sup>cruel, ill-tempered.



That feel I on my ribbes all by rew<sup>191</sup>,  
 And ever shall, until mine ending day.  
 But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,  
 And therewithal so well he could me glose<sup>192</sup>,  
 When that he woulde have my belle chose,  
 Though he had beaten me on every bone,  
 Yet could he win again my love anon.  
 I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he  
 Was of his love so dangerous<sup>193</sup> to me.  
 We women have, if that I shall not lie,  
 In this matter a quaint fantasy.  
 Whatever thing we may not lightly have,  
 Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.  
 Forbid us thing, and that desire we;  
 Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.  
 With danger<sup>194</sup> utter we all our chaffare<sup>195</sup>;  
 Great press at market maketh deare ware,  
 And too great cheap is held at little price;  
 This knoweth every woman that is wise.  
 My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,  
 Which that I took for love and no richness,  
 He some time was a clerk of Oxenford<sup>196</sup>,  
 And had left school, and went at home to board  
 With my gossip<sup>197</sup>, dwelling in oure town:  
 God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.  
 She knew my heart, and all my privity,  
 Bet than our parish priest, so may I the<sup>198</sup>.  
 To her betrayed I my counsel all;  
 For had my husband pissed on a wall,

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<sup>191</sup>in a row.

<sup>192</sup>flatter.

<sup>193</sup>sparing, difficult.

<sup>194</sup>difficulty.

<sup>195</sup>merchandise.

<sup>196</sup>a scholar of Oxford.

<sup>197</sup>godmother.

<sup>198</sup>thrive.

Or done a thing that should have cost his life,  
 To her, and to another worthy wife,  
 And to my niece, which that I loved well,  
 I would have told his counsel every deal<sup>199</sup>.  
 And so I did full often, God it wot,  
 That made his face full often red and hot  
 For very shame, and blam'd himself, for he  
 Had told to me so great a privity<sup>200</sup>.  
 And so befell that ones in a Lent  
 (So oftentimes I to my gossip went,  
 For ever yet I loved to be gay,  
 And for to walk in March, April, and May  
 From house to house, to heare sundry tales),  
 That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame Ales,  
 And I myself, into the fieldes went.  
 Mine husband was at London all that Lent;  
 I had the better leisure for to play,  
 And for to see, and eke for to be sey<sup>201</sup>  
 Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace<sup>202</sup>  
 Was shapen for to be, or in what place<sup>203</sup>?  
 Therefore made I my visitations  
 To vigilies<sup>204</sup>, and to processions, (*Note 22*)  
 To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages,  
 To plays of miracles, and marriages,  
 And weared upon me gay scarlet gites<sup>205</sup>.  
 These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these mites  
 On my apparel frett<sup>206</sup> them never a deal<sup>207</sup>

---

199; jot.

200 secret.

201 seen.

202 favour.

203 appointed,

204 festival-eves.

205 gowns.

206 fed.

207 whit.

And know'st thou why? for they were used<sup>208</sup>  
well.

Now will I telle forth what happen'd me:

I say, that in the fieldes walked we,

Till truely we had such dalliance,

This clerk and I, that of my purveyance<sup>209</sup>

I spake to him, and told him how that he,

If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.

For certainly, I say for no bobance<sup>210</sup>, (*Note 23*)

Yet was I never without purveyance<sup>211</sup>

Of marriage, nor of other thinges eke:

I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,

That hath but one hole for to starte<sup>212</sup> to, (*Note 24*)

And if that faile, then is all y-do<sup>213</sup>.

(I bare him on hand<sup>214</sup> he had enchanted me.

My dame taughte me that subtilty);

And eke I said, I mette<sup>215</sup> of him all night,

He would have slain me, as I lay upright,

And all my bed was full of very blood;

But yet I hop'd that he should do me good;

For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught.

And all was false, I dream'd of him right naught,

But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore,

As well of that as of other things more.) (*Note 25*)

But now, sir, let me see, what shall I sayn?

Aha! by God, I have my tale again.

When that my fourthe husband was on bier,

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<sup>208</sup>worn.

<sup>209</sup>foresight.

<sup>210</sup>boasting.

<sup>211</sup>foresight.

<sup>212</sup>es cape.

<sup>213</sup>done.

<sup>214</sup>falsely assured him.

<sup>215</sup>dreamed.

I wept algate<sup>216</sup> and made a sorry cheer<sup>217</sup>,  
 As wives must, for it is the usage;  
 And with my kerchief covered my visage;  
 But, for I was provided with a make<sup>218</sup>,  
 I wept but little, that I undertake<sup>219</sup>  
 To churche was mine husband borne a-morrow  
 With neighebours that for him made sorrow,  
 And Jenkin, oure clerk, was one of tho<sup>220</sup>:  
 As help me God, when that I saw him go  
 After the bier, methought he had a pair  
 Of legges and of feet so clean and fair,  
 That all my heart I gave unto his hold<sup>221</sup>.  
 He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,  
 And I was forty, if I shall say sooth,  
 But yet I had always a colte's tooth.  
 Gat-toothed I was, and that became me well, (*Note*  
 26)  
 I had the print of Sainte Venus' seal.  
 (As help me God, I was a lusty one,  
 And fair, and rich, and young, and well begone<sup>222</sup>:  
 For certes I am all venerian<sup>223</sup>  
 In feeling, and my heart is martian<sup>224</sup>;  
 Venus me gave my lust and liquorishness,  
 And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.) (*Note* 25)  
 Mine ascendant was Taure<sup>225</sup>, and Mars therein:  
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!

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<sup>216</sup>always.

<sup>217</sup>countenance.

<sup>218</sup>mate.

<sup>219</sup>promise.

<sup>220</sup>those.

<sup>221</sup>keeping.

<sup>222</sup>in a good way,

<sup>223</sup>under the influence of Venus.

<sup>224</sup>under the influence of Mars.

<sup>225</sup>Taurus.

I follow'd aye mine inclination  
 By virtue of my constellation:  
 That made me that I coulde not withdraw  
 My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.  
 (Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face,  
 And also in another privy place.  
 For God so wisly<sup>226</sup> be my salvation,  
 I loved never by discretion,  
 But ever follow'd mine own appetite,  
 All<sup>227</sup> were he short, or long, or black, or white,  
 I took no keep<sup>228</sup>, so that he liked me,  
 How poor he was, neither of what degree.) (Note  
 25)

What should I say? but that at the month's end  
 This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend<sup>229</sup>,  
 Had wedded me with great solemnity,  
 And to him gave I all the land and fee  
 That ever was me given therebefore:  
 But afterward repented me full sore.  
 He woulde suffer nothing of my list<sup>230</sup>.  
 By God, he smote me ones with his fist,  
 For that I rent out of his book a leaf,  
 That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf.  
 Stubborn I was, as is a lioness,  
 And of my tongue a very jangleress<sup>231</sup>,  
 And walk I would, as I had done beforne,  
 From house to house, although he had it sworn<sup>232</sup>:  
 For which he oftentimes woulde preach

---

<sup>226</sup>certainly.

<sup>227</sup>whether.

<sup>228</sup>heed.

<sup>229</sup>courteous.

<sup>230</sup>pleasure.

<sup>231</sup>prater.

<sup>232</sup>had sworn to prevent it.

And me of olde Roman gestes<sup>233</sup> teach  
 How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife  
 And her forsook for term of all his  
 For nought but open-headed<sup>234</sup> he her say<sup>235</sup>  
 Looking out at his door upon a day.  
 Another Roman (*Note 27*) told he me by name,  
 That, for his wife was at a summer game  
 Without his knowing, he forsook her eke.  
 And then would he upon his Bible seek  
 That ilke<sup>236</sup> proverb of Ecclesiast,  
 Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast,  
 Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about.  
 Then would he say right thus withoute doubt:  
 "Whoso that buildeth his house all of fallows<sup>237</sup>,  
 And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows,  
 And suff'reth his wife to go seeke hallows<sup>238</sup>,  
 Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."  
 But all for nought; I sette not a haw<sup>239</sup>  
 Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;  
 Nor would I not of him corrected be.  
 I hate them that my vices telle me,  
 And so do more of us (God wot) than I.  
 This made him wood<sup>240</sup> with me all utterly;  
 I woulde not forbear<sup>241</sup> him in no case.  
 Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,  
 Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,  
 For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.

---

<sup>233</sup>stories.

<sup>234</sup>bare-headed.

<sup>235</sup>saw.

<sup>236</sup>same.

<sup>237</sup>willows.

<sup>238</sup>make pilgrimages.

<sup>239</sup>cared nothing for.

<sup>240</sup>furious.

<sup>241</sup>endure.

He had a book, that gladly night and day  
 For his disport he would it read alway;  
 He call'd it Valerie, (*Note 28*) and Theophrast,  
 And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.  
 And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,  
 A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,  
 That made a book against Jovinian,  
 Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,  
 Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,  
 That was an abbess not far from Paris;  
 And eke the Parables<sup>242</sup> of Solomon,  
 Ovide's Art, (*Note 29*) and bourdes<sup>243</sup> many one;  
 And alle these were bound in one volume.  
 And every night and day was his custume  
 (When he had leisure and vacation  
 From other worldly occupation)  
 To readen in this book of wicked wives.  
 He knew of them more legends and more lives  
 Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.  
 For, trust me well, it is an impossible  
 That any clerk will speake good of wives,  
 (But if<sup>244</sup> it be of holy saintes' lives)  
 Nor of none other woman never the mo'.  
 Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?  
 By God, if women haddde written stories,  
 As clerkes have within their oratories,  
 They would have writ of men more wickedness  
 Than all the mark of Adam (*Note 30*) may redress  
 The children of Mercury and of Venus, (*Note 31*)  
 Be in their working full contrarious.  
 Mercury loveth wisdom and science,  
 And Venus loveth riot and dispence<sup>245</sup>.

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<sup>242</sup>Proverbs.

<sup>243</sup>jests.

<sup>244</sup>unless.

<sup>245</sup>extravagance.

And for their diverse disposition,  
 Each falls in other's exaltation.  
 As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate  
 In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,  
 And Venus falls where Mercury is raised. (*Note 32*)  
 Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.  
 The clerk, when he is old, and may not do  
 Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,  
 Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,  
 That women cannot keep their marriage.  
 But now to purpose, why I tolde thee  
 That I was beaten for a book, pardie.

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire<sup>246</sup>,  
 Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,  
 Of Eva first, that for her wickedness  
 Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,  
 For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,  
 That bought us with his hearte-blood again.  
 Lo here express of women may ye find  
 That woman was the loss of all mankind.  
 Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs  
 Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,  
 Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.  
 Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,  
 Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,  
 That caused him to set himself on fire.  
 Nothing forgot he of the care and woe  
 That Socrates had with his wives two;  
 How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.  
 This silly man sat still, as he were dead,  
 He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,  
 But, "Ere the thunder stint<sup>247</sup> there cometh rain."  
 Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,

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<sup>246</sup>goodman.

<sup>247</sup>ceases.



For shrewedness<sup>248</sup> he thought the tale sweet.  
 Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,  
 Of her horrible lust and her liking.  
 Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery  
 That falsely made her husband for to die,  
 He read it with full good devotion.  
 He told me eke, for what occasion  
 Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:  
 My husband had a legend of his wife  
 Eryphile, that for an ouche<sup>249</sup> of gold  
 Had privily unto the Greekes told,  
 Where that her husband hid him in a place,  
 For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.  
 Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;  
 They bothe made their husbands for to die,  
 That one for love, that other was for hate.  
 Luna her husband on an ev'ning late  
 Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:  
 Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,  
 That, for he should always upon her think,  
 She gave him such a manner<sup>250</sup> love-drink,  
 That he was dead before it were the morrow:  
 And thus algates<sup>251</sup> husbands hadde sorrow.  
 Then told he me how one Latumeus  
 Complained to his fellow Arius  
 That in his garden growed such a tree,  
 On which he said how that his wives three  
 Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.  
 "O leve<sup>252</sup> brother," quoth this Arius,  
 "Give me a plant of thilke<sup>253</sup> blessed tree,

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<sup>248</sup>wickedness.

<sup>249</sup>clasp, collar.

<sup>250</sup>sort of.

<sup>251</sup>always.

<sup>252</sup>dear

<sup>253</sup>that.

And in my garden planted shall it be."  
 Of later date of wives hath he read,  
 That some have slain their husbands in their bed,  
 And let their lechour dight them<sup>254</sup> all the night,  
 While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:  
 And some have driven nails into their brain,  
 While that they slept, and thus they have them  
 slain:

Some have them given poison in their drink:  
 He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.  
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,  
 Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.  
 "Better (quoth he) thine habitation  
 Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,  
 Than with a woman using for to chide.  
 Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,  
 Than with an angry woman in the house,  
 They be so wicked and contrarious:  
 They hate that their husbands loven aye."  
 He said, "A woman cast her shame away  
 When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',  
 "A fair woman, but<sup>255</sup> she be chaste also,  
 Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.  
 Who coulde ween<sup>256</sup>, or who coulde suppose  
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine<sup>257</sup>?  
 And when I saw that he would never fine<sup>258</sup>  
 To readen on this cursed book all night,  
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight<sup>259</sup>  
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke  
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,

---

<sup>254</sup>lover ride them.

<sup>255</sup>except.

<sup>256</sup>thibk.

<sup>257</sup>pain.

<sup>258</sup>finish.

<sup>259</sup>plucked.

That in our fire he backward fell adown.  
 And he up start, as doth a wood lion<sup>260</sup>,  
 And with his fist he smote me on the head,  
 That on the floor I lay as I were dead.  
 And when he saw how still that there I lay,  
 He was aghast, and would have fled away,  
 Till at the last out of my swoon I braid<sup>261</sup>,  
 "Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said  
 "And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?  
 Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."  
 And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,  
 And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,  
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite:  
 That I have done it is thyself to wite<sup>262</sup>,  
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseech<sup>263</sup>."  
 And yet eftsoons<sup>264</sup> I hit him on the cheek,  
 And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak<sup>265</sup>.  
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak."

But at the last, with muche care and woe  
 We fell accorded<sup>266</sup> by ourselves two:  
 He gave me all the bridle in mine hand  
 To have the governance of house and land,  
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also.  
 I made him burn his book anon right tho<sup>267</sup>.  
 And when that I had gotten unto me  
 By mast'ry all the sovereignty,  
 And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,

---

<sup>260</sup> furious.

<sup>261</sup> woke.

<sup>262</sup> blame.

<sup>263</sup> beseech.

<sup>264</sup> immediately; again.

<sup>265</sup> avenged.

<sup>266</sup> agreed.

<sup>267</sup> then.

Do as thee list<sup>268</sup>, the term of all thy life,  
 Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;  
 After that day we never had debate.  
 God help me so, I was to him as kind  
 As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,  
 And also true, and so was he to me:  
 I pray to God that sits in majesty  
 So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.  
 Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. –

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:  
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,  
 This is a long preamble of a tale."  
 And when the Sompnour heard the Friar gale<sup>269</sup>,  
 "Lo," quoth this Sompnour, "Godde's armes two,  
 A friar will intermete<sup>270</sup> him evermo': (Note 33)  
 Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere  
 Will fall in ev'ry dish and eke mattere.  
 What speak'st thou of perambulation<sup>271</sup>?  
 What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:  
 Thou lettest<sup>272</sup> our disport in this mattere."  
 "Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the Frere;  
 "Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,  
 Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,  
 That all the folk shall laughen in this place."  
 "Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew<sup>273</sup> thy face,"  
 Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me,  
 But if<sup>274</sup> I telle tales two or three  
 Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,  
 That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:

---

<sup>268</sup>as pleases thee.

<sup>269</sup>speak.

<sup>270</sup>interpose.

<sup>271</sup>preamble.

<sup>272</sup>hinderesst.

<sup>273</sup>curse.

<sup>274</sup>unless.

## THE PROLOGUE

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For well I wot thy patience is gone."  
Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;"  
And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale.  
Ye fare<sup>275</sup> as folk that drunken be of ale.  
Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."  
"All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest<sup>276</sup>,  
If I have licence of this worthy Frere."  
"Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will hear."

---

<sup>275</sup>behave.

<sup>276</sup>please.

# THE TALE

(Note 1)

In olde dayes of the king Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speake great honour,  
All was this land full fill'd of faerie<sup>277</sup>;  
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,  
Danced full oft in many a green mead  
This was the old opinion, as I read;  
I speak of many hundred years ago;  
But now can no man see none elves mo',  
For now the great charity and prayeres  
Of limitours<sup>278</sup>, and other holy freres, (Note 2)  
That search every land and ev'ry stream  
As thick as motes in the sunne-beam,  
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchenes, and bowers,  
Cities and burghes, castles high and towers,  
Thorpes<sup>279</sup> and barnes, shepens<sup>280</sup> and dairies,  
(Note 3)

This makes that there be now no faeries:  
For there as<sup>281</sup> wont to walke was an elf,

---

<sup>277</sup>fairies.

<sup>278</sup>begging friars.

<sup>279</sup>villages.

<sup>280</sup>stables.

<sup>281</sup>where.

There walketh now the limitour himself,  
 In undermeles<sup>282</sup> and in morrowings<sup>283</sup>, (*Note 4*)  
 And saith his matins and his holy things,  
 As he goes in his limitatioun<sup>284</sup>.  
 Women may now go safely up and down,  
 In every bush, and under every tree;  
 There is none other incubus (*Note 5*) but he;  
 And he will do to them no dishonour.

And so befell it, that this king Arthour  
 Had in his house a lusty bachelor,  
 That on a day came riding from river: (*Note 6*)  
 And happen'd, that, alone as she was born,  
 He saw a maiden walking him befor,  
 Of which maiden anon, maugre<sup>285</sup> her head,  
 By very force he reft her maidenhead:  
 For which oppression was such clamour,  
 And such pursuit unto the king Arthour,  
 That damned<sup>286</sup> was this knight for to be dead  
 By course of law, and should have lost his head;  
 (Paraventure such was the statute tho<sup>287</sup>),  
 But that the queen and other ladies mo'  
 So long they prayed the king of his grace,  
 Till he his life him granted in the place,  
 And gave him to the queen, all at her will  
 To choose whether she would him save or spill<sup>288</sup>  
 The queen thanked the king with all her might;  
 And, after this, thus spake she to the knight,  
 When that she saw her time upon a day.

---

<sup>282</sup>evenings.

<sup>283</sup>mornings.

<sup>284</sup>begging district.

<sup>285</sup>in spite of.

<sup>286</sup>condemned.

<sup>287</sup>then.

<sup>288</sup>destroy.

"Thou standest yet," quoth she, "in such array<sup>289</sup>,  
 That of thy life yet hast thou no surety;  
 I grant thee life, if thou canst tell to me  
 What thing is it that women most desiren:  
 Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from the iron<sup>290</sup>  
 And if thou canst not tell it me anon,  
 Yet will I give thee leave for to gon  
 A twelvemonth and a day, to seek and lear<sup>291</sup>  
 An answer suffisant<sup>292</sup> in this mattere.  
 And surety will I have, ere that thou pace<sup>293</sup>,  
 Thy body for to yielde in this place."  
 Woe was the knight, and sorrowfully siked<sup>294</sup>.  
 But what? he might not do all as him liked.  
 And at the last he chose him for to wend<sup>295</sup>,  
 And come again, right at the yeare's end,  
 With such answer as God would him purvey<sup>296</sup>:  
 And took his leave, and wended forth his way.  
 He sought in ev'ry house and ev'ry place,  
 Where as he hoped for to finde grace,  
 To learne what thing women love the most:  
 But he could not arrive in any coast,  
 Where as he mighte find in this mattere  
 Two creatures according in fere<sup>297</sup>.  
 Some said that women loved best richness,  
 Some said honour, and some said jolliness,  
 Some rich array, and some said lust<sup>298</sup> a-bed,

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<sup>289</sup>a position.

<sup>290</sup>executioner's axe.

<sup>291</sup>learn.

<sup>292</sup>satisfactory.

<sup>293</sup>go.

<sup>294</sup>sighed.

<sup>295</sup>depart.

<sup>296</sup>provide.

<sup>297</sup>agreeing together.

<sup>298</sup>pleasure.



And oft time to be widow and be wed.  
 Some said, that we are in our heart most eased  
 When that we are y-flatter'd and y-praised.  
 He went full nigh the sooth<sup>299</sup>, I will not lie;  
 A man shall win us best with flattery;  
 And with attendance, and with business  
 Be we y-limed<sup>300</sup>, bothe more and less.  
 And some men said that we do love the best  
 For to be free, and do right as us lest<sup>301</sup>,  
 And that no man reprove us of our vice,  
 But say that we are wise, and nothing nice<sup>302</sup>, (*Note*  
 7)  
 For truly there is none among us all,  
 If any wight will claw us on the gall<sup>303</sup>  
 That will not kick, for that he saith us sooth:  
 Assay<sup>304</sup>, and he shall find it, that so do'th.  
 For be we never so vicious within,  
 We will be held both wise and clean of sin.  
 And some men said, that great delight have we  
 For to be held stable and eke secre<sup>305</sup>,  
 And in one purpose steadfastly to dwell,  
 And not bewray<sup>306</sup> a thing that men us tell.  
 But that tale is not worth a rake-stele<sup>307</sup>.  
 Pardie, we women canne nothing hele<sup>308</sup>, (*Note 9*)  
 Witness on Midas; will ye hear the tale?

---

<sup>299</sup>came very near the truth.

<sup>300</sup>caught with bird-lime.

<sup>301</sup>whatever we please.

<sup>302</sup>foolish.

<sup>303</sup>see note 8

<sup>304</sup>try.

<sup>305</sup>discreet.

<sup>306</sup>give away.

<sup>307</sup>rake-handle.

<sup>308</sup>hide.

Ovid, amonges other thinges smale<sup>309</sup>  
 Saith, Midas had, under his longe hairs,  
 Growing upon his head two ass's ears;  
 The whiche vice he hid, as best he might,  
 Full subtley from every man's sight,  
 That, save his wife, there knew of it no mo';  
 He lov'd her most, and trusted her also;  
 He prayed her, that to no creature  
 She woulde tellen of his disfigure.  
 She swore him, nay, for all the world to win,  
 She would not do that villainy or sin,  
 To make her husband have so foul a name:  
 She would not tell it for her owen shame.  
 But natheless her thoughte that she died,  
 That she so longe should a counsel hide;  
 Her thought it swell'd so sore about her heart  
 That needes must some word from her astart  
 And, since she durst not tell it unto man  
 Down to a marish fast thereby she ran,  
 Till she came there, her heart was all afire:  
 And, as a bittern bumbles<sup>310</sup> in the mire,  
 She laid her mouth unto the water down  
 "Bewray me not, thou water, with thy soun"  
 Quoth she, "to thee I tell it, and no mo',  
 Mine husband hath long ass's eares two!  
 Now is mine heart all whole; now is it out;  
 I might no longer keep it, out of doubt."  
 Here may ye see, though we a time abide,  
 Yet out it must, we can no counsel hide.  
 The remnant of the tale, if ye will hear,  
 Read in Ovid, and there ye may it lear<sup>311</sup>.  
 This knight, of whom my tale is specially,  
 When that he saw he might not come thereby,

---

<sup>309</sup>small.

<sup>310</sup>makes a humming noise.

<sup>311</sup>learn.

That is to say, what women love the most,  
 Within his breast full sorrowful was his ghost<sup>312</sup>.  
 But home he went, for he might not sojourn,  
 The day was come, that homeward he must turn.  
 And in his way it happen'd him to ride,  
 In all his care<sup>313</sup>, under a forest side,  
 Where as he saw upon a dance go  
 Of ladies four-and-twenty, and yet mo',  
 Toward this ilke<sup>314</sup> dance he drew full yern<sup>315</sup>,  
 (*Note 10*)

The hope that he some wisdom there should learn;  
 But certainly, ere he came fully there,  
 Y-vanish'd was this dance, he knew not where;  
 No creature saw he that bare life,  
 Save on the green he sitting saw a wife,  
 A fouler wight there may no man devise<sup>316</sup>.  
 Against<sup>317</sup> this knight this old wife gan to rise,  
 And said, "Sir Knight, hereforth<sup>318</sup> lieth no way.  
 Tell me what ye are seeking, by your fay.  
 Paraventure it may the better be:  
 These olde folk know mucche thing." quoth she.  
 My leve<sup>319</sup> mother," quoth this knight, "certain,  
 I am but dead, but if<sup>320</sup> that I can sayn  
 What thing it is that women most desire:  
 Could ye me wiss, I would well quite your hire<sup>321</sup>."  
 (*Note 11*)

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<sup>312</sup>spirit.

<sup>313</sup>trouble, anxiety.

<sup>314</sup>same.

<sup>315</sup>eagerly.

<sup>316</sup>imagine, tell.

<sup>317</sup>to meet.

<sup>318</sup>from here.

<sup>319</sup>dear.

<sup>320</sup>unless.

<sup>321</sup>instruct.

"Plight me thy troth here in mine hand<sup>322</sup>," quoth she,

"The nexte thing that I require of thee  
Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,  
And I will tell it thee ere it be night."

"Have here my trothe," quoth the knight; "I grant."

"Thenne," quoth she, "I dare me well avaunt<sup>323</sup>,

Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby,  
Upon my life the queen will say as I:  
Let see, which is the proudest of them all,  
That wears either a kerchief or a caul,  
That dare say nay to that I shall you teach.  
Let us go forth withoute longer speech  
Then rownded she a pistol<sup>324</sup> in his ear,  
And bade him to be glad, and have no fear.

When they were come unto the court, this knight  
Said, he had held his day, as he had hight<sup>325</sup>,  
And ready was his answer, as he said.  
Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,  
And many a widow, for that they be wise, –  
The queen herself sitting as a justice, –  
Assembled be, his answer for to hear,  
And afterward this knight was bid appear.  
To every wight commanded was silence,  
And that the knight should tell in audience,  
What thing that worldly women love the best.  
This knight he stood not still, as doth a beast,  
But to this question anon answer'd  
With manly voice, that all the court it heard,  
"My liege lady, generally," quoth he,  
"Women desire to have the sovereignty

---

<sup>322</sup>reward you.

<sup>323</sup>boast, affirm.

<sup>324</sup>she whispered a secret.

<sup>325</sup>promised.

As well over their husband as their love  
 And for to be in mast'ry him above.  
 This is your most desire, though ye me kill,  
 Do as you list, I am here at your will."  
 In all the court there was no wife nor maid  
 Nor widow, that contraried what he said,  
 But said, he worthy was to have his life.  
 And with that word up start that olde wife  
 Which that the knight saw sitting on the green.

"Mercy," quoth she, "my sovereign lady queen,  
 Ere that your court departe, do me right.  
 I taughte this answer unto this knight,  
 For which he plighted me his trothe there,  
 The firste thing I would of him requere,  
 He would it do, if it lay in his might.  
 Before this court then pray I thee, Sir Knight,"  
 Quoth she, "that thou me take unto thy wife,

For well thou know'st that I have kept<sup>326</sup> thy life.  
 If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay<sup>327</sup>."  
 This knight answer'd, "Alas, and well-away!  
 I know right well that such was my behest<sup>328</sup>.  
 For Godde's love choose a new request  
 Take all my good, and let my body go."  
 "Nay, then," quoth she, "I shrew<sup>329</sup> us bothe two,  
 For though that I be old, and foul, and poor,  
 I n'ould<sup>330</sup> for all the metal nor the ore,  
 That under earth is grave<sup>331</sup>, or lies above  
 But if thy wife I were and eke thy love."  
 "My love?" quoth he, "nay, my damnation,

---

<sup>326</sup>preserved.

<sup>327</sup>faith.

<sup>328</sup>promise.

<sup>329</sup>curse.

<sup>330</sup>would not.

<sup>331</sup>buried.

Alas! that any of my nation  
 Should ever so foul disparaged be.  
 But all for nought; the end is this, that he  
 Constrained was, that needs he muste wed,  
 And take this olde wife, and go to bed.

Now woulde some men say paraventure  
 That for my negligence I do no cure<sup>332</sup>  
 To tell you all the joy and all th' array  
 That at the feast was made that ilke<sup>333</sup> day.  
 To which thing shortly answeren I shall:  
 I say there was no joy nor feast at all,  
 There was but heaviness and mucche sorrow:  
 For privily he wed her on the morrow;  
 And all day after hid him as an owl,  
 So woe was him, his wife look'd so foul  
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought  
 When he was with his wife to bed y-brought;  
 He wallow'd, and he turned to and fro.  
 This olde wife lay smiling evermo',  
 And said, "Dear husband, benedicite,  
 Fares every knight thus with his wife as ye?  
 Is this the law of king Arthoures house?  
 Is every knight of his thus dangerous<sup>334</sup>?  
 I am your owen love, and eke your wife  
 I am she, which that saved hath your life  
 And certes yet did I you ne'er unright.  
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?  
 Ye fare like a man had lost his wit.  
 What is my guilt? for God's love tell me it,  
 And it shall be amended, if I may."  
 "Amended!" quoth this knight; "alas, nay, nay,  
 It will not be amended, never mo';

---

<sup>332</sup>take no pains.

<sup>333</sup>same.

<sup>334</sup>fastidious, niggardly.

Thou art so loathly, and so old also,  
 And thereto<sup>335</sup> comest of so low a kind,  
 That little wonder though I wallow and wind<sup>336</sup>;  
 So woulde God, mine hearte woulde brest<sup>337</sup>!"  
 "Is this," quoth she, "the cause of your unrest?"  
 "Yea, certainly," quoth he; "no wonder is."  
 "Now, Sir," quoth she, "I could amend all this,  
 If that me list, ere it were dayes three,  
 So well ye mighte bear you unto me<sup>338</sup>  
 But, for ye speaken of such gentleness  
 As is descended out of old richness,  
 That therefore shalle ye be gentlemen;  
 Such arrogancy is not worth a hen<sup>339</sup>.  
 Look who that is most virtuous alway,  
 Prive and apert<sup>340</sup>, and most intendeth aye  
 To do the gentle deedes that he can;  
 And take him for the greatest gentleman.  
 Christ will<sup>341</sup>, we claim of him our gentleness,  
 Not of our elders<sup>342</sup> for their old richness.  
 For though they gave us all their heritage,  
 For which we claim to be of high parag<sup>343</sup>,  
 Yet may they not bequeathe, for no thing,  
 To none of us, their virtuous living  
 That made them gentlemen called to be,  
 And bade us follow them in such degree.  
 Well can the wise poet of Florence,

---

<sup>335</sup>in addition.

<sup>336</sup>writhe, turn about.

<sup>337</sup>burst.

<sup>338</sup>if you could conduct toursef well towards me.

<sup>339</sup>worth nothing.

<sup>340</sup>in private and public.

<sup>341</sup>wills, requires.

<sup>342</sup>ancestors.

<sup>343</sup>birth, descent.

That highte Dante, speak of this sentence<sup>344</sup>,  
Lo, in such manner<sup>345</sup> rhyme is Dante's tale.  
'Full seld'<sup>346</sup> upriseth by his branches smale  
Prowess of man, for God of his goodness  
Wills that we claim of him our gentleness;' (*Note*  
12)

For of our elders may we nothing claim  
But temp'ral things that man may hurt and maim.  
Eke every wight knows this as well as I,  
If gentleness were planted naturally  
Unto a certain lineage down the line,  
Prive and apert, then would they never fine<sup>347</sup>  
To do of gentleness the fair office  
Then might they do no villainy nor vice.  
Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house  
Betwixt this and the mount of Caucasus,  
And let men shut the doores, and go thenne<sup>348</sup>,  
Yet will the fire as fair and lighte brenne<sup>349</sup>,  
As twenty thousand men might it behold;  
Its office natural aye will it hold<sup>350</sup>,  
On peril of my life, till that it die.  
Here may ye see well how that gentry<sup>351</sup>  
Is not annexed to possession,  
Since folk do not their operation  
Always, as doth the fire, lo, in its kind<sup>352</sup>  
For, God it wot, men may full often find  
A lorde's son do shame and villainy.

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<sup>344</sup>sentiment.

<sup>345</sup>kind of.

<sup>346</sup>seldom.

<sup>347</sup>cease.

<sup>348</sup>thence.

<sup>349</sup>burn.

<sup>350</sup>it will perform its natural duty.

<sup>351</sup>gentility, nobility.

<sup>352</sup>from its very nature



And he that will have price<sup>353</sup> of his gent'ry,  
 For<sup>354</sup> he was boren of a gentle house,  
 And had his elders noble and virtuous,  
 And will himselfe do no gentle deedes,  
 Nor follow his gentle ancestry, that dead is,  
 He is not gentle, be he duke or earl;  
 For villain sinful deedes make a churl.  
 For gentleness is but the renomee<sup>355</sup>  
 Of thine ancestors, for their high bounte<sup>356</sup>,  
 Which is a strange thing to thy person:  
 Thy gentleness cometh from God alone.  
 Then comes our very<sup>357</sup> gentleness of grace;  
 It was no thing bequeath'd us with our place.  
 Think how noble, as saith Valerius,  
 Was thilke<sup>358</sup> Tullius Hostilius,  
 That out of povert' rose to high  
 Read in Senec, and read eke in Boece,  
 There shall ye see express, that it no drede<sup>359</sup> is,  
 That he is gentle that doth gentle deedes.  
 And therefore, leve<sup>360</sup> husband, I conclude,  
 Albeit that mine ancestors were rude,  
 Yet may the highe God, – and so hope I, –  
 Grant me His grace to live virtuously:  
 Then am I gentle when that I begin  
 To live virtuously, and waive<sup>361</sup> sin.  
 "And whereas ye of povert' me reprove<sup>362</sup>,

---

<sup>353</sup>esteem, honour.

<sup>354</sup>because.

<sup>355</sup>renown.

<sup>356</sup>goodness, worth.

<sup>357</sup>true.

<sup>358</sup>that.

<sup>359</sup>doubt.

<sup>360</sup>dear.

<sup>361</sup>forsake.

<sup>362</sup>reproach.

The highe God, on whom that we believe,  
 In wilful povert' chose to lead his life:  
 And certes, every man, maiden, or wife  
 May understand that Jesus, heaven's king,  
 Ne would not choose a virtuous living.  
 Glad povert'<sup>363</sup> is an honest thing, certain;  
 This will Senec and other clerkes sayn  
 Whoso that holds him paid of<sup>364</sup> his povert',  
 I hold him rich though he hath not a shirt.  
 He that coveteth is a poore wight  
 For he would have what is not in his might  
 But he that nought hath, nor coveteth to have,  
 Is rich, although ye hold him but a knave<sup>365</sup>  
 Very povert' is sinne<sup>366</sup>, properly.  
 Juvenal saith of povert' merrily:  
 The poore man, when he goes by the way  
 Before the thieves he may sing and play (*Note 13*)  
 Povert' is hateful good, (*Note 14*) and, as I guess,  
 A full great bringer out of business<sup>367</sup>;  
 A great amender eke of sapience  
 To him that taketh it in patience.  
 Povert' is this, although it seem elenge<sup>368</sup> (*Note 15*)  
 Possession that no wight will challenge  
 Povert' full often, when a man is low,  
 Makes him his God and eke himself to know  
 Povert' a spectacle<sup>369</sup> is, as thinketh me  
 Through which he may his very<sup>370</sup> friendes see.  
 And, therefore, Sir, since that I you not grieve,

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<sup>363</sup>poverty cheerfully endured.

<sup>364</sup>is satisfied with.

<sup>365</sup>slave, abject wretch.

<sup>366</sup>the only true poverty is sin.

<sup>367</sup>deliver from trouble.

<sup>368</sup>strange.

<sup>369</sup>a pair of spectacles.

<sup>370</sup>true.

Of my povert' no more me reprove<sup>371</sup>.  
 "Now, Sir, of elde<sup>372</sup> ye reprove me:  
 And certes, Sir, though none authority<sup>373</sup>  
 Were in no book, ye gentles of honour  
 Say, that men should an olde wight honour,  
 And call him father, for your gentleness;  
 And authors shall I finden, as I guess.  
 Now there ye say that I am foul and old,  
 Then dread ye not to be a cokewold<sup>374</sup>.  
 For filth, and elde, all so may I the<sup>375</sup>,  
 Be greate wardens upon chastity.  
 But natheless, since I know your delight,  
 I shall fulfil your wordly appetite.  
 Choose now," quoth she, "one of these thinges  
     tway,  
 To have me foul and old till that I dey<sup>376</sup>,  
 And be to you a true humble wife,  
 And never you displease in all my life:  
 Or elles will ye have me young and fair,  
 And take your aventure of the repair<sup>377</sup>  
 That shall be to your house because of me, –  
 Or in some other place, it may well be?  
 Now choose yourselfe whether that you liketh.  
  
 This knight adviseth<sup>378</sup> him and sore he siketh<sup>379</sup>.  
 But at the last he said in this mannere;  
 "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,  
 I put me in your wise governance,

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<sup>371</sup>reproach.

<sup>372</sup>age.

<sup>373</sup>text, dictum.

<sup>374</sup>cuckold.

<sup>375</sup>thrive.

<sup>376</sup>die.

<sup>377</sup>resort.

<sup>378</sup>considered.

<sup>379</sup>sighed.

Choose for yourself which may be most plesance  
 And most honour to you and me also;  
 I do no force<sup>380</sup>, the whether of the two:  
 For as you liketh, it sufficeth me."  
 "Then have I got the mastery," quoth she,  
 "Since I may choose and govern as me lest<sup>381</sup>."  
 "Yea, certes wife," quoth he, "I hold it best."  
 "Kiss me," quoth she, "we are no longer wroth<sup>382</sup>,  
 For by my troth I will be to you both;  
 This is to say, yea, bothe fair and good.  
 I pray to God that I may sterve wood<sup>383</sup>,  
 But<sup>384</sup> I to you be all so good and true,  
 As ever was wife since the world was new;  
 And but<sup>385</sup> I be to-morrow as fair to seen,  
 As any lady, emperess or queen,  
 That is betwixt the East and eke the West  
 Do with my life and death right as you  
 lest@please.@@.  
 Cast up the curtain, and look how it is."  
 And when the knight saw verily all this,  
 That she so fair was, and so young thereto,  
 For joy he hent<sup>386</sup> her in his armes two:  
 His hearte bathed in a bath of bliss,  
 A thousand times on row<sup>387</sup> he gan her kiss:  
 And she obeyed him in every thing  
 That mighte do him plesance or liking.  
 And thus they live unto their lives' end  
 In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send

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<sup>380</sup>care not

<sup>381</sup>pleases.

<sup>382</sup>at variance.

<sup>383</sup>die mad.

<sup>384</sup>unless.

<sup>385</sup>unless.

<sup>386</sup>took.

<sup>387</sup>in succession.

Husbandes meek and young, and fresh in bed,  
And grace to overlive them that we wed.  
And eke I pray Jesus to short their lives,  
That will not be governed by their wives.  
And old and angry niggards of dispence<sup>388</sup>,  
God send them soon a very pestilence!

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<sup>388</sup>expense.