

*Fragment III (Group D)***The Wife of Bath's Tale**

PROLOGUE

"Experience, though no authority
Were in this world, would be enough for me
To speak of woe that married life affords;
For since I was twelve years of age, my lords,
Thanks be to God eternally alive, 5
Of husbands at the church door I've had five
(If I have wed that often legally),
And all were worthy men in their degree.
But I was told not very long ago
That as but once did Jesus ever go 10
To a wedding (in Cana, Galilee),
By that example he was teaching me
That only once in life should I be wed.
And listen what a sharp word, too, was said
Beside a well by Jesus, God and man, 15
In a reproof of the Samaritan:
'Now you have had five husbands,' Jesus said,
'But he who has you now, I say instead,
Is not your husband.' That he said, no doubt,
But what he meant I haven't figured out; 20
For I must ask, why is it the fifth man
Wasn't husband to the Samaritan?
How many men was she allowed to wed?
In all my years I've never heard it said
Exactly how this number is defined; 25
Men may surmise and gloss how it's divined,
But I expressly know it's not a lie
God bade us to increase and multiply--
That noble text I well appreciate.
I also know the Lord said that my mate 30
Should leave for me his father and his mother,
But mentioned not one number or another,
Not bigamy nor yet octogamy.
Why should men speak, then, disapprovingly?
"Look, here's the wise king, lordly Solomon: 35
I do believe his wives were more than one.
Would that the Lord permitted me to be
Refreshed as half as often as was he.
A gift from God he had for all his wives,
No man will ever have such in our lives. 40
God knows, this noble king, if I am right,
Had many a merry bout on that first night
With each of them, he was so much alive.
And God be blest that I have married five,
Of which I have picked out the very best, 44A
Both for their hanging purse and for their chest.
As many different schools make perfect clerks,
So practice that's diverse in sundry works
Will make a perfect workman certainly;
Five-husband schooling's done the same for me. 44F

The sixth is welcome when he comes along; 45
 I won't be keeping myself chaste for long,
 For when one husband from this world is gone
 Some Christian man will wed me early on--
 For as the [Apostle](#) says, then I am free
 To wed in God's name when it pleases me. 50
 It's no sin to be married, he has said,
 For if you're burning, better to be wed.
 What do I care if folks speak evilly
 Of curséd Lamech and his bigamy?
 A holy man was Abraham, I know, 55
 And Jacob, too, as far as that may go,
 Yet each with more than two wives came to dwell,
 Like many other holy men as well.
 And where in any age can it be said
 That God on high forbade that we be wed 60
 By any word express? Please answer me.
 Or when did he command virginity?
 I know as well as you, for there's no doubt,
 When maidenhood the Apostle spoke about
 He said he had no precept. To be sure, 65
 A woman may be counseled to be pure,
 But counsel and commandment aren't the same.
 To leave it to our judgment was his aim.
 For if God did command virginity,
 Then marriage he condemned concurrently; 70
 And surely if no seed were ever sown,
 From where then would virginity be grown?
 Paul wouldn't dare command, would least invoke
 A thing on which his Master never spoke.
 A prize is set up for virginity: 75
 Who runs the best may have it, let us see.
 "But not for all is this word seen as right,
 It's only as God wills it in his might.
 The Apostle was a virgin, well I note;
 But nonetheless, although he said and wrote 80
 That he wished everyone would be as he,
 It was but to advise virginity.
 He allows I be a wife, if that's my place,
 In his indulgence, so it's no disgrace
 To marry if my latest mate should die-- 85
 Without the 'bigamy' that some would cry.
 'It's best a man should not a woman touch';
 He meant in bed or on the couch or such.
 In mixing fire and tinder danger lies;
 What this example means you realize. 90
 And that's the sum: he held virginity
 Was better than to wed in frailty.
 (I call it 'frailty' unless the two
 Would chaste remain till both their lives were through.)
 "I grant it well, but envy I do not, 95
 That maidenhood may be the better lot.
 In soul and body some like being clean,
 And I can make no boasts. But have you seen
 Among possessions that the nobles hold
 If each and every vessel is of gold? 100
 Some are of service though they be of wood.
 In sundry ways God calls us to his good,
 Each by his own God-given gift sustained,
 Some this, some that, as heaven has ordained.
 "A great perfection is virginity, 105

And continence maintained devotedly;
 But Christ, who of perfection is the well,
 Did not bid everyone to go and sell
 All that he had and give it to the poor
 And thereby follow him; no, this was for 110
 The ones desiring to live perfectly--
 And by your leave, my lords, that isn't me.
 For I'll bestow the flower of my life
 In all the acts and fruits of being wife.

"And tell me for what reason, if you can, 115
 Were organs made for reproducing man
 Who's made in such a wise and perfect way?
 They were not made for nothing, safe to say.
 Gloss over whoso will, tell all creation
 Our little things both are for urination, 120
 And that they're made so different in detail
 So we can know the female from the male
 And for no other reason--you say 'No'?
 Experience knows well it isn't so. 125
 That learned men I not provoke to oath,
 I mean to say that they were made for both--
 That is, both for relief and for our ease
 To procreate, so God we not displease.
 Why else should men into their ledgers set
 That every man yield to his wife her debt? 130
 And how can he pay this emolument
 Unless he use his simple instrument?
 That's why upon all creatures these are set,
 To urinate and also to beget.

"But I don't say that everyone possessing 135
 Equipment such as this as I was stressing
 Must go and use it for engendering,
 Lest chastity be held a worthless thing.
 Christ was a virgin though shaped as a man,
 And many a saint since this world first began 140
 Has also lived in perfect chastity.
 I don't begrudge them their virginity;
 They're bread from finest wheat, so be it said,
 And let us wives be known as barley bread.
 And yet with barley bread, as Mark can tell, 145
 Was many a man by Jesus nourished well.
 In such estate as God calls each of us
 I'll persevere. I'm not fastidious,
 In wifhood I will use my instrument
 As freely as my Maker has it sent. 150
 If I hold back, God bring me misery!
 My spouse shall have it day and night, when he
 Desires he may come forth and pay his debt.
 I'll have a husband--I'm not quitting yet--
 And he will be my debtor and my slave, 155
 And in the flesh his troubles will be grave
 As long as I continue as his wife;
 For I will have the power all my life
 Over his body, I and never he.
 It's just as the Apostle said to me 160
 And bade them love us well, which I must say
 Are teachings to my liking all the way."

The [Pardoner](#) spoke up immediately.
 "Now dame, by God and by Saint John," said he,
 "As a noble preacher on the case you'll pass. 165
 I almost wed a wife, but then, alas,

Why buy it with my flesh, a price so dear?
 I'd rather not get married, not this year."
 "Abide," she said, "my tale is not begun!
 No, you'll be drinking from another tun, 170
 Before I'm through, that tastes much worse than ale.
 And when I'm finished telling you my tale
 Of tribulation known to man and wife--
 Of which I've been an expert all my life
 (That is to say, of which I've been the whip)-- 175
 Then make your choice whether you would sip
 From this same tun that I'm about to broach.
 Be wary lest too near it you approach.
 I'll tell you good examples, more than ten.
 'Whoso would not be warned by other men, 180
 By him shall other men corrected be.'
 These words were written by [Ptolemy](#),
 You'll find it if you read his [Almagest](#)."
 "Dame, if you will, I prayerfully request,"
 The Pardoner said, "that just as you began 185
 Tell us your tale and do not spare a man
 And of your practice teach us younger men."
 "If you desire, I'll do so gladly, then,"
 She said. "But first I pray this company,
 If I should speak as it may fancy me, 190
 Will not be too upset by what I say,
 For my intent is nothing but to play.
 "My lords, I now will offer you my tale.
 If ever I may drink of wine or ale,
 I'll tell the truth on husbands that I've had, 195
 As three of them were good and two were bad.
 The three men who were good were rich and old,
 Indeed were scarcely able to uphold
 The contract binding them. By God above,
 You know exactly what I'm speaking of. 200
 So help me God, I laugh to think, all right,
 How pitifully I made them work all night,
 Though, by my faith, it meant not much to me;
 They gave me so much of their treasury
 I didn't need to practice diligence 205
 To win their love or show them reverence.
 For they loved me so well, by God above,
 That I put little value in their love.
 The woman's wise who's busy till she's won
 The love she wants, or she'll be left with none. 210
 But since I had them wholly in my hand
 And they had given to me all their land,
 Why should I pay them heed and try to please,
 Unless it were for profit and for ease?
 But by my faith, I worked them for so long 215
 That many a night they sang a plaintive song.
 The bacon wasn't fetched for them, I know,
 Like for some men in Essex at [Dunmow](#).
 I governed them so strictly by my law
 That each of them was happy to a flaw 220
 To bring me back some nice things from the fair,
 And glad when I would speak with pleasant air,
 For God knows I would chide them spitefully.
 "Now hear how well I bore myself, and see,
 The wise among you wives who understand, 225
 How you should speak: accuse them out of hand.
 There's no man who can falsely swear and lie

As half as boldly as a woman. I
 Don't say this to those wives already wise,
 Save when they've made mistakes--then I advise 230
 That she who knows what's good for her and bad
 Must prove the chough has gone stark raving mad
 And call as witness her assenting maid.
 Now listen to my typical tirade:
 "'Old sluggard, you would have me dress this way? 235
 Why does my neighbor's wife have fine array?
 She is so honored everywhere she goes;
 I sit at home, I have no nifty clothes.
 What are you up to at my neighbor's house?
 Is she so fair? So amorous are you, spouse? 240
 What do you whisper with our maid? Ah, bless me!
 Sir Lecher, will you stop your treachery!
 Yet if I have a confidant or friend
 In innocence, you chide me to no end
 If I so much as walk into his house. 245
 You come home just as drunken as a mouse
 And preach upon your bench. Bad luck to you!
 You say to me that it's a mighty rue
 To marry one who's poor, for the expense;
 And if she's rich and highborn, you commence 250
 To talk about the torment and the folly
 Of suffering all her pride and melancholy.
 And if she's fair, you thorough knave, you say
 That every lecher wants her right away,
 That she'll not long in chastity abide 255
 When she's assailed on each and every side.
 "'You say that some desire us for our fortunes,
 Some for our looks, some for our good proportions,
 And some because she either sings or dances,
 Some for her noble blood and flirty glances, 260
 Her hands and arms so graceful--without fail
 All go right to the devil by your tale.
 You say that men can't keep a castle wall
 That's swarmed upon as long, that it will fall.
 "'If she looks foul, then you declare that she 265
 Will lust for every fellow she may see,
 Leap on him like a spaniel in a trice
 Until she finds the man who'll pay her price.
 In all the lake there's not one goose so gray
 That it will be without a mate, you say. 270
 Yet it's a hard thing, you would have it known,
 To have what no man willingly would own
 (You say it, loafer, when you go to bed),
 And that a wise man has no need to wed
 Nor any man whose aim is heaven's wonder. 275
 May lightning and a bolt of wildest thunder
 Come break your withered neck with fiery stroke!
 "'You say a house that leaks, and also smoke,
 And wives who scold, cause men to run away
 From their own homes. Ah, benedicite! 280
 What ails such an old fellow so to chide?
 "'You say we wives all of our vices hide
 Until we wed, and then we let them show.
 The proverb of a rascal whom I know!
 "'You say the ox, the ass, the hound, the horse 285
 At various times are tested, as, of course,
 Are bowls and basins ere a buy is made,
 And spoons and stools, and other household trade

Like pots and clothes, and other such array;
 But menfolk never test their wives, you say, 290
 Till they are wed--old dotard, ne'er do well!--
 And then we show our vices, so you tell.
 "'And it displeases me, you also say,
 If you don't praise my beauty all the day
 And aren't forever poring on my face 295
 And calling me "fair dame" in every place;
 If you don't hold a feast upon the day
 When I was born, dress me in rich array;
 If you don't honor with all due respect
 My nurse and chambermaid, nor deem select 300
 All of my father's kinfolk and allies--
 You say it, you old barrel full of lies!
 "'And our apprentice Jenkin, by his hair--
 Those curly, golden, shining locks so fair--
 And by the fact he squires me where I go, 305
 Gives you a false suspicion. Kindly know
 I wouldn't want him if you died tomorrow.
 "'But tell me this, why hide (be it your sorrow!)
 The keys from me that lock your chest? I'll tell
 You this, your property is mine as well. 310
 Am I an idiot like some other dames?
 I tell you by that lord they call Saint James,
 You won't be--you can rave mad in the woods!--
 Master of both my body and my goods;
 You'll forgo one, I tell you to your eye. 315
 What help is it to ask around and spy?
 I think that you would lock me in your chest.
 To say, "Go where you please, wife," would be best,
 "Have fun, I won't believe tales told in malice,
 For I know you to be a good wife, Alice." 320
 We love no man who keeps such watchful eyes
 On where we go, our liberty we prize.
 "'Above all men may he most blessed be,
 That wise astronomer Ptolemy,
 Who wrote this proverb in his *Almagest*: 325
 "He has much higher wisdom than the rest
 Who doesn't care who has the world in hand."
 And by this proverb you should understand
 That if you have enough, why should you care
 How merrily some other people fare? 330
 For by your leave, old dotard, of my stuff
 Tonight you surely will have quite enough.
 How great a niggard is he who refuses
 A candlelight from the lantern that he uses;
 He'd have no less light than he did before. 335
 You have enough, so don't complain for more.
 "'And if in finest clothes, you also say,
 In jewelry and other fine display,
 We dress ourselves, we risk our chastity;
 To back up what you say, you quote to me 340
 The following in the Apostle's name:
 "Clothes chastely made with proper sense of shame
 Is what your women's dress should always be--
 No fancy hairdos, no bright jewelry
 Like pearls and gold, nor other rich array." 345
 About your text and rubric, let me say
 I'd follow them as much as would a gnat.
 "'You also say that I am like a cat,
 For if somebody singes a cat's fur

She'll be content to stay inside and purr, 350
 But if her fur is sleek and fine she'll stay
 Inside the house not more than half a day;
 Before the dawn can break she's to her calling,
 She's showing off her fur and caterwauling--
 In other words, Sir Rascal, if well dressed 355
 I run out to be sure I'm well assessed.

"'Old fool, what help to you are all your spies?
 If you asked [Argus](#) with his hundred eyes
 To be my bodyguard--what better measure?--
 He'd guard me only if it were my pleasure; 360
 As I may thrive, I'd really tweak his beard!

"'You also speak of three things to be feared
 For troubling all the earth, and that for sure
 The fourth one there's no man could long endure.
 Sir Rascal dear, may Christ cut short your life, 365
 For still you preach and say a hateful wife
 Is one of these misfortunes. Sir, are there
 No other things to speak of and compare
 In telling all your parables? Must you
 Always include a poor wife ere you're through? 370

"'You also liken woman's love to hell,
 To barren land without a stream or well,
 And also to a wildly raging fire--
 The more it burns, the stronger its desire
 To consume all that will burn. You say to me 375
 That just as little worms destroy a tree
 A wife destroys her husband. "They have found
 This to be true, those who to wives are bound."

"My lords, just so, as you now understand,
 I accused all my old husbands out of hand 380
 Of saying such while they were drunk. And all
 Was false, but as my witnesses I'd call
 On Jenkin and my niece to say, 'It's so.'
 O Lord, the pain I gave them and the woe!
 Their guilt? By God's sweet grief, they hadn't any; 385
 And yet just like a horse I'd bite and whinny,
 Complaining well when I myself had guilt,
 For they'd have killed me had the beans been spilt.
 Who comes first to the mill is first to grind;
 I'd be first to complain, and always find 390
 Our war was quickly over--gladly they
 Repented things they didn't do or say.
 On wenches I would give them reprimand
 When they were so sick they could hardly stand.

"Yet each was tickled in his heart to see 395
 What he thought was such love for him in me.
 I swore that all my walking out by night
 Was just to keep his wenches in my sight.
 With that excuse I had me lots of mirth.
 For we are given such keen wits at birth 400
 To cheat and weep and spin; these God will give
 To women naturally long as they live.
 So one thing I can speak of boastfully,
 The one who came out best was always me,
 By sleight or force, or by some other thing 405
 Like long complaint and constant bickering.
 Especially in bed were they undone,
 For there I'd scold them and deny them fun;
 I would no longer in the bed abide,
 Once I could feel his arm upon my side, 410

Until he paid his ransom as he must--
 Then I would suffer him to do his lust.
 And so to every man I tell this tale:
 Gain what you can, for everything's for sale,
 And no hawk by an empty hand is lured. 415
 For profit all his lust I so endured
 And feigned for him a lusty appetite;
 In bacon, though, I never took delight,
 And that is why I would forever chide.
 For even had the pope sat down beside 420
 Them there, I wouldn't spare them at the table,
 To pay back word for word I was so able.
 So help me God who is omnipotent,
 Were I to make right now my testament
 I'd owe them not a word that's not repaid. 425
 I did this by the wits that I displayed
 So that they had to give up and be bested
 Or else we never would have finally rested.
 Though like a raging lion he would look,
 Yet he would fail at every tack he took. 430
 "Then I would say, 'Good dear, just take a peep
 At how meek-looking Wilkin is, our sheep;
 Come here, my spouse, and let me kiss your cheek;
 You should always be patient, always meek,
 And have a good man's conscience, as so much 435
 You like to preach of patient Job and such.
 Be always patient, since so well you preach--
 If not, a lesson we will have to teach,
 How fair it is to have a wife in peace,
 For there's no doubt that one of us must cease; 440
 Since woman's less reasonable than the male,
 You must therefore be patient. What can ail
 You, husband, that so much you gripe and groan?
 Is it my thing? You'd have it yours alone?
 Why, take it all, here, take it every bit. 445
 By Peter, curse you! such a love for it.
 If I were selling some of my belle chose
 I then could walk fresh-looking as a rose,
 But I will keep it for your own sweet tooth.
 You are to blame, by God, and that's the truth.' 450
 "The words we'd have were always of that sort.
 And now on my fourth husband I'll report.
 "A reveler was husband number four,
 That is to say, he had a paramour.
 And I was young and wanton, passionate, 455
 As jolly as a magpie, obstinate
 And strong. How I could dance to a small harp, too,
 And sing like any nightingale can do
 When I had drunk a draught of good sweet wine!
 Metellius, that dirty churl, the swine, 460
 Picked up a staff and took his spouse's life
 For drinking wine. If I had been his wife,
 He never would have daunted me from drinking!
 And after wine, on Venus I'd be thinking,
 For as surely as cold engenders hail 465
 A lustful mouth will have a lustful tail.
 A tipsy woman is without defense,
 As lechers know by their experience.
 "But Lord Christ! when it all comes back to me,
 Remembrance of my youth and jollity, 470
 It warms the cockles of my heart. Today

It still does my heart good that I can say
 I've had the world, what time's been mine to pass.
 But age that poisons everything, alas,
 Bereft me of my beauty and my pith. 475
 Well, let it go, the devil go therewith!
 The flour is gone, there is no more to tell;
 The bran as best I can I now must sell
 And strive to be as merry as before.
 And now I'll tell of husband number four. 480
 "I had within my heart a great despite
 That he in any other took delight.
 I paid him back, by God and by Saint Joyce,
 With a hard staff from wood of his own choice;
 Not with my body, not by sinful means, 485
 But entertaining folks in merry scenes,
 I made him fry in his own grease till he
 Was quite consumed with angry jealousy.
 By God, on earth I was his purgatory,
 For which I hope his soul is now in glory. 490
 God knows how often he would sit and sing
 While his shoe pinched him, such a painful thing;
 For there was none save God and me who knew
 The many torments that I put him through.
 He died when I came from Jerusalem; 495
 Beneath the rood-beam where we buried him,
 His tomb was surely not as finely done
 As was great King Darius's, the one
 Built by Apelles with such skill and taste.
 A costly burial would have been a waste. 500
 May he fare well and God give his soul rest,
 For he's now in his grave, his wooden chest.
 "Of husband number five I now will tell.
 God grant his soul may never go to hell!
 And yet he was to me the very worst; 505
 I feel it in my ribs from last to first
 And always will until the day I die.
 But in our bed he was so fresh and spry,
 To gloss away so able, heaven knows,
 Whenever he was wanting my *belle chose*, 510
 That though each bone he'd beaten was in pain,
 At once he'd win back all my love again.
 I swear I loved him best of all, for he
 Was always playing hard to get with me.
 We women have--the truth, so help me God-- 515
 In this regard a fancy that is odd;
 That which we can't get in an easy way
 Is what we'll crave and cry for all the day.
 Forbid us something and then we'll desire it,
 But press it on us and we'll not require it. 520
 With coyness we trade in our affairs;
 Great market crowds make more expensive wares
 And what's too cheap will not be held a prize.
 This every woman knows if she is wise.
 "My husband number five, God bless his soul, 525
 I took for love, no riches were my goal.
 He once had been an Oxford clerk, but then
 Had left school and gone home, and boarded in
 Our town with a good friend of mine, the one,
 God bless her soul, whose name was Alison. 530
 She knew my heart, each of my secrets well,
 Much better than the parish priest. I'd tell

Her everything, disclosing to her all;
 For had my husband pissed upon a wall
 Or done something that could have cost his life, 535
 To her and to another worthy wife--
 And also to my niece, whom I loved well--
 His every secret I would fully tell.
 God knows, I did this so much, to his dread,
 It often made his face get hot and red. 540
 He felt ashamed, but blamed himself that he
 Had told to me so great a privity.
 "It so befell that one time during Lent,
 As often to this close friend's house I went
 (And I so loved to dress up anyway 545
 And take my walks in March, April, and May
 From house to house, to hear what tales were spun),
 This clerk named Jenkin, my friend Alison,
 And I myself into the meadows went.
 My husband was in London all that Lent, 550
 So I had much more leisure time to play,
 To see and to be seen along the way
 By lusty folks. How could I know when there
 Would come good fortune meant for me, or where?
 And so I made my visits, I'd attend 555
 Religious vigils and processions, wend
 With pilgrims, hear the sermons preached; also
 To miracle plays and weddings I would go.
 The clothes that I would wear were scarlet bright;
 There never was a worm or moth or mite, 560
 As I may live, could bring to them abuse.
 Do you know why? They always were in use.
 "I'll tell you now what happened next to me.
 I've said we walked into the fields, we three;
 And there we really had a chance to flirt, 565
 This clerk and I. My foresight to assert,
 While we were talking I suggested he,
 If I wound up a widow, marry me.
 For certainly--I say it not to boast--
 Of good purveyance I have made the most 570
 In marriages and other things as well.
 A mouse's heart's not worth a leek in hell
 If he has just one hole for which to run,
 For if that one hole fails then all is done.
 "I made pretense that he enchanted me 575
 (My mother taught to me this subtlety);
 I dreamt of him all night, I also said,
 And dreamt he slew me as I lay in bed,
 My bed as full of blood as it could be.
 'But still I hope that you'll bring good to me, 580
 For blood betokens gold, or so I'm taught.'
 And all was false, for I'd been dreaming naught,
 I only followed all my mother's lore
 (On that as well as on a few things more).
 "And now, sirs--let me see, what was I saying? 585
 Aha! by God, I have it, no more straying.
 "When my fourth husband lay upon the bier,
 I wept, of course, grief-stricken to appear,
 As wives must do (the custom of the land),
 And hid my face with the kerchief in my hand. 590
 But as I'd be provided with a mate,
 I wept but little, I can truly state.
 "Now as my husband to the church was borne

That morning, neighbors went along to mourn,
 With our clerk Jenkin being one. As God 595
 May help me, when I saw him trod
 Behind the bier, I thought that he had feet
 And legs as fair as ever I could meet,
 And all my heart was then in his dear hold.
 He was, I think, then twenty winters old, 600
 And I was forty, telling you the truth;
 But I have always had a coltish tooth.
 Gap-toothed I was, and that was for the best;
 The birthmark of Saint Venus I possessed.
 So help me God, I was a lusty one 605
 And fair and rich and young and full of fun;
 And truly, as my husbands said to me,
 I had the finest what's-it there could be.
 My feelings come from Venus and my heart
 Is full of Mars; for Venus did impart 610
 To me all of my lecherousness and lust,
 And Mars gave me a hard and sturdy crust.
 My ascendant sign was Taurus, Mars therein.
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!
 For I have always followed inclination 615
 By virtue of my taurine constellation;
 That made me so that I could not deny
 A good fellow my Venus chamber. I
 Still have the mark of Mars upon my face
 (And also in another, private place). 620
 As truly as the Lord is my salvation,
 My love was never by discrimination;
 I always catered to my appetite,
 Though he be short or long or black or white.
 I didn't care, just so he pleased me, 625
 How poor he was or what was his degree.
 "What shall I say except, when that month ended,
 This jolly Jenkin whom I thought so splendid
 Had married me midst great solemnity.
 I gave him all the land and property 630
 That ever had been given me. And yet
 It was thereafter much to my regret;
 Of nothing that I wanted he would hear.
 By God, he struck me so once on the ear
 (Because I tore a page out of his book) 635
 That it went deaf from that one blow it took.
 But I was stubborn like a lioness
 And lashed him with my tongue without redress.
 And I'd go walking as I'd done before
 From house to house (though I would not, he swore), 640
 For which he oftentimes would start to preach
 To me. Old Roman stories he would teach,
 Like how Simplicius Gallus left his wife,
 Forsaking her the remainder of his life,
 Because he caught her looking out the door 645
 One day bareheaded--that and nothing more.
 "A Roman, too, he told me of by name
 Whose wife had gone out to a summer's game
 Without his knowledge; he forsook her too.
 And then he'd go and search his Bible through 650
 For a proverb of Ecclesiasticus
 Wherein he gives a firm command to us:
 No man should let his wife go roam about.
 And after that he'd quote without a doubt:

'Whoever builds his house by using shallows
 And goes and pricks his blind horse over fallows
 And lets his wife seek any shrine one hallows
 Is worthy to be hung upon the gallows!'
 But all for naught, for I cared not a straw
 For all his proverbs or for his old saw. 660
 I'd not correct myself by his advices.
 I hate a man who tells me of my vices,
 And so do more of us, God knows, than I.
 So mad with me this made him he could die,
 But I would not forbear in any case. 665

"I'll tell you, by Saint Thomas, face-to-face
 The reason I tore from his book a page,
 Why he gave me a deaf ear in his rage.
 "He had a book that he read night and day
 For his amusement. He would laugh away 670
 At this book, which he called 'Valerius
 And Theophrastus,' with its various
 Selections: there was once a clerk in Rome,
 A cardinal whose name was Saint Jerome,
 Who wrote a book against Jovinian; 675
 This book also contained Tertullian,
 Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
 An abbess who once lived near Paris; these
 Along with parables of Solomon
 And [Ovid](#)'s Art--the books were many a one, 680
 And all of them in this one volume bound.
 And day and night he always could be found,
 When he had leisure or was on vacation
 From any sort of worldly occupation,
 Reading some passage about wicked wives. 685
 Of them he knew more legends and more lives
 Than of the best of wives in Holy Writ.
 It is impossible, no doubting it,
 For any clerk to speak some good of wives
 Unless it deals with saints, their holy lives; 690
 No woman not a saint he's kindly to.
 Who painted, though, the lion, tell me who?
 By God, if women ever wrote some stories
 As clerks have done in all their oratories,
 They would have told of men more wickedness 695
 Than all the sons of Adam could redress.
 Children of Venus and of [Mercury](#)
 Have always worked in great polarity;
 For Mercury loves wisdom, science pure,
 While Venus loves good times, expenditure. 700
 Because their dispositions are divergent,
 One's descendant, the other one emergent;
 So Mercury, God knows, has desolation
 When Venus has in Pisces exaltation,
 And Venus falls when Mercury is raised. 705
 So by no clerk is woman ever praised.
 The clerk, when he is old and cannot do
 For Venus any work worth his old shoe,
 Will in his dotage sit and write of how
 A woman cannot keep her marriage vow! 710

"Now let me tell the reason why I say
 That I was beaten for a book, I pray.
 One night this Jenkin, who was my fifth sire,
 Was reading in his book beside the fire.
 He read of Eve, who by her wickedness 715

Had brought all of mankind to wretchedness,
 The reason Jesus Christ himself was slain
 To bring us back with his heart's blood again.
 'Of women here expressly you may find
 That woman was the ruin of all mankind.' 720

"He read to me how Samson lost his hair,
 Sheared by his mistress, sleeping unaware,
 And how by this he lost both of his eyes.
 "He read then to me--I will tell no lies--
 Of Dejanira, she who was to blame 725
 That Hercules had set himself aflame.

"He left out not a whit about the woe
 That Socrates' two wives caused him to know;
 When Xantippe poured piss upon his head,
 The hapless man sat there as still as dead, 730
 Then wiped his head and dared not to complain,
 But said, 'Ere thunder stops, there comes a rain.'

"The tale of Pasiphaë, the queen of Crete,
 For cursedness he thought was really sweet.
 Fie on it! I'll not speak in any measure 735
 About her horrid lust, her grisly pleasure.

"Of Clytemnestra, who for lechery
 Brought to her husband death by treachery,
 With greatest fervor then to me he read. 740

"He told me, too, the circumstance that led
 Amphiaraus at Thebes to lose his life;
 My husband had a legend of his wife
 Eriphyle, who for a brooch of gold
 Had gone in secret to the Greeks and told
 Of where her husband had his hiding place, 745
 For which he met at Thebes with sorry grace.

"He told of Livia, Lucilia too,
 Who made their husbands die, albeit true
 One was for love, the other was for hate.
 For Livia, one evening very late, 750
 Gave poison to her husband as a foe;
 But lecherous Lucilia loved hers so
 That, so he might forever of her think,
 She gave him such a love potion to drink
 That he was dead before the morning sun. 755
 And therefore husbands always are undone.

"He told me then how one Latumius
 Complained one day to his friend Arrius
 That growing in his garden was a tree
 On which, he said, his wives (who numbered three) 760
 Had hung themselves out of their hearts' despite.
 Said Arrius, 'Dear brother, if you might,
 Give me a cutting from that blessed tree,
 And in my garden planted shall it be.'

"Of later date, of wives to me he read 765
 Who sometimes slew their husbands while in bed,
 Then with their lechers screwed the night away
 While flat upon the floor the bodies lay.
 Some others would drive nails into the brain
 While they were sleeping, that's how they were slain. 770
 Still others gave them poison in their drink.
 Of evil more than any heart can think
 About he read, and he knew more proverbs
 Than in this world there's growth of grass or herbs.
 'It's better that your dwelling place,' said he, 775
 'With a foul dragon or a lion be

Than with a woman who is wont to chide.
 High on the roof it's better to abide
 Than with an angry wife down in the house.
 Each wicked and contrary to her spouse, 780
 They hate all that their husbands love.' He'd say,
 'A woman casts all of her shame away
 When she casts off her smock.' He'd further tell,
 'A woman fair, if she's not chaste as well,
 Is like a golden ring in a sow's nose.' 785
 Who could have thought, whoever would suppose
 The woe and torment that was in my heart?
 "And when I saw that he would never part
 With reading in this curséd book all night,
 Three leaves all of a sudden I tore right 790
 Out of his book while he was reading it,
 Then with my fist I gave his cheek a hit
 And he fell backwards right into the fire.
 He jumped up like a lion full of ire
 And with his fist he hit me in the head, 795
 And I lay on the floor then as if dead.
 And when he saw how stilly there I lay,
 He was aghast and would have run away,
 But then at last out of my swoon I woke.
 'O false thief, have you slain me?' then I spoke. 800
 'You've murdered me for all my land, that's why,
 Yet let me kiss you now before I die.'
 "Then near he came and knelt down by my side,
 And said, 'Dear sister Alison, my bride,
 So help me God, I'd never hit my dame; 805
 For what I've done you are yourself to blame.
 Forgive me, I beseech you and implore.'
 And then I hit him on the cheek once more.
 'This much I am avenged, O thief,' I said.
 'I can no longer speak, I'm nearly dead.' 810
 "But in the end, for all we suffered through,
 We finally reached accord between us two.
 The bridle he put wholly in my hand
 To have complete control of house and land,
 And of his tongue and hands as well--and when 815
 He did, I made him burn his book right then.
 And when I had by all my mastery
 Thus gained for myself all the sovereignty--
 When he had said to me, 'My own true wife,
 Do as you please the balance of your life; 820
 Keep your honor as well as my estate'--
 From that day on we never had debate.
 I was as true as any wife you'd find
 From India to Denmark, and as kind,
 So help me God, and he was so to me. 825
 I pray that God who sits in majesty
 Will bless his soul for all his mercy dear.
 Now I will tell my tale if you will hear."

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Words between the Summoner and the Friar

The [Friar](#) laughed when he had heard all this.
 He said, "If ever I have joy or bliss, 830
 Your tale has quite a long preamble, dame!"
 And when the [Summoner](#) heard the Friar exclaim,
 The Summoner said, "Behold, by God's two arms!
 See how a meddling friar ever swarms.
 A fly and friar, good men, will fall into 835
 Each dish, into all kinds of matter. You
 Speak of preambulation? Amble or
 Go trot, shut up, or go sit down! No more,
 You're spoiling all our fun, the way you act."
 The Friar said, "Summoner, is that a fact? 840
 Now by my faith, I will, before I'm through,
 Tell of a summoner such a tale or two
 That everyone will laugh throughout the place."
 "Now, Friar, damn your bloody eyes and face!"
 The Summoner said. "And damn myself as well 845
 If two tales, or if three, I do not tell
 Of friars ere I come to Sittingbourne.
 And with them I will cause your heart to mourn,
 For I can see your patience now is gone."
 Our Host said, "Peace! No more such goings on!" 850
 He said, "Now let this woman tell her tale.
 You act like people who are drunk with ale.
 Now, madam, tell your tale, for that is best."
 "I'm ready, sir," she said, "as you request,
 With license from this worthy Friar here." 855
 "Yes, dame," said he, "speak on, you'll have my ear."

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The Wife of Bath's Tale

In the old days of King Arthur, today
 Still praised by Britons in a special way,
 This land was filled with fairies all about.
 The elf-queen with her jolly little rout 860
 In many a green field often danced. Indeed
 This was the old belief of which I read;
 I speak of many hundred years ago.
 But now such elves no one is seeing. No,
 For now the prayers and charitable desires 865
 Of [limiters](#) and other holy friars
 Who wander all the land, by every stream,
 As thick as specks of dust in a sunbeam,
 To bless our halls, chambers, kitchens, bowers,
 Boroughs, cities, castles, lofty towers, 870
 Villages, granaries, stables, dairies,
 Have made sure that no longer are there fairies.
 For where there once was wont to walk an elf
 There's walking now the limiter himself,
 Early and late, to give his auspices, 875
 Say matins and his other offices,
 Go all about the limit where he's found.
 Now women may go safely all around;
 In every bush and under every tree
 He is the only [incubus](#), and he 880
 Won't do a thing except dishonor them.
 It happened that King Arthur had with him
 A [bachelor](#) in his house; this lusty liver,
 While riding from his hawking by the river,
 Once chanced upon, alone as she was born, 885
 A maiden who was walking--soon forlorn,
 For he, despite all that she did or said,
 By force deprived her of her maidenhead.
 Because of this, there was such clamoring
 And such demand for justice to the king, 890
 This knight was all but numbered with the dead
 By course of law, and should have lost his head
 (Which may have been the law in that milieu).
 But then the queen and other ladies too
 Prayed so long that the king might grant him grace, 895
 King Arthur spared him for at least a space;
 He left him to the queen to do her will,
 To choose to save or order them to kill.
 The queen then thanked the king with all her might,
 And after this the queen spoke with the knight 900
 When she saw opportunity one day.
 "For you," she said, "things stand in such a way
 You can't be sure if you're to live or not.
 I'll grant you life if you can tell me what
 It is that women most desire. Beware 905
 The iron ax, your neckbone now to spare!
 And if you cannot tell me right away,
 I'll give you leave, a twelvemonth and a day,
 That you may go to seek, that you might find

An answer that is of sufficient kind. 910
 I want your word before you take a pace:
 You'll bring yourself back to this very place."
 This knight with sorrow sighed, was full of woe.
 What could he do? Not as he pleased, and so
 To go away was what he finally chose, 915
 To come back when his year was at its close
 With such an answer as God might provide.
 He took his leave and forth he went to ride.
 He sought in every house and every place
 In hopes he could secure the promised grace 920
 By learning that which women love the most.
 But he did not arrive at any coast
 Where he could find two people on the matter
 Who might agree, if judging by their chatter.
 Some said that women all love riches best, 925
 While some said honor, others jolly zest,
 Some rich array; some said delights in bed,
 And many said to be a widow wed;
 Some others said that our hearts are most eased
 When we are flattered and when we are pleased-- 930
 And he was nigh the truth, if you ask me.
 A man shall win us best with flattery;
 With much attendance, charm, and application
 Can we be caught, whatever be our station.
 Some said our love to which we all aspire 935
 Is to be free to do as we desire,
 With no reproof of vice but with the rule
 That men should say we're wise, not one a fool.
 For truly there is none among us all
 Who, if a man should claw us on the gall, 940
 Won't kick for being told the truth; he who
 Does an assay will find out that it's true.
 But though we may have vices kept within,
 We like to be called wise and clean of sin.
 And some say that we take the most delight 945
 In keeping secrets, keeping our lips tight,
 To just one purpose striving to adhere:
 Not to betray one thing that we may hear.
 That tale's not worth the handle of a rake.
 We women can't keep secrets, heaven's sake! 950
 Just look at Midas--would you hear the tale?
Ovid, among the trifles he'd detail,
 Said Midas had long hair, for it appears
 That on his head had grown two ass's ears.
 This defect he had tried as best he might 955
 To keep well as he could from others' sight,
 And save his wife there was none who could tell.
 He loved her much and trusted her as well
 And prayed that not one living creature she
 Would ever tell of his deformity. 960
 She swore she'd not, though all the world to win,
 Be guilty of such villainy and sin
 And make her husband have so foul a name.
 To tell it would as well bring her to shame.
 But nonetheless she all but nearly died, 965
 So long to have a secret she must hide.
 She thought it swelled so sorely in her heart
 Some word from out of her was bound to start;
 And since she dared to tell it to no man,
 Down close beside a marsh the lady ran-- 970

She had to rush, her heart was so afire.
 Then like a bittern booming in the mire,
 She put her mouth down to the water, saying,
 "Water, make no sound, don't be betraying,
 For I will tell this to no one but you. 975
 My husband has long ass's ears--it's true!"
 She thought, "My heart is cured now, it is out;
 I couldn't keep it longer, there's no doubt."
 So as you see, we may awhile abide
 But it must out, no secret we can hide. 980
 (As for the tale, if you would hear the rest,
 Read Ovid, for that's where you'll learn it best.)
 This knight of whom my tale is all about,
 When seeing that he couldn't find it out--
 That is to say, what women love the most-- 985
 Felt in his breast already like a ghost;
 For home he headed, he could not sojourn,
 The day had come when homeward he must turn.
 And in this woeful state he chanced to ride
 While on his way along a forest side, 990
 And there he saw upon the forest floor
 Some ladies dancing, twenty-four or more.
 Toward these dancers he was quick to turn
 In hope that of some wisdom he might learn;
 But all at once, before he'd gotten there, 995
 The dancers disappeared, he knew not where.
 He didn't see one creature bearing life,
 Save sitting on the green one single wife.
 An uglier creature no mind could devise.
 To meet him this old wife was to arise, 1000
 And said, "You can't get there from here, Sir Knight.
 What are you seeking, by your faith? It might
 Well be to your advantage, sir, to tell;
 Old folks like me know many things, and well."
 "Dear mother," said the knight, "it is for sure 1005
 That I am dead if I cannot secure
 What thing it is that women most desire.
 If you could teach me, gladly I would hire."
 "Give me your word here in my hand," said she,
 "The next thing I request you'll do for me 1010
 If it's a thing that lies within your might,
 And I will tell you then before it's night."
 The knight said, "Here's my oath, I guarantee."
 "Then certainly I dare to boast," said she,
 "Your life is safe, for I'll be standing by; 1015
 Upon my life, the queen will say as I.
 Let's see who is the proudest of them all,
 With kerchief or with headdress standing tall,
 Who shall deny that which I have to teach.
 Now let us go, no need to make a speech." 1020
 She whispered then a message in his ear
 And bade him to be glad and have no fear.
 When they had come to court, the knight declared,
 "I've come back to the day, and to be spared,
 For I am now prepared to give reply." 1025
 The noble wives and maidens stood nearby,
 And widows too (who were considered wise);
 The queen sat like a justice in her guise.
 All these had been assembled there to hear,
 And then the knight was summoned to appear. 1030
 Full silence was commanded in the court

So that the knight might openly report
 The thing that worldly women love the best.
 He stood not like a beast at one's behest
 But quickly gave his answer loud and clear, 1035
 With manly voice that all the court might hear.
 "My liege and lady, generally," said he,
 "What women most desire is sovereignty
 Over their husbands or the ones they love,
 To have the mastery, to be above. 1040
 This is your most desire, though you may kill
 Me if you wish. I'm here, do as you will."
 No wife or maid or widow in the court
 Saw fit to contradict the knight's report;
 They all agreed, "He's worthy of his life." 1045
 And with that word up started the old wife,
 The one the knight had seen upon the green.
 "Mercy," she said, "my sovereign lady queen!
 Before your court departs, grant me my right.
 It's I who taught this answer to the knight, 1050
 For which he gave a solemn oath to me:
 The first thing I request he'd do for me
 If it's a thing that lies within his might.
 Before the court I therefore pray, Sir Knight,"
 She said, "that you will take me as your wife; 1055
 For well you know that I have saved your life.
 If I speak falsely, by your faith accuse me."
 The knight replied, "Alas, how woes abuse me!
 I know I made the promise you've expressed.
 For love of God, please choose a new request. 1060
 Take all my goods and let my body go."
 "No, damn us both then!" she replied. "For though
 I may be ugly, elderly, and poor,
 I'd give all of the metal and the ore
 That lies beneath the earth and lies above 1065
 If only I could be your wife and love."
 "My love?" he said. "No, rather my damnation!
 Alas! that there is any of my nation
 Who ever could so foully be disgraced."
 But all for naught, the end was that he faced 1070
 Constraint, for he now would have to wed
 And take his gray old wife with him to bed.
 Now there are some men who might say perhaps
 That it's my negligence or else a lapse
 That I don't tell you of the joyous way 1075
 In which the feast took place that very day.
 I'll answer briefly should the question fall:
 There wasn't any joy or feast at all,
 Just lots of sorrow, things went grievously.
 He married her that morning privately, 1080
 Then all that day he hid just like an owl,
 So woeful, for his wife looked really foul.
 Great was the woe the knight had in his head
 When with his wife he'd been brought to the bed;
 He tossed and then he turned both to and fro. 1085
 His old wife lay there smiling at him, though,
 And said, "Dear husband, benedicite!
 Acts every knight toward his wife this way?
 Is this the law of great King Arthur's house?
 Is every knight of his so distant? Spouse, 1090
 I am your own true love and I'm your wife
 And I'm the one as well who saved your life,

And I have never done you wrong or spite.
 Why do you treat me so on our first night?
 You act just like a man who's lost his wit. 1095
 What is my guilt? For God's love, tell me it,
 And it shall be amended if I may."
 "Amended?" asked the knight. "Whatever way?
 There's no way it could ever be amended.
 You are so old and loathsome--and descended, 1100
 To add to that, from such a lowly kind--
 No wonder that I toss and turn and wind.
 I wish to God my heart would burst, no less!"
 "Is this," she said, "the cause of your distress?"
 "Why, yes," said he, "and is there any wonder?" 1105
 She said, "I could amend the stress you're under,
 If you desire, within the next three days,
 If you'll treat me more kindly in your ways.
 "But when you talk about gentility
 Like old wealth handed down a family tree, 1110
 That this is what makes of you gentlemen,
 Such arrogance I judge not worth a hen.
 Take him who's always virtuous in his acts
 In public and in private, who exacts
 Of himself all the noble deeds he can, 1115
 And there you'll find the greatest gentleman.
 Christ wills we claim nobility from him,
 Not from our elders or the wealth of them;
 For though they give us all their heritage
 And we claim noble birth by parentage, 1120
 They can't bequeath--all else theirs for the giving--
 To one of us the virtuous way of living
 That made the nobles they were known to be,
 The way they bade us live in like degree.
 "How well the poet wise, the Florentine 1125
 Named Dante, speaks about just what I mean,
 And this is how he rhymes it in his story:
 'Of men who climb their family trees for glory,
 Few will excel, for it is by God's grace
 We gain nobility and not by race.' 1130
 No, from our elders all that we can claim
 Are temporal things such as may hurt and maim.
 "All know as I, that if gentility
 Were something that was planted naturally
 Through all a certain lineage down the line, 1135
 In private and in public they'd be fine
 And noble people doing what is nice,
 Completely free of villainy and vice.
 "Take fire into the darkest house or hut
 Between here and Mount Caucasus, then shut 1140
 The doors, and all men leave and not return;
 That fire will still remain as if the burn
 Were being watched by twenty thousand souls.
 Its function will not cease, its nature holds,
 On peril of my life, until it dies. 1145
 "Gentility, you then should realize,
 Is not akin to things like property;
 For people act with much variety,
 Not like the fire that always is the same.
 God knows that men may often find, for shame, 1150
 A lord's son who's involved in villainy.
 Who prides himself to have gentility
 Because it happens he's of noble birth,

With elders virtuous, of noble worth,
 But never tries to do a noble deed 1155
 Nor follow in his dead ancestors' lead,
 Is not a noble, be he duke or earl;
 For bad and sinful deeds just make a churl.
 Sir, your gentility is but the fame
 Of your ancestors, who earned their good name 1160
 With qualities quite foreign to your own.
 Gentility can come from God alone,
 So true gentility's a thing of grace,
 Not something that's bequeathed by rank or place.
 "For nobleness, as says Valerius, 1165
 Consider Tullius Hostilius:
 Though poor, he rose to noble heights. Look in
[Boethius](#) or [Seneca](#), and when
 You do, don't doubt the truth of what you read:
 The noble is the man of noble deed. 1170
 And so, dear husband, thus I will conclude:
 If it's true my ancestors were so rude,
 Yet may the Lord, as I do hope, grant me
 The grace to live my life most virtuously;
 For I'm a noble when I so begin 1175
 To live in virtue and avoid sin.
 "For poverty you scold me. By your leave,
 The God on high, in whom we both believe,
 Chose willfully to live a poor man's life;
 And surely every man, maiden, or wife 1180
 Can understand that Jesus, heaven's King,
 Would not choose sinful living. It's a thing
 Of honor to be poor without despair,
 As Seneca and other [clerks](#) declare.
 To be poor yet contented, I assert, 1185
 Is to be rich, though having not a shirt.
 The one who covets is the poorer man,
 For he would have that which he never can;
 But he who doesn't have and doesn't crave
 Is rich, though you may hold him but a knave. 1190
 True poverty's been sung of properly;
 As Juvenal said of it, 'Merrily
 The poor man, as he goes upon his way,
 In front of every thief can sing and play.'
 It is a hateful good and, as I guess, 1195
 A great promoter of industriousness.
 A source of greater wisdom it can be
 For one who learns to bear it patiently.
 Though it seem wearisome, poverty is
 Possession none will take from you as his. 1200
 Poverty often makes a fellow know
 Himself as well as God when he is low.
 Poverty is an eyeglass, I contend,
 Through which a man can see a truthful friend.
 I bring no harm at all to you, therefore 1205
 Do not reprove me, sire, for being poor.
 "For being old you've also fussed at me;
 Yet surely, sire, though no authority
 Were in a book, you gentlemen select
 Say men should treat an elder with respect 1210
 And call him father, by your courtesy.
 I think I could find authors who agree.
 "If I am old and ugly, as you've said,
 Of cuckoldry you needn't have a dread;

For filthiness and age, as I may thrive, 1215
 Are guards that keep one's chastity alive.
 But nonetheless, since I know your delight,
 I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.

"Choose now," she said, "one of these two: that I
 Be old and ugly till the day I die, 1220
 And be to you a true and humble wife,
 One never to displease you all your life;
 Or if you'd rather, have me young and fair,
 And take your chance on those who will repair
 To your house now and then because of me 1225
 (Or to some other place, it may well be).
 Choose for yourself the one you'd rather try."

The knight gave it some thought, then gave a sigh,
 And finally answered as you are to hear:
 "My lady and my love and wife so dear, 1230
 I leave to your wise governance the measure;
 You choose which one would give the fullest pleasure
 And honor to you, and to me as well.
 I don't care which you do, you best can tell.
 What you desire is good enough for me." 1235

"You've given me," she said, "the mastery?
 The choice is mine and all's at my behest?"
 "Yes, surely, wife," said he, "I think it best."
 "Then kiss me, we'll no longer fight," she said,
 "For you've my oath that I'll be both instead-- 1240
 That is to say, I'll be both good and fair.
 I pray to God I die in mad despair
 Unless I am to you as good and true
 As any wife since this old world was new.
 Come dawn, if I'm not as fair to be seen 1245
 As any lady, empress, any queen
 Who ever lived between the east and west,
 Then take my life or do whatever's best.
 Lift up the curtains now, see how it is."

And when the knight had truly seen all this, 1250
 How she was young and fair in all her charms,
 In utter joy he took her in his arms;
 His heart was bathing in a bath of bliss,
 A thousand kisses he began to kiss,
 And she obeyed in each and every way, 1255
 Whatever was his pleasure or his play.

And so they lived, till their lives' very end,
 In perfect joy. And may Christ Jesus send
 Us husbands meek and young and fresh abed,
 And then the grace to outlive those we wed; 1260
 I also pray that Jesus shorten lives
 Of those who won't be governed by their wives;
 As for old niggards angered by expense,
 God send them soon a mighty pestilence!

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