

The Wife of Bath's Tale Main Text and Translation

Writer: Geoffrey Chaucer | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

You can read The Wife of Bath's Tale's main text and modern English translation below, side-by-side.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe

1 **"Experience, though noon auctoritee** "Experience, though no written authority 2
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me Were in this world, is good enough for me 3
To speke of wo that is in mariage; To speak of the woe that is in marriage; 4 **For,**
lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age, For, gentlemen, since I was twelve years of age,
5 **Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,** Thanked be God who is eternally alive, 6
Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve -- I have had five husbands at the church
door -- 7 **If I so ofte myghte have ywedded bee --** If I so often might have been wedded
-- 8 **And alle were worthy men in hir degree.** And all were worthy men in their way. 9
 But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is, But to me it was told, certainly, it is not
long ago, 10 **That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis** That since Christ went
never but once 11 **To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,** To a wedding, in the Cana of
Galilee, 12 **That by the same ensample taughte he me** That by that same example he
taught me 13 **That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.** That I should be wedded but once.
14 **Herkne eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,** Listen also, lo, what a sharp
word for this purpose, 15 **Biside a welle, Jhesus, God and man,** Beside a well, Jesus,
God and man, 16 **Spak in repreeve of the Samaritan:** Spoke in reproof of the
Samaritan: 17 **`Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,' quod he,** `Thou hast had five
husbands,' he said, 18 **`And that ilke man that now hath thee** `And that same man
that now has thee 19 **Is noght thyn housbonde,' thus seyde he certeyn.** Is not thy
husband,' thus he said certainly. 20 **What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;** What
he meant by this, I can not say; 21 **But that I axe, why that the fifthe man** But I ask,
why the fifth man 22 **Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?** Was no husband to the
Samaritan? 23 **How manye myghte she have in mariage?** How many might she have in

marriage? 24 **Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age** I never yet heard tell in my lifetime
25 **Upon this nombre diffinicioun.** A definition of this number. 26 **Men may devyne**
and glosen, up and doun, Men may conjecture and interpret in every way, 27 **But wel I**
woot, expres, withoute lye, But well I know, expressly, without lie, 28 **God bad us for**
to wexe and multiplie; God commanded us to grow fruitful and multiply; 29 **That gentil**
text kan I wel understonde. That gentle text I can well understand. 30 **Eek wel I woot,**
he seyde myn housbonde Also I know well, he said my husband 31 **Sholde lete fader**
and mooder and take to me. Should leave father and mother and take to me. 32 **But of**
no nombre mencion made he, But he made no mention of number, 33 **Of bigamy, or**
of octogamy; Of marrying two, or of marrying eight; 34 **Why sholde men thanne**
speke of it vileynye? Why should men then speak evil of it?

35 **Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun Salomon;** Lo, (consider) here the wise king, dan
Salomon; 36 **I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.** I believe he had wives more than
one. 37 **As wolde God it leveful were unto me** As would God it were lawful unto me 38
To be refresshed half so ofte as he! To be refreshed half so often as he! 39 **Which**
yifte of God hadde he for alle his wyvys! What a gift of God he had because of all his
wives! 40 **No man hath swich that in this world alyve is.** No man that in this world is
alive has such (a gift). 41 **God woot, this noble kyng, as to my wit,** God knows, this
noble king, according to my judgment, 42 **The firste nyght had many a myrie fit** The
first night had many a merry fit 43 **With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve.** With
each of them, so well things went for him in his lifetime. 44 **Yblessed be God that I have**
wedded fyve! Blessed be God that I have wedded five! 44a **[Of whiche I have pyked**
out the beste, [Of which I have picked out the best, 44b **Bothe of here nether purs**
and of here cheste. Both of their lower purse (scrotum) and of their strongbox. 44c
Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes, Differing schools make perfect clerks, 44d **And**
diverse practyk in many sondry werkes And differing practice in many various works 44e
Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly; Makes the workman truly perfect; 44f **Of fyve**
husbondes scolei yng am I.] Of five husbands' schooling am I.] 45 **Welcome the sixte,**
whan that evere he shal. Welcome the sixth, whenever he shall appear. 46 **For sothe, I**
wol nat kepe me chaast in al. For truly, I will not keep myself chaste in everything. 47
Whan myn housbonde is fro the world ygon, When my husband is gone from the world,
48 **Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon,** Some Christian man shall wed me
straightway, 49 **For thanne th' apostle seith that I am free** For then the apostle says
that I am free 50 **To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.** To wed, by God's side
(I swear), wherever it pleases me. 51 **He seith that to be wedded is no synne;** He says
that to be wedded is no sin; 52 **Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.** It is better to be

wedded than to burn. 53 **What rekketh me, thogh folk seye vileynye** What do I care,
 though folk speak evil 54 **Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamye?** Of cursed Lamech and
 his bigamy? 55 **I woot wel Abraham was an hooly man,** I know well Abraham was a
 holy man, 56 **And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan;** And Jacob also, insofar as I know; 57
And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two, And each of them had more than two wives,
 58 **And many another holy man also.** And many another holy man also. 59 **Wher**
can ye seye, in any manere age, Where can you find, in any historical period, 60 **That**
hye God defended mariage That high God forbad marriage 61 **By expres word? I pray**
yow, telleth me. By express word? I pray you, tell me. 62 **Or where comanded he**
virginitee? Or where commanded he virginity? 63 **I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,** I
 know as well as you, it is no doubt, 64 **Th' apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,**
 The apostle, when he speaks of maidenhood, 65 **He seyde that precept therof hadde**
he noon. He said that he had no precept concerning it. 66 **Men may conseille a**
womman to been oon, Men may advise a woman to be one, 67 **But conseillyng is no**
comandement. But advice is no commandment. 68 **He putte it in oure owene**
juggement; He left it to our own judgment; 69 **For hadde God comanded**
maydenhede, For had God commanded maidenhood, 70 **Thanne hadde he dampned**
weddyng with the dede. Then had he damned marriage along with the act (of procreation).
 71 **And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,** And certainly, if there were no seed sown,
 72 **Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?** Then from what should virginity grow?
 73 **Poul dorste nat comanden, atte leeste,** In any case, Paul dared not command 74
A thyng of which his maister yaf noon heeste. A thing of which his master gave no
 command. 75 **The dart is set up for virginitee;** The prize is set up for virginity; 76
Cacche whoso may, who renneth best lat see. Catch it whoever can, let's see who runs
 best.
 77 **But this word is nat taken of every wight,** But this word does not apply to every
 person, 78 **But ther as God lust gyve it of his myght.** But where God desires to give it
 by his power. 79 **I woot wel that th' apostel was a mayde;** I know well that the apostle
 was a virgin; 80 **But nathelees, thogh that he wroot and sayde** But nonetheless,
 though he wrote and said 81 **He wolde that every wight were swich as he,** He would
 that every person were such as he, 82 **Al nys but conseil to virginitee.** All is nothing but
 advice to (adopt) virginity. 83 **And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve** And he gave me
 leave to be a wife 84 **Of indulgence; so nys it no reprove** By explicit permission; so it is
 not blameful 85 **To wedde me, if that my make dye,** To wed me, if my mate should die,
 86 **Withouten excepcion of bigamye.** Without objection on the grounds of bigamy. 87
Al were it good no womman for to touche -- Although it would be good to touch no

woman -- 88 **He mente as in his bed or in his couche,** He meant in his bed or in his couch, 89 **For peril is bothe fyr and tow t' assemble;** For it is perilous to assemble both fire and flax; 90 **Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble.** You know what this example may apply to. 91 **This is al and som: he heeld virginitee** This is the sum of it: he held virginity 92 **Moore parfit than weddyng in freletee.** More perfect than wedding in weakness. 93 **Freletee clepe I, but if that he and she** Weakness I call it, unless he and she 94 **Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.** Would lead all their life in chastity.

95 **I graunte it wel; I have noon envie,** I grant it well; I have no envy, 96 **Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.** Though maidenhood may have precedence over a second marriage. 97 **It liketh hem to be clene, body and goost;** It pleases them to be clean, body and spirit; 98 **Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost,** Of my state I will make no boast, 99 **For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,** For well you know, a lord in his household, 100 **He nath nat every vessel al of gold;** He has not every utensil all of gold; 101 **Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.** Some are of wood, and do their lord service. 102 **God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,** God calls folk to him in various ways, 103 **And everich hath of God a propre yifte --** And each one has of God an individual gift -- 104 **Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.** Some this, some that, as it pleases Him to provide.

105 **Virginitee is greet perfeccion,** Virginity is great perfection, 106 **And continence eek with devocion,** And continence also with devotion, 107 **But Crist, that of perfeccion is welle,** But Christ, who is the source of perfection, 108 **Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle** Did not command that every one should go sell 109 **Al that he hadde, and gyve it to the poore,** All that he had, and give it to the poor, 110 **And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.** And in such wise follow him and his footsteps. 111 **He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;** He spoke to those who would live perfectly; 112 **And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.** And gentlemen, by your leave, I am not that. 113 **I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age** I will bestow the flower of all my age 114 **In the actes and in fruyt of mariage.** In the acts and in fruit of marriage.

115 **Telle me also, to what conclusion** Tell me also, to what purpose 116 **Were membres maad of generacion,** Were members of generation made, 117 **And of so parfit wys a [wright] ywroght?** And by so perfectly wise a Workman wrought? 118 **Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.** Trust right well, they were not made for nothing. 119 **Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and down** Interpret whoever will, and say both up and down 120 **That they were maked for purgacioun** That they were made for purgation 121 **Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale** Of urine, and

both our small things 122 **Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,** Were also to
 know a female from a male, 123 **And for noon oother cause -- say ye no?** And for no
 other cause -- do you say no? 124 **The experience woot wel it is noght so.** The
 experience knows well it is not so. 125 **So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,**
 Provided that the clerks be not angry with me, 126 **I sey this: that they maked ben for**
bothe; I say this: that they are made for both; 127 **That is to seye, for office and for**
ese That is to say, for urination and for ease 128 **Of engendrure, ther we nat God**
displese. Of procreation, in which we do not displease God. 129 **Why sholde men elles**
in hir bookes sette Why else should men set in their books 130 **That man shal yelde to**
his wyf hire dette? That man shall pay to his wife her debt? 131 **Now wherwith sholde**
he make his paiement, Now with what should he make his payment, 132 **If he ne used**
his sely instrument? If he did not use his blessed instrument? 133 **Thanne were they**
maad upon a creature Then were they made upon a creature 134 **To purge uryne, and**
eek for engendrure. To purge urine, and also for procreation.

135 **But I seye noght that every wight is holde,** But I say not that every person is
 required, 136 **That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,** That has such equipment as I
 to you told, 137 **To goon and usen hem in engendrure.** To go and use them in
 procreation. 138 **Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.** Then should men have
 no regard for chastity. 139 **Crist was a mayde and shapen as a man,** Christ was a
 virgin and shaped like a man, 140 **And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;** And
 many a saint, since the world began; 141 **Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.** Yet
 lived they ever in perfect chastity. 142 **I nyl envye no virginitee.** I will envy no virginity.
 143 **Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,** Let them be bread of pure wheat-seed,
 144 **And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;** And let us wives be called barley-bread; 145
 And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan, And yet with barley-bread, Mark can tell it,
 146 **Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man.** Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.
 147 **In swich estaat as God hath cleped us** In such estate as God has called us 148
I wol persevere; I nam nat precius. I will persevere; I am not fussy. 149 **In wyfhod I**
wol use myn instrument In wifhood I will use my instrument 150 **As frely as my**
Makere hath it sent. As freely as my Maker has it sent. 151 **If I be daungerous, God**
yeve me sorwe! If I be niggardly, God give me sorrow! 152 **Myn housbonde shal it**
have bothe eve and morwe, My husband shall have it both evenings and mornings, 153
Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette. When it pleases him to come forth
 and pay his debt. 154 **An housbonde I wol have -- I wol nat lette --** A husband I will
 have -- I will not desist -- 155 **Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,** Who shall
 be both my debtor and my slave, 156 **And have his tribulacion withal** And have his

suffering also 157 **Upon his flessch, whil that I am his wyf.** Upon his flesh, while I am his wife. 158 **I have the power durynge al my lyf** I have the power during all my life 159

Upon his propre body, and noght he. Over his own body, and not he. 160 **Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me,** Right thus the Apostle told it unto me, 161 **And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.** And commanded our husbands to love us well. 162 **Al this sentence me liketh every deel** -- All this sentence pleases me every bit" --

163 **Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;** Up sprang the Pardoner, and that at once; 164 **"Now, dame," quod he, "by God and by Seint John!** "Now, madam," he said, "by God and by Saint John! 165 **Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.** You are a noble preacher in this case. 166 **I was aboute to wedde a wyf; alas!** I was about to wed a wife; alas! 167 **What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere?** Why should I pay for it so dearly on my flesh? 168 **Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!"** Yet would I rather wed no wife this year!"

169 **"Abyde!" quod she, "my tale is nat bigonne.** "Wait!" she said, "my tale is not begun. 170 **Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,** Nay, thou shalt drink from another barrel, 171 **Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.** Before I go, which shall taste worse than ale. 172 **And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale** And when I have told thee forth my tale 173 **Of tribulacion in mariage,** Of suffering in marriage, 174 **Of which I am expert in al myn age --** Of which I am expert in all my life -- 175 **This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe --** This is to say, myself have been the whip -- 176 **Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe** Than may thou choose whether thou will sip 177 **Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.** Of that same barrel that I shall open. 178 **Be war of it, er thou to ny approche;** Beware of it, before thou too near approach; 179 **For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.** For I shall tell examples more than ten. 180 **`Whoso that nyl be war by othere men,** `Whoever will not be warned by (the examples of) other men, 181 **By hym shul othere men corrected be.'** Shall be an example by which other men shall be corrected.' 182 **The same wordes writeth Ptholomee;** The same words writes Ptholomy; 183 **Rede in his Almageste, and take it there."** Read in his Almagest, and take it there."

184 **"Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,"** "Madam, I would pray you, if it were your will," 185 **Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan,** Said this Pardoner, "as you began, 186 **Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,** Tell forth your tale, refrain for no man, 187 **And teche us yonge men of youre praktike."** And teach us young men of your practice."

188 **"Gladly," quod she, "sith it may yow like;** "Gladly," she said, "since it may please
 you; 189 **But yet I praye to al this compaignye,** But yet I pray to all this company, 190
If that I speke after my fantasye, If I speak according to my fancy, 191 **As taketh**
not agrief of that I seye, Do not be annoyed by what I say, 192 **For myn entente nys**
but for to pleye. For my intention is only to amuse.

193 **Now, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale.** Now, sir, now will I tell forth my tale. 194
As evere moote I drynken wyn or ale, As ever may I drink wine or ale, 195 **I shal**
seye sooth; tho housbondes that I hadde, I shall speak the truth; those husbands that I
 had, 196 **As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.** Three of them were good,
 and two were bad. 197 **The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;** The three
 were good men, and rich, and old; 198 **Unnethe myghte they the statut holde** Hardly
 might they the statute hold (pay the debt) 199 **In which that they were bounden unto**
me. In which they were bound unto me. 200 **Ye woot wel what I meene of this,**
pardee! You know well what I mean of this, by God! 201 **As help me God, I laughe**
whan I thynke So help me God, I laugh when I think 202 **How pitously a-nyght I made**
hem swynke! How pitifully at night I made them work! 203 **And, by my fey, I tolde of it**
no stoor. And, by my faith, I set no store by it. 204 **They had me yeven hir lond and**
hir tresoor; They had given me their land and their treasure; 205 **Me neded nat do**
lenger diligence I needed not work hard any longer 206 **To wynne hir love, or doon**
hem reverence. To win their love, or do them reverence. 207 **They loved me so wel, by**
God above, They loved me so well, by God above, 208 **That I ne tolde no deyntee of**
hir love! That I reckoned little of their love! 209 **A wys womman wol bisye hire evere**
in oon A wise woman will be constantly busy 210 **To gete hire love, ye, ther as she**
hath noon. To get their love, yes, when she has none. 211 **But sith I hadde hem hoolly**
in myn hond, But since I had them wholly in my hand, 212 **And sith they hadde me**
yeven al hir lond, And since they had me given all their land, 213 **What sholde I taken**
keep hem for to plese, Why should I take care to please them, 214 **But it were for my**
profit and myn ese? Unless it were for my profit and my pleasure? 215 **I sette hem so**
a-werke, by my fey, I set them so to work, by my faith, 216 **That many a nyght they**
songen `Weilawey!' That many a night they sang 'Woe is me!' 217 **The bacon was nat**
fet for hem, I trowe, The bacon was not fetched for them, I believe, 218 **That som men**
han in Essex at Dunmowe. That some men have in Essex at Dunmowe. 219 **I governed**
hem so wel, after my lawe, I governed them so well, according to my law, 220 **That ech**
of hem ful blisful was and fawe That each of them was very blissful and eager 221 **To**
brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre. To bring me gay things from the fair. 222 **They**
were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire, They were very glad when I spoke to them

pleasantly, 223 **For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.** For, God knows it, I cruelly scolded them.

224 **Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely,** Now listen how well I conducted myself,
225 **Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde.** You wise wives, that can understand. 226
 Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde, Thus should you speak and
accuse them wrongfully, 227 **For half so boldely kan ther no man** For half so boldly can
there no man 228 **Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.** Swear and lie, as a woman can.
229 **I sey nat this by wyves that been wyse,** I do not say this concerning wives that are
wise, 230 **But if it be whan they hem mysavyse.** Unless it be when they are ill advised.
231 **A wys wyf, if that she kan hir good,** A wise wife, if she knows what is good for her,
232 **Shal beren hym on honde the cow is wood,** Shall deceive him by swearing the bird
is crazy, 233 **And take witnesse of hir owene mayde,** And prove it by taking witness of
her own maid 234 **Of hir assent. But herkneth how I sayde:** Who is in league with her.
But listen how I spoke:

235 **`Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?** `Sir old doddering fool, is this thy doing?
236 **Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?** Why is my neighbor's wife so gay? 237
She is honoured overal ther she gooth; She is honored everywhere she goes; 238 **I**
sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty clooth. I sit at home; I have no decent clothing. 239
What dostow at my neighebores hous? What dost thou at my neighbor's house? 240 **Is**
she so fair? Artow so amorous? Is she so fair? Art thou so amorous? 241 **What rowne**
ye with oure mayde? Benedicite! What do you whisper with our maid? Bless me! 242
Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be! Sir old lecher, let thy tricks be! 243 **And if I have**
a gossib or a freend, And if I have a close friend or an acquaintance, 244 **Withouten**
gilt, thou chidest as a feend, Innocently, thou scold like a fiend, 245 **If that I walke or**
pleye unto his hous! If I walk or go unto his house to amuse myself! 246 **Thou comest**
hoom as dronken as a mous, Thou comest home as drunk as a mouse, 247 **And**
prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef! And preach on thy bench, bad luck to you! 248
 Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief Thou sayest to me it is a great misfortune 249
To wedde a povre womman, for costage; To wed a poor woman, because of expense; 250
 And if that she be riche, of heigh parage, And if she be rich, of high birth, 251
Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie Then thou sayest that it is a torment 252 **To**
soffre hire pride and hire malencolie. To put up with her pride and her angry moods. 253
 And if that she be fair, thou verray knave, And if she be fair, thou utter knave, 254
Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have; Thou sayest that every lecher wants to have
her; 255 **She may no while in chastitee abyde,** She can not remain chaste for any

length of time, 256 **That is assailed upon ech a syde.** Who is assailed on every side.

257 **Thou seyst som folk desiren us for richesse,** Thou sayest some folk desire us for riches, 258 **Somme for oure shap, and somme for oure fairnesse,** Some for our shape, and some for our fairness, 259 **And som for she kan outhur synge or daunce,** And one because she can either sing or dance, 260 **And som for gentillesse and daliaunce;** And some because of noble descent and flirtatious talk; 261 **Som for hir handes and hir armes smale;** Some because of their hands and their slender arms; 262 **Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale.** Thus goes all to the devil, according to you. 263 **Thou seyst men may nat kepe a castel wal,** Thou sayest men may not defend a castle wall, 264 **It may so longe assailed been overal.** It may so long be assailed on all sides.

265 **And if that she be foul, thou seist that she** And if she be ugly, thou sayest that she 266 **Coveiteth every man that she may se,** Covets every man that she may see, 267 **For as a spanyel she wol on hym lepe,** For like a spaniel she will on him leap, 268 **Til that she fynde som man hire to chepe.** Until she find some man to buy (take) her. 269 **Ne noon so grey goos gooth ther in the lake** Nor does any goose go there in the lake, no matter how drab, 270 **As, seistow, wol been withoute make.** That, thou sayest, will be without a mate. 271 **And seyst it is an hard thyng for to welde** And thou sayest it is a hard thing to control 272 **A thyng that no man wole, his thanks, helde.** A thing that no man will, willingly, hold. 273 **Thus seistow, lorel, whan thou goost to bedde,** Thus sayest thou, scoundrel, when thou goest to bed, 274 **And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,** And that no wise man needs to wed, 275 **Ne no man that entendeth unto hevene.** Nor any man that hopes (to go) to heaven. 276 **With wilde thonder-dynt and firy leve** With wild thunder-bolt and fiery lightning 277 **Moote thy welked nekke be tobroke!** May thy wrinkled neck be broken in pieces!

278 **Thow seyst that droppyng houses, and eek smoke,** Thou sayest that leaky houses, and also smoke, 279 **And chidyng wyves maken men to flee** And scolding wives make men to flee 280 **Out of hir owene houses; a, benedicitee!** Out of their own houses; ah, bless me! 281 **What eyleth swich an old man for to chide?** What ails such an old man to chide like that?

282 **Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide** Thou sayest we wives will hide our vices 283 **Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe --** Until we be securely tied (in marriage), and then we will them show -- 284 **Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!** Well may that be a proverb of a scoundrel!

285 **Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,** Thou sayest that oxen, asses,
horses, and hounds, 286 **They been assayed at diverse stoundes;** They are tried out a
number of times; 287 **Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye,** Basins, wash bowls,
before men them buy, 288 **Spoones and stooles, and al swich housbondrye,** Spoons
and stools, and all such household items, 289 **And so been pottes, clothes, and array;**
And so are pots, clothes, and adornments; 290 **But folk of wyves maken noon assay,**
But folk of wives make no trial, 291 **Til they be wedded -- olde dotard shrewe! --** Until
they are wedded -- old doddering scoundrel! -- 292 **And thanne, seistow, we wol oure**
vices shewe. And then, sayest thou, we will show our vices.

293 **Thou seist also that it displeseth me** Thou sayest also that it displeases me 294
But if that thou wolt preyse my beautee, Unless thou will praise my beauty, 295 **And**
but thou poure alwey upon my face, And unless thou peer always upon my face, 296
And clepe me "faire dame" in every place. And call me "dear lady" in every place. 297
And but thou make a feeste on thilke day And unless thou make a feast on that same day
298 **That I was born, and make me fressh and gay;** That I was born, and make me
happy and gay; 299 **And but thou do to my norice honour,** And unless thou do honor to
my nurse, 300 **And to my chamberere withinne my bour,** And to my chambermaid
within my bedchamber, 301 **And to my fadres folk and his allyes --** And to my father's
folk and his allies -- 302 **Thus seistow, olde barel-ful of lyes!** Thus sayest thou, old
barrelful of lies!

303 **And yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,** And yet of our apprentice Janekin, 304
For his criske heer, shynynge as gold so fyn, Because of his curly hair, shining like gold so
fine, 305 **And for he squiereth me bothe up and down,** And because he familiarly
attends me everywhere, 306 **Yet hastow caught a fals suspecion.** Yet hast thou
caught a false suspicion. 307 **I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed tomorwe!** I do
not want him, though thou were dead tomorrow!

308 **But tel me this: why hydestow, with sorwe,** But tell me this: why hidest thou, bad
luck to you, 309 **The keyes of thy cheste away fro me?** The keys of thy strongbox away
from me? 310 **It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!** It is my property as well as thine,
by God! 311 **What, wenestow make an ydiot of oure dame?** What, think thou to make
a fool of the lady of the house? 312 **Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,** Now by
that lord that is called Saint James, 313 **Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were**
wood, Thou shalt not both, though thou were crazy with anger, 314 **Be maister of my**
body and of my good; Be master of my body and of my property; 315 **That oon thou**
shalt forgo, maugree thyne yen. One of them thou must give up, despite anything you can

do. 316 **What helpith it of me to enquire or spyen?** What helps it to inquire about me or spy? 317 **I trowe thou woldest loke me in thy chiste!** I believe thou would lock me in thy strongbox! 318 **Thou sholdest seye, "Wyf, go wher thee liste;** Thou should say, "Wife, go where you please; 319 **Taak youre disport; I wol nat leve no talys.** Enjoy yourself; I will not believe any gossip. 320 **I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alys."** I know you for a true wife, dame Alys." 321 **We love no man that taketh kep or charge** We love no man who takes notice or concern about 322 **Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large.** Where we go; we will be free (to do as we wish).

323 **Of alle men yblessed moot he be,** Of all men blessed may he be, 324 **The wise astrologien, Daun Ptholome,** The wise astrologer, Dan Ptolemy, 325 **That seith this proverbe in his Almageste:** Who says this proverb in his Almagest: 326 **"Of alle men his wysdom is the hyeste** "Of all men his wisdom is the highest 327 **That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde."** Who never cares who has the world in his control." 328 **By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,** By this proverb thou shalt understand, 329 **Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care** If thou have enough, why should thou take note or care 330 **How myrily that othere folkes fare?** How merrily other folks fare? 331 **For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,** For, certainly, old senile fool, by your leave, 332 **Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.** You shall have pudendum right enough at eve. 333 **He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne** He is too great a miser that would refuse 334 **A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;** A man to light a candle at his lantern; 335 **He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.** He shall have never the less light, by God. 336 **Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.** If thou have enough, thou need not complain.

337 **Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay** Thou sayest also, that if we make ourselves gay 338 **With clothyng, and with precious array,** With clothing, and with precious adornments, 339 **That it is peril of oure chastitee;** That it is dangerous to our chastity; 340 **And yet -- with sorwe! -- thou most enforce thee,** And yet -- bad luck to thee! -- thou must reinforce thy argument, 341 **And seye thise wordes in the Apostles name:** And say these words in the Apostle's name: 342 **"In habit maad with chastitee and shame** "In clothing made with chastity and shame 343 **Ye wommen shul apparaille yow," quod he,** You women shall apparel yourselves," he said, 344 **"And noght in tressed heer and gay perree,** "And not in carefully arranged hair and gay precious stones, 345 **As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche."** Such as pearls, nor with gold, nor rich cloth." 346 **After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,** In accordance with thy text, nor in accord with thy interpretation, 347 **I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.** I will not do

as much as a gnat.

348 **Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;** Thou said this, that I was like a cat; 349
For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn, For if anyone would singe a cat's skin, 350
Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in; Then would the cat well stay in his dwelling;
351 **And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,** And if the cat's skin be sleek and gay, 352
She wol nat dwelle in house half a day, She will not stay in house half a day, 353
But forth she wole, er any day be dawed, But forth she will (go), before any day be
dawned, 354 **To shewe hir skyn and goon a-caterwawed.** To show her skin and go
yowling like a cat in heat. 355 **This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,** This is to say, if I
be well dressed, sir scoundrel, 356 **I wol renne out my borel for to shewe.** I will run out
to show my poor clothes.

357 **Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?** Sir old fool, what help is it for thee to
spy? 358 **Thogh thou preye Argus with his hundred yen** Though thou pray Argus with
his hundred eyes 359 **To be my warde-cors, as he kan best,** To be my bodyguard, as
he best knows how, 360 **In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;** In faith, he shall not
keep me but as I please; 361 **Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!** Yet could I
deceive him, as I may prosper!

362 **Thou seydest eek that ther been thynges thre,** Thou said also that there are
three things, 363 **The whiche thynges troublen al this erthe,** The which things trouble
all this earth, 364 **And that no wight may endure the ferthe.** And that no one can
endure the fourth. 365 **O leewe sire shrewe, Jhesu shorte thy lyf!** O dear sir scoundrel,
Jesus shorten thy life! 366 **Yet prechestow and seyst an hateful wyf** Yet thou
prechest and sayest a hateful wife 367 **Yrekened is for oon of thise meschances.** Is
reckoned as one of these misfortunes. 368 **Been ther none othere maner**
resemblances Are there no other sorts of comparisons 369 **That ye may likne youre**
parables to, That you can use in your sayings, 370 **But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?**
Without a poor wife's being one of them?

371 **Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,** Thou also compare women's love to
hell, 372 **To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.** To barren land, where water
may not remain. 373 **Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;** Thou compare it also to Greek
(inextinguishable) fire; 374 **The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir** The more
it burns, the more it has desire 375 **To consume every thyng that brent wole be.** To
consume every thing that will be burned. 376 **Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a**
tree, Thou sayest, just as worms destroy a tree, 377 **Right so a wyf destroyeth hire**

housbonde; Right so a wife destroys her husband; 378 **This knowe they that been to wyves bonde.'** This know they who are bound to wives.'

379 **Lordynges, right thus, as ye have understonde,** Gentlemen, right thus, as you have heard, 380 **Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde** I firmly swore to my old husbands 381 **That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;** That thus they said in their drunkenness; 382 **And al was fals, but that I took wisse** And all was false, but I took witness 383 **On Janekyn, and on my nece also.** On Janekin, and on my niece also. 384

O Lord! The peyne I dide hem and the wo, O Lord! The pain I did them and the woe, 385
Ful gylteles, by Goddes sweete pyne! Entirely guiltless (they were), by God's sweet pain! 386 **For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.** For like a horse I could bite and whinny. 387 **I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,** I could complain, and yet was in the wrong, 388 **Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.** Or else many times had I been ruined. 389 **Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;** Whoever first comes to the mill, first grinds; 390 **I pleynd first, so was oure werre ystynt.** I complained first, so was our war ended. 391 **They were ful glade to excuse hem blyve** They were very glad to excuse themselves quickly 392 **Of thyng of which they nevere agylte hir lyve.** Of things of which they were never guilty in their lives. 393 **Of wenchis wolde I beren hem on honde,** Of wenchis would I falsely accuse them, 394 **Whan that for syk unnethis myghte they stonde.** When for sickness they could hardly stand.

395 **Yet tikled I his herte, for that he** Yet I tickled his heart, for he 396 **Wende that I hadde of hym so greet chiertee!** Believed that I had of him so great affection! 397 **I swoor that al my walkyng out by nyghte** I swore that all my walking out by night 398
Was for t' espye wenchis that he dighte; Was to spy out wenchis with whom he had intercourse; 399 **Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.** Under that pretense I had many a mirth. 400 **For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;** For all such wit is given us in our birth; 401 **Deceite, wepyng, spyngnyng God hath yive** Deceit, weeping, spinning God has given 402 **To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.** To women naturally, while they may live. 403 **And thus of o thyng I avaunte me:** And thus of one thing I boast: 404 **Atte ende I hadde the better in ech degree,** At the end I had the better in every way, 405 **By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,** By trickery, or force, or by some such thing, 406 **As by continueel murmur or grucchyng.** As by continual grumbling or grouching. 407 **Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:** Especially in bed they had misfortune: 408 **Ther wolde I chide and do hem no plesaunce;** There would I scold and do them no pleasure; 409 **I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,** I would no longer in the bed abide, 410 **If that I felte his arm over my**

syde, If I felt his arm over my side, 411 **Til he had maad his raunson unto me;** Until he
 had paid his penalty to me; 412 **Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.** Then
 would I allow him to do his foolishness. 413 **And therefore every man this tale I telle,**
 And therefore this tale I tell to every man, 414 **Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;**
 Anyone can profit, for everything is for sale; 415 **With empty hand men may none**
haukes lure. One can lure no hawks with an empty hand. 416 **For wynnyng wolde I al**
his lust endure, For profit I would endure all his lust, 417 **And make me a feyned**
appetit; And make me a feigned appetite; 418 **And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit.**
 And yet in bacon (old meat) I never had delight. 419 **That made me that evere I wolde**
hem chide, That made me so that I would always scold them, 420 **For thogh the pope**
hadde seten hem biside, For though the pope had sat beside them, 421 **I wolde nat**
spare hem at hir owene bord, I would not spare them at their own table, 422 **For, by**
my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word. For, by my troth, I paid them back word for word.
 423 **As helpe me verray God omnipotent,** As help me true God omnipotent, 424
Though I right now sholde make my testament, Though I right now should make my will,
 425 **I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quit.** I owe them not one word that has not
 been avenged. 426 **I broghte it so aboute by my wit** I brought it so about by my wit 427
That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste, That they had to give it up, as the best
 they could do, 428 **Or elles hadde we nevere been in reste;** Or else had we never been
 at peace; 429 **For thogh he looked as a wood leon,** For though he looked like a furious
 lion, 430 **Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion.** Yet should he fail to attain his goal.
 431 **Thanne wolde I seye, `Goode lief, taak keep** Then I would say, `Sweetheart, see
 432 **How mekely looketh Wilkyn, oure sheep!** How meekly looks Willy, our sheep! 433
Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke! Come near, my spouse, let me kiss thy
 cheek! 434 **Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,** You should be all patient and meek,
 435 **And han a sweete spiced conscience,** And have a sweet tender disposition, 436
Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience. Since you so preach of Job's patience. 437
Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche; Suffer always, since you so well can preach;
 438 **And but ye do, certein we shal yow teche** And unless you do, certainly we shall
 teach you 439 **That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.** That it is fair to have a wife in
 peace. 440 **Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,** One of us two must bow,
 doubtless, 441 **And sith a man is moore resonable** And since a man is more reasonable
 442 **Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.** Than a woman is, you must be able to
 bear suffering. 443 **What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?** What ails you to
 grouch thus and groan? 444 **Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?** Is it because
 you want to have my pudendum all to yourself? 445 **Wy, taak it al! Lo, have it every**

deel! Why, take it all! Lo, have it every bit! 446 **Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;** By Saint Peter! I would curse you, if you did not love it well; 447 **For if I wolde selle my bele chose,** For if I would sell my `pretty thing,' 448 **I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;** I could walk as fresh (newly clothed) as is a rose; 449 **But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.** But I will keep it for your own pleasure. 450 **Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth.'** You are to blame, by God! I tell you the truth.'

451 **Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.** Such sorts of words we had in hand.
452 **Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.** Now will I speak of my fourth husband.

453 **My fourthe housbonde was a revelour --** My fourth husband was a reveller -- 454
 This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour -- This is to say, he had a mistress -- 455 **And I was yong and ful of ragerye,** And I was young and full of playfulness, 456 **Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.** Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a magpie. 457 **How koude I daunce to an harpe smale,** How well I could dance to a small harp, 458 **And synge, ywis, as any nyghtyngale,** And sing, indeed, like any nightingale, 459 **Whan I had dronke a draughte of sweete wyn!** When I had drunk a draft of sweet wine! 460
 Metellius, the foule cherl, the swyn, Metellius, the foul churl, the swine, 461 **That with a staf birafted his wyf hir lyf,** Who with a staff deprived his wife of her life, 462 **For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,** Because she drank wine, if I had been his wife,
463 **He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke!** He should not have frightened me away from drink! 464 **And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke,** And after wine on Venus must I think, 465 **For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,** For as surely as cold engenders hail, 466 **A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.** A gluttonous mouth must have a lecherous tail. 467 **In wommen vinolent is no defence --** In drunken women there is no defense -- 468 **This knowen lecchours by experience.** This lechers know by experience.

469 **But -- Lord Crist! -- whan that it remembreth me** But -- Lord Christ! -- when I remember 470 **Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,** My youth, and my gaiety, 471
 It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote. It tickles me to the bottom of my heart. 472
 Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote Unto this day it does my heart good 473 **That I have had my world as in my tyme.** That I have had my world in my time. 474 **But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,** But age, alas, that all will poison, 475 **Hath me birafted my beautee and my pith.** Has deprived me of my beauty and my vigor. 476 **Lat go. Farewel! The devel go therwith!** Let it go. Farewell! The devil go with it! 477 **The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;** The flour is gone; there is no more to tell; 478 **The**

bran, as I best kan, now moste I selle; The bran, as I best can, now I must sell; 479 **But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.** But yet I will try to be right merry. 480 **Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.** Now will I tell of my fourth husband.

481 **I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit** I say, I had in heart great anger 482 **That he of any oother had delit.** That he had delight in any other. 483 **But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce!** But he was paid back, by God and by Saint Joce! 484 **I made hym of the same wode a croce;** I made him a cross of the same wood; 485 **Nat of my body, in no foul manere,** Not of my body, in no foul manner, 486 **But certainly, I made folk swich cheere** But certainly, I treated folk in such a way 487 **That in his owene grece I made hym frye** That I made him fry in his own grease 488 **For angre, and for verray jealousye.** For anger, and for pure jealousy. 489 **By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie,** By God, in earth I was his purgatory, 490 **For which I hope his soule be in glorie.** For which I hope his soul may be in glory. 491 **For, God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song,** For, God knows it, he sat very often and cried out in pain, 492 **Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong.** When his shoe very bitterly pinched him. 493 **Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste,** There was no person who knew it, save God and he, 494 **In many wise, how soore I hym twiste.** In many a way, how painfully I tortured him. 495 **He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem,** He died when I came from Jerusalem, 496 **And lith ygrave under the roode beem,** And lies buried under the rood beam, 497 **Al is his tombe noght so curyus** Although his tomb is not so elaborate 498 **As was the sepulcre of hym Daryus,** As was the sepulcher of that Darius, 499 **Which that Appelles wroghte subtilly;** Which Appelles wrought skillfully; 500 **It nys but wast to burye hym preciously.** It is nothing but waste to bury him expensively. 501 **Lat hym fare wel; God yeve his soule reste!** Let him fare well; God give his soul rest! 502 **He is now in his grave and in his cheste.** He is now in his grave and in his casket.

503 **Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.** Now of my fifth husband I will tell. 504 **God lete his soule nevere come in helle!** God let his soul never come in hell! 505 **And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;** And yet he was to me the greatest scoundrel; 506 **That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe,** That feel I on my ribs one after another, 507 **And evere shal unto myn endyng day.** And ever shall unto my final day. 508 **But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,** But in our bed he was so lively and gay, 509 **And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,** And moreover he so well could deceive me, 510 **Whan that he wolde han my bele chose;** When he would have my 'pretty thing'; 511 **That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,** That though he had beat me on every bone, 512 **He koude wynne agayn my love anon.** He could win back my love straightway. 513

I trowe I loved hym best, for that he I believe I loved him best, because he 514
Was of his love daungerous to me. Was of his love standoffish to me. 515 **We**
wommen han, if that I shal nat lye, We women have, if I shall not lie, 516 **In this**
materre a queynte fantasye: In this matter a curious fantasy: 517 **Wayte what thyng**
we may nat lightly have, Note that whatever thing we may not easily have, 518
Therafter wol we crie al day and crave. We will cry all day and crave for it. 519
Forbode us thyng, and that desiren we; Forbid us a thing, and we desire it; 520
Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle. Press on us fast, and then will we flee. 521
With daunger oute we al oure chaffare; With niggardliness we spread out all our
merchandise; 522 **Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,** A great crowd at the
market makes wares expensive, 523 **And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:** And too
great a supply makes them of little value: 524 **This knoweth every womman that is**
wys. Every woman that is wise knows this.

525 **My fifthe housbonde -- God his soule blesse! --** My fifth husband -- God bless his
soul! -- 526 **Which that I took for love, and no richesse,** Whom I took for love, and no
riches, 527 **He som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,** He was formerly a clerk of Oxford,
528 **And hadde left scole, and wente at hom to bord** And had left school, and came
home to board 529 **With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun;** With my close friend,
dwelling in our town; 530 **God have hir soule! Hir name was Alisoun.** God have her
soul! Her name was Alisoun. 531 **She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,** She knew
my heart, and also my secrets, 532 **Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!**
Better than our parish priest, as I may prosper! 533 **To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.** To
her I revealed all my secrets. 534 **For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,** For had
my husband pissed on a wall, 535 **Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,** Or
done a thing that should have cost his life, 536 **To hire, and to another worthy wyf,** To
her, and to another worthy wife, 537 **And to my nece, which that I loved weel,** And to
my niece, whom I loved well, 538 **I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.** I would
have told every one of his secrets. 539 **And so I dide ful often, God it woot,** And so I did
very often, God knows it, 540 **That made his face often reed and hoot** That made his
face often red and hot 541 **For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he** For true
shame, and blamed himself because he 542 **Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee.** Had
told to me so great a secret.

543 **And so bifel that ones in a Lente --** And so it happened that once in a Springtime --
544 **So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,** Since frequently I went to visit my close
friend, 545 **For evere yet I loved to be gay,** For I always loved to be gay, 546 **And**

for to walke in March, Averill, and May, And to walk in March, April, and May, 547 **Fro**
hous to hous, to heere sondry talys -- From house to house, to hear various bits of gossip
-- 548 **That Jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame Alys**, That Jankin the clerk, and my
close friend dame Alys, 549 **And I myself, into the feeldes wente.** And I myself, into the
fields went. 550 **Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente;** My husband was at
London all that Spring; 551 **I hadde the better leyser for to pleye,** I had the better
opportunity to amuse myself, 552 **And for to se, and eek for to be seye** And to see, and
also to be seen 553 **Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace** By amorous folk. What
did I know about where my good fortune 554 **Was shapen for to be, or in what place?**
Was destined to be, or in what place? 555 **Therefore I made my visitaciouns** Therefore I
made my visitations 556 **To vigilies and to processiouns,** To religious feasts and to
processions, 557 **To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,** To preaching also, and to
these pilgrimages, 558 **To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages,** To plays about
miracles, and to marriages, 559 **And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.** And wore my
gay scarlet robes. 560 **Thise wormes, ne thise motthes, ne thise mytes,** These
worms, nor these moths, nor these mites, 561 **Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;**
Upon my peril (I swear), chewed on them never a bit; 562 **And wostow why? For they**
were used weel. And know thou why? Because they were well used.

563 **Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.** Now will I tell forth what happened to me.
564 **I seye that in the feeldes walked we,** I say that in the fields we walked, 565 **Til**
trewely we hadde swich daliance, Until truly we had such flirtation, 566 **This clerk and**
I, that of my purveiance This clerk and I, that for my provision for the future 567 **I spak**
to hym and seyde hym how that he, I spoke to him and said to him how he, 568 **If I**
were wydwe, sholde wedde me. If I were a widow, should wed me. 569 **For certainly --**
I sey for no bobance -- For certainly -- I say this for no boast -- 570 **Yet was I nevere**
withouten purveiance I was never yet without providing beforehand 571 **Of mariage, n'**
of othere thynges eek. For marriage, nor for other things also. 572 **I holde a mouses**
herte nat worth a leek I hold a mouse's heart not worth a leek 573 **That hath but oon**
hole for to sterte to, That has but one hole to flee to, 574 **And if that faille, thanne is**
al ydo. If that should fail, then all is lost.

575 **I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me --** I falsely swore that he had
enchanted me -- 576 **My dame taughte me that soutiltee --** My mother taught me that
trick -- 577 **And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,** And also I said I dreamed of him
all night, 578 **He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,** He would have slain me as I lay
on my back, 579 **And al my bed was ful of verray blood;** And all my bed was full of real

blood; 580 **`But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,** `But yet I hope that you shall do
me good, 581 **For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'** For blood symbolizes
gold, as I was taught.' 582 **And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,** And all was
false; I dreamed of it not at all, 583 **But as I folwed ay my dames loore,** But I followed
always my mother's teaching, 584 **As wel of this as of othere thynges moore.** As well
in this as in other things more.

585 **But now, sire, lat me se what I shal seyn.** But now, sir, let me see what I shall say.
586 **A ha! By God, I have my tale ageyn.** A ha! By God, I have my tale again.

587 **Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,** When my fourth husband was
on the funeral bier, 588 **I weep algate, and made sory cheere,** I wept continuously, and
acted sorry, 589 **As wyves mooten, for it is usage,** As wives must do, for it is the
custom, 590 **And with my coverchief covered my visage,** And with my kerchief
covered my face, 591 **But for that I was purveyed of a make,** But because I was
provided with a mate, 592 **I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.** I wept but little, and
that I affirm.

593 **To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe** To church was my husband carried
in the morning 594 **With neighebores, that for hym maden sorwe;** By neighbors, who
for him made sorrow; 595 **And Jankyn, oure clerk, was oon of tho.** And Jankin, our
clerk, was one of those. 596 **As help me God, whan that I saugh hym go** As help me
God, when I saw him go 597 **After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire** After the
bier, I thought he had a pair 598 **Of legges and of feet so clene and faire** Of legs and of
feet so neat and fair 599 **That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.** That all my heart I
gave unto his keeping. 600 **He was, I trowe, twenty wynter oold,** He was, I believe,
twenty years old, 601 **And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;** And I was forty, if I shall
tell the truth; 602 **But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.** But yet I had always a colt's
tooth. 603 **Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;** With teeth set wide apart I was,
and that became me well; 604 **I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.** I had the print
of Saint Venus's seal. 605 **As help me God, I was a lusty oon,** As help me God, I was a
lusty one, 606 **And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,** And fair, and rich, and
young, and well fixed, 607 **And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,** And truly, as
my husbands told me, 608 **I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.** I had the best
pudendum that might be. 609 **For certes, I am al Venerien** For certainly, I am all
influenced by Venus 610 **In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.** In feeling, and my
heart is influenced by Mars. 611 **Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,** Venus me
gave my lust, my amorousness, 612 **And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;** And

Mars gave me my sturdy boldness; 613 **Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.**
 My ascendant was Taurus, and Mars was therein. 614 **Allas, alas! That evere love was synne!** Alas, alas! That ever love was sin! 615 **I folwed ay myn inclinacioun** I followed always my inclination 616 **By vertu of my constellacioun;** By virtue of the state of the heavens at my birth; 617 **That made me I koude noght withdrawe** That made me that I could not withdraw 618 **My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.** My chamber of Venus from a good fellow. 619 **Yet have I Martes mark upon my face,** Yet have I Mars' mark upon my face, 620 **And also in another privee place.** And also in another private place. 621 **For God so wys be my savacioun,** For as God may be my salvation, 622 **I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,** I never loved in moderation, 623 **But evere folwede myn appetit,** But always followed my appetite, 624 **Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;** Whether he were short, or tall, or black-haired, or blond; 625 **I took no kep, so that he liked me,** I took no notice, provided that he pleased me, 626 **How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.** How poor he was, nor also of what rank.

627 **What sholde I seye but, at the monthes ende,** What should I say but, at the month's end, 628 **This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,** This jolly clerk, Jankin, that was so courteous, 629 **Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee,** Has wedded me with great solemnity, 630 **And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee** And to him I gave all the land and property 631 **That evere was me yeven therbifoore.** That ever was given to me before then. 632 **But afterward repented me ful soore;** But afterward I repented very bitterly; 633 **He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.** He would not allow me anything of my desires. 634 **By God, he smoot me ones on the lyst,** By God, he hit me once on the ear, 635 **For that I rente out of his book a leef,** Because I tore a leaf out of his book, 636 **That of the strook myn ere wax al deef.** So that of the stroke my ear became all deaf. 637 **Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,** I was as stubborn as is a lioness, 638 **And of my tonge a verray jangleresse,** And of my tongue a true chatterbox, 639 **And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,** And I would walk, as I had done before, 640 **From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;** From house to house, although he had sworn the contrary; 641 **For which he often tymes wolde preche,** For which he often times would preach, 642 **And me of olde Romain geestes teche;** And teach me of old Roman stories; 643 **How he Symplicius Gallus lefte his wyf,** How he, Simplicius Gallus, left his wife, 644 **And hire forsook for terme of al his lyf,** And forsook her for rest of all his life, 645 **Noght but for open-heveded he hir say** Because of nothing but because he saw her bare-headed 646 **Lookynge out at his dore upon a day.** Looking out at his door one day.

647 **Another Romain tolde he me by name,** Another Roman he told me by name, 648
That, for his wyf was at a someres game Who, because his wife was at a midsummer
revel 649 **Withouten his wityng, he forsook hire eke.** Without his knowledge, he
forsook her also. 650 **And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke** And then he would
seek in his Bible 651 **That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste** That same proverb of
Ecclesiasticus 652 **Where he comandeth and forbedeth faste** Where he commands
and strictly forbids that 653 **Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute.** Man should
suffer his wife go wander about. 654 **Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten
doute:** Then would he say right thus, without doubt:

655 **`Whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,** `Whoever builds his house all of
willow twigs, 656 **And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,** And spurs his blind
horse over the open fields, 657 **And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,** And suffers
his wife to go on pilgrimages, 658 **Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!** Is worthy
to be hanged on the gallows! 659 **But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe** But all for
nothing, I gave not a hawthorn berry 660 **Of his proverbes n' of his olde sawe,** For his
proverbs nor for his old sayings, 661 **Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be.** Nor would I
be corrected by him. 662 **I hate hym that my vices telleth me,** I hate him who tells me
my vices, 663 **And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I.** And so do more of us, God
knows, than I. 664 **This made hym with me wood al outrely;** This made him all utterly
furious with me; 665 **I nolde noght forbere hym in no cas.** I would not put up with him
in any way.

666 **Now wol I seye yow sooth, by Seint Thomas,** Now will I tell you the truth, by Saint
Thomas, 667 **Why that I rente out of his book a leef,** Why I tore a leaf out of his book,
668 **For which he smoot me so that I was deef.** For which he hit me so hard that I was
deaf.

669 **He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,** He had a book that regularly, night
and day, 670 **For his desport he wolde rede alway;** For his amusement he would
always read; 671 **He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,** He called it Valerie and
Theophrastus, 672 **At which book he lough alwey ful faste.** At which book he always
heartily laughed. 673 **And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,** And also there was
once a clerk at Rome, 674 **A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,** A cardinal, who is
called Saint Jerome, 675 **That made a book agayn Jovinian;** That made a book against
Jovinian; 676 **In which book eek ther was Tertulan,** In which book also there was
Tertullian, 677 **Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,** Crisippus, Trotula, and Heloise, 678
That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys, Who was abbess not far from Paris, 679 **And eek**

the Parables of Salomon, And also the Parables of Salomon, 680 **Ovides Art, and**
bookes many on, Ovid's Art, and many other books, 681 **And alle thise were bounden**
in o volume. And all these were bound in one volume. 682 **And every nyght and day**
was his custume, And every night and day was his custom, 683 **Whan he hadde leyser**
and vacacioun When he had leisure and spare time 684 **From oother worldly**
occupacioun, From other worldly occupations, 685 **To reden on this book of wikked**
wyves. To read in this book of wicked wives. 686 **He knew of hem mo legendes and**
lyves He knew of them more legends and lives 687 **Than been of goode wyves in the**
Bible. Than are of good women in the Bible. 688 **For trusteth wel, it is an impossible**
For trust well, it is an impossibility 689 **That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,** That
any clerk will speak good of women, 690 **But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,** Unless it be
of holy saints' lives, 691 **Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.** Nor of any other
woman in any way. 692 **Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?** Who painted the lion, tell
me who? 693 **By God, if women hadde writen stories,** By God, if women had written
stories, 694 **As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,** As clerks have within their studies,
695 **They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse** They would have written of
men more wickedness 696 **Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.** Than all the male
sex could set right. 697 **The children of Mercurie and of Venus** The children of Mercury
(clerks) and of Venus (lovers) 698 **Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;** Are directly
contrary in their actions; 699 **Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,** Mercury loves
wisdom and knowledge, 700 **And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.** And Venus loves riot
and extravagant expenditures. 701 **And, for hire diverse disposicioun,** And, because of
their diverse dispositions, 702 **Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.** Each falls in the
other's most powerful astronomical sign. 703 **And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat**
And thus, God knows, Mercury is powerless 704 **In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,** In
Pisces (the Fish), where Venus is exalted, 705 **And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is**
reysed. And Venus falls where Mercury is raised. 706 **Therefore no womman of no clerk**
is preysed. Therefore no woman is praised by any clerk. 707 **The clerk, whan he is**
oold, and may noght do The clerk, when he is old, and can not do 708 **Of Venus**
werkes worth his olde sho, Any of Venus's works worth his old shoe, 709 **Thanne sit he**
doun, and writ in his dotage Then he sits down, and writes in his dotage 710 **That**
wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage! That women can not keep their marriage!
711 **But now to purpos, why I tolde thee** But now to the point, why I told thee 712
That I was beten for a book, pardee! That I was beaten for a book, by God! 713 **Upon**
a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire, Upon a night Jankin, that was master of our house, 714
Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire, Read on his book, as he sat by the fire, 715

Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse Of Eve first, how for her wickedness 716 **Was al**
mankynde broght to wrecchednesse, All mankind was brought to wretchedness, 717
For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn, For which Jesus Christ himself was slain,
718 **That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.** Who bought us back with his heart's
blood. 719 **Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde** Lo, here clearly of woman you
may find 720 **That womman was the los of al mankynde.** That woman was the cause
of the loss of all mankind.

721 **Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his heres:** Then he read me how Sampson
lost his hair: 722 **Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sheres;** Sleeping, his lover cut
it with her shears; 723 **Thurgh which treson loste he bothe his yen.** Through which
treason he lost both his eyes. 724 **Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,** Then he
read to me, if I shall not lie, 725 **Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,** Of Hercules and of his
Dianyre, 726 **That caused hym to sette hymself afyre.** Who caused him to set himself
on fire.

727 **No thyng forgat he the care and the wo** He forgot not a bit of the care and the
woe 728 **That Socrates hadde with his wyves two,** That Socrates had with his two
wives, 729 **How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed.** How Xantippa caste piss upon his
head. 730 **This sely man sat stille as he were deed;** This poor man sat still as if he
were dead; 731 **He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn,** He wiped his head, no
more dared he say, 732 **But `Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn!** But `Before
thunder stops, there comes a rain!"

733 **Of Phasipha, that was the queene of Crete,** Of Phasipha, that was the queen of
Crete, 734 **For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale swete;** For sheer malignancy,
he thought the tale sweet; 735 **Fy! Spek namoore -- it is a grisly thyng --** Fie! Speak no
more -- it is a grisly thing -- 736 **Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng.** Of her horrible lust
and her pleasure.

737 **Of Clitermystra, for hire lecherye,** Of Clitermystra, for her lechery, 738 **That**
falsly made hire housbonde for to dye, That falsely made her husband to die, 739 **He**
redde it with ful good devocioun. He read it with very good devotion.

740 **He tolde me eek for what occasioun** He told me also for what occasion 741
Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf. Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life. 742 **Myn**
housbonde hadde a legende of his wyf, My husband had a legend of his wife, 743
Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold Eriphilem, that for a brooch of gold 744 **Hath**
prively unto the Grekes told Has secretly unto the Greeks told 745 **Wher that hir**

housbonde hidde hym in a place, Where her husband hid him in a place, 746 **For**
which he hadde at Thebes sory grace. For which he had at Thebes a sad fate.

747 **Of Lyvia tolde he me, and of Lucye:** Of Livia told he me, and of Lucie: 748 **They**
bothe made hir housbondes for to dye, They both made their husbands to die, 749
That oon for love, that oother was for hate. That one for love, that other was for hate. 750

Lyvia hir housbonde, on an even late, Livia her husband, on a late evening, 751
Empoysoned hath, for that she was his fo; Has poisoned, because she was his foe; 752

Lucia, likerous, loved hire housbonde so Lucia, lecherous, loved her husband so much
753 **That, for he sholde alwey upon hire thynke,** That, so that he should always think
upon her, 754 **She yaf hym swich a manere love-drynke** She gave him such a sort of
love-drink 755 **That he was deed er it were by the morwe;** That he was dead before it
was morning; 756 **And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.** And thus always husbands
have sorrow.

757 **Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumys** Then he told me how one Latumius 758
Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius Complained unto his fellow Arrius 759 **That in his**
gardyn growed swich a tree That in his garden grew such a tree 760 **On which he**
seyde how that his wyves thre On which he said how his three wives 761 **Hanged**
himself for herte despitus. Hanged themselves for the malice of their hearts 762 **`O**
leeve brother,' quod this Arrius, `O dear brother,' this Arrius said, 763 **`Yif me a**
plante of thilke blissed tree, `Give me a shoot of that same blessed tree, 764 **And in**
my gardyn planted shal it bee.' And in my garden shall it be planted.'

765 **Of latter date, of wyves hath he red** Of latter date, of wives has he read 766
That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed, That some have slain their husbands in
their bed, 767 **And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght,** And let her lecher
copulate with her all the night, 768 **Whan that the corps lay in the floor upright.** When
the corpse lay in the floor flat on its back. 769 **And somme han dryve nayles in hir**
brayn, And some have driven nails in their brains, 770 **Whil that they slepte, and thus**
they had hem slayn. While they slept, and thus they had them slain. 771 **Somme han**
hem yeve poyoun in hire drynke. Some have given them poison in their drink. 772 **He**
spak moore harm than herte may bithynke, He spoke more harm than heart may imagine,
773 **And therwithal he knew of mo proverbes** And concerning this he knew of more
proverbs 774 **Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.** Than in this world there
grow grass or herbs. 775 **`Bet is,' quod he, `thyn habitacioun** `Better is,' he said, `thy
habitation 776 **Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,** Be with a lion or a foul dragon, 777
Than with a womman usynge for to chyde. Than with a woman accustomed to scold. 778

**Bet is,' quod he, `hye in the roof abyde,** Better is,' he said, `to stay high in the roof,
779 **Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;** Than with an angry wife down in the
house; 780 **They been so wikked and contrarious,** They are so wicked and contrary,
781 **They haten that hir housbondes loven ay.'** They always hate what their husbands
love.' 782 **He seyde, `A womman cast hir shame away,** He said, `A woman casts their
shame away, 783 **Whan she cast of hir smok'; and forthermo,** When she casts off her
undergarment'; and furthermore, 784 **`A fair womman, but she be chaast also,** `A fair
woman, unless she is also chaste, 785 **Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose.'** Is like a gold
ring in a sow's nose.' 786 **Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,** Who would
believe, or who would suppose, 787 **The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?** The woe
that in my heart was, and pain?

788 **And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne** And when I saw he would never cease
789 **To reden on this cursed book al nyght,** Reading on this cursed book all night, 790
Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght All suddenly have I plucked three leaves 791
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke Out of his book, right as he read, and also 792
I with my fest so took hym on the cheke I with my fist so hit him on the cheek 793
That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun. That in our fire he fell down backwards. 794
And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun, And he leaped up as does a furious lion, 795
And with his fest he smoot me on the heed And with his fist he hit me on the head 796
That in the floor I lay as I were deed. That on the floor I lay as if I were dead. 797 **And**
whan he saugh how stille that I lay, And when he saw how still I lay, 798 **He was**
agast and wolde han fled his way, He was frightened and would have fled on his way, 799
Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde. Until at the last out of my swoon I awoke. 800
`O! hastow slayn me, false theef?' I seyde, `O! hast thou slain me, false thief?' I said,
801 **`And for my land thus hastow mordred me?' `And for my land thus hast thou**
murdered me? 802 **Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.'** Before I am dead, yet will I kiss
thee.'

803 **And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,** And near he came, and kneeled gently
down, 804 **And seyde, `Deere suster Alisoun,** And said, `Dear sister Alisoun, 805 **As**
help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte! So help me God, I shall never (again) smite thee!
806 **That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.** What I have done, it is thyself to blame
(you drove me to it). 807 **Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!' Forgive it me, and**
that I beseech thee!' 808 **And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,** And yet
immediately I hit him on the cheek, 809 **And seyde, `Theef, thus muchel am I wreke;**
And said, `Thief, thus much am I avenged; 810 **Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke.'**

Now will I die, I may no longer speak.' 811 **But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,**
 But at the last, with much care and woe, 812 **We fille acorded by us selven two.** We
 made an agreement between our two selves. 813 **He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,**
 He gave me all the control in my hand, 814 **To han the governance of hous and lond,**
 To have the governance of house and land, 815 **And of his tonge, and of his hond also;**
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also; 816 **And made hym brenne his book anon**
right tho. And made him burn his book immediately right then. 817 **And whan that I**
hadde geten unto me, And when I had gotten unto me, 818 **By maistrie, al the**
soveraynetee, By mastery, all the sovereignty, 819 **And that he seyde, `Myn owene**
trewe wyf, And that he said, `My own true wife, 820 **Do as thee lust the terme of al**
thy lyf; Do as you please the rest of all thy life; 821 **Keep thyn honour, and keep eek**
myn estaat' -- Guard thy honor, and guard also my reputation' -- 822 **After that day we**
hadden never debaat. After that day we never had an argument. 823 **God helpe me so,**
I was to hym as kynde As God may help me, I was to him as kind 824 **As any wyf from**
Denmark unto Ynde, As any wife from Denmark unto India, 825 **And also trewe, and**
so was he to me. And also true, and so was he to me. 826 **I prey to God, that sit in**
magestee, I pray to God, who sits in majesty, 827 **So blesse his soule for his mercy**
deere. So bless his soul for his mercy dear. 828 **Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol**
heere." Now will I say my tale, if you will hear."

Beholde the wordes bitwene the Somonour and the Frere

829 **The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this;** The Friar laughed, when he had
 heard all this; 830 **"Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,** "Now dame, he said,
 "as I may have joy or bliss, 831 **This is a long preamble of a tale!"** This is a long
 preamble of a tale!" 832 **And whan the Somonour herde the Frere gale,** And when the
 Summoner heard the Friar cry out, 833 **"Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddess armes**
two! "Lo," said the Summoner, "By God's two arms! 834 **A frere wol entremette hym**
everemo. A friar will always intrude himself (in others' affairs). 835 **Lo, goode men, a**
flye and eek a frere Lo, good men, a fly and also a friar 836 **Wol falle in every dyssh**
and eek mateere. Will fall in every dish and also every discussion. 837 **What spekestow**
of preambulacioun? What speakest thou of perambulation? 838 **What! amble, or**
trotte, or pees, or go sit down! What! amble, or trot, or keep still, or go sit down! 839
Thou lettest oure disport in this manere." Thou spoil our fun in this manner."

840 **"Ye, woltow so, sire Somonour?" quod the Frere;** "Yes, wilt thou have it thus, sir
 Summoner?" said the Friar; 841 **"Now, by my feith I shal, er that I go,** "Now, by my
 faith I shall, before I go, 842 **Telle of a somonour swich a tale or two** Tell of a

summoner such a tale or two 843 **That alle the folk shal laughen in this place."** That
all the folk shall laugh in this place."

844 **"Now elles, Frere, I bishrewe thy face,"** "Now otherwise, Friar, I curse thy face,"
845 **Quod this Somonour, "and I bishrewe me,** Said this Summoner, "and I curse
myself, 846 **But if I telle tales two or thre** Unless I tell tales two or three 847 **Of**
freres er I come to Sidyngborne Of friars before I come to Siitingbourne 848 **That I**
shal make thyn herte for to morne, That I shall make thy heart to mourn, 849 **For wel**
I woot thy pacience is gon." For well I know thy patience is gone."

850 **Oure Hooste cride "Pees! And that anon!"** Our Host cried "Peace! And that right
now!" 851 **And seyde, "Lat the womman telle hire tale.** And said, "Let the woman tell
her tale. 852 **Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.** You act like folk that are drunk
on ale. 853 **Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best."** Do, dame, tell forth
your tale, and that is best."

854 **"Al redy, sire," quod she, "right as yow lest,** "All ready, sir," she said, "right as
you please, 855 **If I have licence of this worthy Frere."** If I have permission of this
worthy Friar."

856 **"Yis, dame," quod he, "tel forth, and I wol heere."** "Yes, dame," he said, "tell
forth, and I will hear."

Heere endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe

The Wife of Bath's Tale

Heere bigynneth the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe

857 **In th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,** In the old days of King Arthur, 858 **Of**
which that Britons speken greet honour, Of whom Britons speak great honor, 859 **Al**
was this land fulfild of fayerye. This land was all filled full of supernatural creatures. 860
 The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye, The elf-queen, with her jolly company, 861
 Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. Danced very often in many a green mead. 862
 This was the olde opinion, as I rede; This was the old belief, as I read; 863 **I**
speke of manye hundred yeres ago. I speak of many hundred years ago. 864 **But**

now kan no man se none elves mo, But now no man can see any more elves, 865 **For**
now the grete charitee and prayeres For now the great charity and prayers 866 **Of**
lymytours and othere hooly freres, Of licensed beggars and other holy friars, 867
That serchen every lond and every streem, That overrun every land and every stream,
868 **As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem**, As thick as specks of dust in the sun-
beam, 869 **Blessyng halles, chambres, kichenes, boures**, Blessing halls, chambers,
kitchens, bedrooms, 870 **Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures**, Cities, towns, castles,
high towers, 871 **Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes --** Villages, barns, stables,
dairies -- 872 **This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes**. This makes it that there are no
fairies. 873 **For ther as wont to walken was an elf** For where an elf was accustomed
to walk 874 **Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself** There walks now the licensed
begging friar himself 875 **In undermeles and in morwenynges**, In late mornings and in
early mornings, 876 **And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges** And says his
morning prayers and his holy things 877 **As he gooth in his lymytacioun**. As he goes in
his assigned district. 878 **Wommen may go saufly up and doun**. Women may go safely
up and down. 879 **In every bussh or under every tree** In every bush or under every
tree 880 **Ther is noon oother incubus but he**, There is no other evil spirit but he, 881
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour. And he will not do them any harm except
dishonor.
882 **And so bifel that this kyng Arthour** And so it happened that this king Arthur 883
Hadde in his hous a lusty bachelor, Had in his house a lusty bachelor, 884 **That**
on a day cam ridyng fro ryver, That on one day came riding from hawking, 885 **And**
happed that, allone as he was born, And it happened that, alone as he was born, 886
He saugh a mayde walkyng hym biforn, He saw a maiden walking before him, 887
Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed, Of which maiden straightway, despite all she
could do, 888 **By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed**; By utter force, he took away
her maidenhead; 889 **For which oppressioun was swich clamour** For which wrong
was such clamor 890 **And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour** And such demand for
justice unto king Arthur 891 **That dampned was this knyght for to be deed**, That this
knight was condemned to be dead, 892 **By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his**
heed -- By course of law, and should have lost his head -- 893 **Paraventure swich was**
the statut tho -- Perhaps such was the statute then -- 894 **But that the queene and**
other ladyes mo Except that the queen and other ladies as well 895 **So longe**
preyeden the kyng of grace So long prayed the king for grace 896 **Til he his lyf hym**
graunted in the place, Until he granted him his life right there, 897 **And yaf hym to**
the queene, al at hir wille, And gave him to the queen, all at her will, 898 **To chese**

wheither she wolde hym save or spille. To choose whether she would him save or put to death.

899 **The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght,** The queen thanks the king
with all her might, 900 **And after this thus spak she to the knyght,** And after this she
spoke thus to the knight, 901 **Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:** When she
saw her time, upon a day: 902 **"Thou standest yet," quod she, "in swich array** "Thou
standest yet," she said, "in such condition, 903 **That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.**
That of thy life yet thou hast no assurance 904 **I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen**
me I grant thee life, if thou canst tell me 905 **What thyng is it that wommen moost**
desiren. What thing it is that women most desire. 906 **Be war, and keep thy nekke-**
boon from iren! Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from iron (axe)! 907 **And if thou**
kanst nat tellen it anon, And if thou canst not tell it right now, 908 **Yet wol I yeve**
thee leve for to gon Yet I will give thee leave to go 909 **A twelf-month and a day, to**
seche and leere A twelvemonth and a day, to seek to learn 910 **An answer suffisant**
in this mateere; A satisfactory answer in this matter; 911 **And suretee wol I han, er**
that thou pace, And I will have, before thou go, a pledge 912 **Thy body for to yelden**
in this place." To surrender thy body in this place."

913 **Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh;** Woe was this knight, and
sorrowfully he sighs; 914 **But what! He may nat do al as hym liketh.** But what! He
can not do all as he pleases. 915 **And at the laste he chees hym for to wende** And at
the last he chose to leave 916 **And come agayn, right at the yeres ende,** And come
again, exactly at the year's end, 917 **With swich answer as God wolde hym**
purveye; With such answer as God would provide him; 918 **And taketh his leve, and**
wendeth forth his weye. And takes his leave, and goes forth on his way.

919 **He seketh every hous and every place** He seeks every house and every place
920 **Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace** Where he hopes to have the luck 921
 To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost, To learn what thing women love most, 922
 But he ne koude arryven in no coost But he could not arrive in any region 923
Wher as he myghte fynde in this mateere Where he might find in this matter 924
Two creatures accordynge in-feere. Two creatures agreeing together. 925 **Somme**
seyde wommen loven best richesse, Some said women love riches best, 926 **Somme**
seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse, Some said honor, some said gaiety, 927
Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde, Some rich clothing, some said lust in
bed, 928 **And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde.** And frequently to be widow and
wedded. 929 **Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed** Some said that our

hearts are most eased 930 **Whan that we been yflatered and ypleased.** When we are
 flattered and pleased. 931 **He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.** He goes very near
 the truth, I will not lie. 932 **A man shal wyne us best with flaterye,** A man shall win
 us best with flattery, 933 **And with attendance and with bisynesse** And with
 attentions and with solicitude 934 **Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.** We are
 caught, every one of us.

935 **And somme seyn that we loven best** And some say that we love best 936
For to be free and do right as us lest, To be free and do just as we please, 937 **And**
that no man reprove us of oure vice, And that no man reprove us for our vices, 938
But seye that we be wise and no thyng nyce. But say that we are wise and not at all silly.
 939 **For trewely ther is noon of us alle,** For truly there is not one of us all, 940 **If**
any wight wol clawe us on the galle, If any one will scratch us on the sore spot, 941
That we nel kike, for he seith us sooth. That we will not kick back, because he tells us the
 truth. 942 **Assay, and he shal fynde it that so dooth;** Try it, and whoever so does
 shall find it true; 943 **For, be we never so vicious withinne,** For, be we never so
 vicious within, 944 **We wol been holden wise and clene of synne.** We want to be
 considered wise and clean of sin.

945 **And somme seyn that greet delit han we** And some say that we have great
 delight 946 **For to been holden stable, and eek secree,** To be considered steadfast,
 and also (able to keep a) secret, 947 **And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,** And in
 one purpose steadfastly to remain, 948 **And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle.** And
 not reveal things that men tell us. 949 **But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.** But
 that tale is not worth a rake handle. 950 **Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele;**
 By God, we women can hide nothing; 951 **Witnesse on Myda -- wol ye heere the**
tale? Witness on Midas -- will you hear the tale?

952 **Ovyde, amonges othere thynges smale,** Ovid, among other small matters, 953
Seyde Myda hadde, under his longe heres, Said Midas had, under his long hair, 954
Growynge upon his heed two asses eres, Two ass's ears, growing upon his head, 955
The whiche vice he hydde as he best myghte The which vice he hid as he best could 956
Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte, Very skillfully from every man's sight, 957
That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo. That, except for his wife, there knew of it no
 others. 958 **He loved hire moost, and trusted hire also;** He loved her most, and
 trusted her also; 959 **He preyede hire that to no creature** He prayed her that to no
 creature 960 **She sholde tellen of his disfigure.** She should tell of his disfigurement.

961 **She swoor him, "Nay"; for al this world to wyne,** She swore him, "Nay"; for all
 this world to win, 962 **She nolde do that vileynye or synne,** She would not do that
 dishonor or sin, 963 **To make hir housbonde han so foul a name.** To make her
 husband have so foul a reputation. 964 **She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.**
 She would not tell it for her own shame. 965 **But nathelees, hir thoughte that she**
dyde But nonetheless, she thought that she would die 966 **That she so longe sholde a**
conseil hyde; If she should hide a secret so long; 967 **Hir thoughte it swal so soore**
aboute hir herte She thought it swelled so sore about her heart 968 **That nedely som**
word hire moste asterte; That necessarily some word must escape her; 969 **And sith**
she dorste telle it to no man, And since she dared tell it to no man, 970 **Doun to a**
mareys faste by she ran -- She ran down to a marsh close by -- 971 **Til she cam there**
hir herte was afyre -- Until she came there her heart was afire -- 972 **And as a bitore**
bombleth in the myre, And as a bittern bumbles in the mire, 973 **She leyde hir mouth**
unto the water doun: She laid her mouth down unto the water: 974 **"Biwreye me nat,**
thou water, with thy soun," "Betray me not, thou water, with thy sound," 975 **Quod**
she; "to thee I telle it and namo; She said; "to thee I tell it and no others; 976 **Myn**
housbonde hath longe asses erys two! My husband has two long asses ears! 977
Now is myn herte al hool; now is it oute. Now is my heart all whole; now is it out. 978
I myghte no lenger kepe it, out of doute." I could no longer keep it, without doubt." 979
Heere may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde, Here you may see, though we a time abide,
 980 **Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde.** Yet out it must come; we can hide no
 secret. 981 **The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,** The remnant of the tale if you
 will hear, 982 **Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere.** Read Ovid, and there you may
 learn it.

983 **This knyght, of which my tale is specially,** This knight, of whom my tale is in
 particular, 984 **Whan that he saugh he myghte nat come therby --** When he saw he
 might not come to that -- 985 **This is to seye, what wommen love moost --** This is to
 say, what women love most -- 986 **Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.**
 Within his breast very sorrowful was the spirit. 987 **But hoom he gooth; he myghte**
nat sojourne; But home he goes; he could not linger; 988 **The day was come that**
homward moste he tourne. The day was come that homeward he must turn. 989 **And**
in his wey it happed hym to ryde, And in his way he happened to ride, 990 **In al this**
care, under a forest syde, In all this care, near a forest side, 991 **Wher as he saugh**
upon a daunce go Where he saw upon a dance go 992 **Of ladyes foure and twenty,**
and yet mo; Ladies four and twenty, and yet more; 993 **Toward the whiche daunce**
he drow ful yerne, Toward the which dance he drew very eagerly, 994 **In hope that**

som wysdom sholde he lerne. In hope that he should learn some wisdom. 995 **But**
certainly, er he cam fully there, But certainly, before he came fully there, 996
Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where. Vanished was this dance, he knew not
where. 997 **No creature saugh he that bar lyf,** He saw no creature that bore life, 998

Save on the grene he saugh sittynge a wyf -- Save on the green he saw sitting a
woman -- 999 **A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.** There can no man imagine an
uglier creature. 1000 **Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse,** At the knight's coming
this old wife did rise, 1001 **And seyde, "Sire knyght, heer forth ne lith no wey.** And
said, "Sir knight, there lies no road out of here. 1002 **Tel me what that ye seken, by**
youre fey! Tell me what you seek, by your faith! 1003 **Paraventure it may the bettre**
be; Perhaps it may be the better; 1004 **Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng," quod she.**
These old folk know many things," she said.

1005 **"My leeve mooder," quod this knyght, "certeyn** "My dear mother," said this
knight, "certainly 1006 **I nam but deed but if that I kan seyn** I am as good as dead
unless I can say 1007 **What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.** What thing it is
that women most desire. 1008 **Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire."** If
you could teach me, I would well repay you."

1009 **"Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand," quod she,** "Pledge me thy word
here in my hand," she said, 1010 **"The nexte thyng that I requere thee,** "The next thing
that I require of thee, 1011 **Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,** Thou shalt do it, if it
lies in thy power, 1012 **And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght."** And I will tell it to you
before it is night."

1013 **"Have heer my trouthe," quod the knyght, "I grante."** "Have here my pledged
word," said the knight, "I agree." 1014 **"Thanne," quod she, "I dar me wel avante**
"Then," she said, "I dare me well boast 1015 **Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby;**
Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby; 1016 **Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I.**
Upon my life, the queen will say as I. 1017 **Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle**
Let's see which is the proudest of them all 1018 **That wereth on a coverchief or a calle**
That wears a kerchief or a hairnet 1019 **That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche.**
That dares say 'nay' of what I shall teach thee. 1020 **Lat us go forth withouten lenger**
speche." Let us go forth without longer speech." 1021 **Tho rowned she a pistel in his**
ere, Then she whispered a message in his ear, 1022 **And bad hym to be glad and have**
no fere. And commanded him to be glad and have no fear. 1023 **Whan they be comen**
to the court, this knyght When they are come to the court, this knight 1024 **Seyde he**
had holde his day, as he hadde hight, Said he had held his day, as he had promised, 1025

And redy was his answer, as he sayde. And his answer was ready, as he said. 1026
Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde, Very many a noble wife, and many a maid,
1027 **And many a wydwe, for that they been wise,** And many a widow, because they
are wise, 1028 **The queene herself sittynge as a justise,** The queen herself sitting as a
justice, 1029 **Assembled been, his answer for to heere;** Are assembled, to hear his
answer; 1030 **And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.** And afterward this knight
was commanded to appear.

1031 **To every wight comanded was silence,** Silence was commanded to every person,
1032 **And that the knyght sholde telle in audience** And that the knight should tell in
open court 1033 **What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.** What thing (it is) that
worldly women love best. 1034 **This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best,** This
knight stood not silent as does a beast, 1035 **But to his questioun anon answerde** But
to his question straightway answered 1036 **With manly voys, that al the court it**
herde: With manly voice, so that all the court heard it:

1037 **"My lige lady, generally," quod he,** "My liege lady, without exception," he said,
1038 **"Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee"** "Women desire to have sovereignty
1039 **As wel over hir housbond as hir love,** As well over her husband as her love, 1040
And for to been in maistrie hym above. And to be in mastery above him. 1041 **This**
is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille. This is your greatest desire, though you kill me.
1042 **Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille."** Do as you please; I am here subject
to your will." 1043 **In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,** In all the court there
was not wife, nor maid, 1044 **Ne wydwe that contraried that he sayde,** Nor widow that
denied what he said, 1045 **But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.** But said that he was
worthy to have his life. 1046 **And with that word up stirte the olde wyf,** And with that
word up sprang the old woman, 1047 **Which that the knyght saugh sittynge on the**
grene: Whom the knight saw sitting on the green: 1048 **"Mercy," quod she, "my**
sovereyn lady queene! "Mercy," she said, "my sovereign lady queen! 1049 **Er that**
youre court departe, do me right. Before your court departs, do me justice. 1050 **I**
taughte this answer unto the knyght; I taught this answer to the knight; 1051 **For**
which he plighte me his trouthe there, For which he pledged me his word there, 1052
The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere The first thing that I would ask of him 1053
He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte. He would do, if it lay in his power. 1054 **Bifore**
the court thanne preye I thee, sir knyght," Before the court then I pray thee, sir knight,"
1055 **Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wyf,** Said she, "that thou take me as thy
wife, 1056 **For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.** For well thou know that I have

saved thy life. 1057 **If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!**" If I say false, say `nay', upon thy faith!"

1058 **This knyght answerde, "Allas and weylawey!** This knight answered, "Alas and woe is me! 1059 **I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.** I know right well that such was my promise. 1060 **For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!** For God's love, choose a new request! 1061 **Taak al my good and lat my body go."** Take all my goods and let my body go."

1062 **"Nay, thanne," quod she, "I shrewe us bothe two!** "Nay, then," she said, "I curse both of us two! 1063 **For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore** For though I am ugly, and old, and poor 1064 **I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore** I would not for all the metal, nor for ore 1065 **That under erthe is grave or lith above,** That under earth is buried or lies above, 1066 **But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love."** Have anything except that I were thy wife, and also thy love."

1067 **"My love?" quod he, "nay, my dampnacioun!** "My love?" he said, "nay, my damnation! 1068 **Allas, that any of my nacioun** Alas, that any of my family 1069 **Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!"** Should ever be so foully degraded!" 1070 **But al for noght; the ende is this, that he** But all for naught; the end is this, that he 1071 **Constreyned was; he nedes moste hire wedde,** Constrained was; he must by necessity wed her, 1072 **And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde.** And takes his old wife, and goes to bed.

1073 **Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,** Now would some men say, perhaps, 1074 **That for my negligence I do no cure** That because of my negligence I make no effort 1075 **To tellen yow the joye and al th' array** To tell you the joy and all the rich display 1076 **That at the feeste was that ilke day.** That was at the (wedding) feast that same day. 1077 **To which thyng shortly answeren I shal:** To which thing shortly I shall answer: 1078 **I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;** I say there was no joy nor feast at all; 1079 **Ther nas but hevynesse and mucche sorwe.** There was nothing but heaviness and much sorrow. 1080 **For prively he wedded hire on morwe,** For he wedded her in private in the morning, 1081 **And al day after hidde hym as an owle,** And all day after hid himself like an owl, 1082 **So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule.** So woeful was he, his wife looked so ugly.

1083 **Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his thought,** Great was the woe the knight had in his thought, 1084 **Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought;** When he was brought to bed with his wife; 1085 **He walweth and he turneth to and fro.** He wallows

and he turns to and fro. 1086 **His olde wyf lay smyllynge everemo,** His old wife lay smiling evermore, 1087 **And seyde, "O deere housbonde, benedicitee!** And said, "O dear husband, bless me! 1088 **Fareth every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?** Does every knight behave thus with his wife as you do? 1089 **Is this the lawe of kyng Arthures hous?** Is this the law of king Arthur's house? 1090 **Is every knyght of his so dangerous?** Is every knight of his so aloof? 1091 **I am youre owene love and youre wyf;** I am your own love and your wife; 1092 **I am she which that saved hath youre lyf,** I am she who has saved your life, 1093 **And, certes, yet ne dide I yow nevere unright;** And, certainly, I did you never wrong yet; 1094 **Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?** Why behave you thus with me this first night? 1095 **Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit.** You act like a man who had lost his wit. 1096 **What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel it,** What is my offense? For God's love, tell it, 1097 **And it shal been amended, if I may."** And it shall be amended, if I can."

1098 **"Amended?" quod this knyght, "Allas, nay, nay!** "Amended?" said this knight, "Alas, nay, nay! 1099 **It wol nat been amended nevere mo.** It will not be amended ever more. 1100 **Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,** Thou art so loathsome, and so old also, 1101 **And therto comen of so lough a kynde,** And moreover descended from such low born lineage, 1102 **That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.** That little wonder is though I toss and twist about. 1103 **So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!"** So would God my heart would burst!"

1104 **"Is this," quod she, "the cause of youre unreste?"** "Is this," she said, "the cause of your distress?"

1105 **"Ye, certeinly," quod he, "no wonder is."** "Yes, certainly," he said, "it is no wonder."

1106 **"Now, sire," quod she, "I koude amende al this,** "Now, sir," she said, "I could amend all this, 1107 **If that me liste, er it were dayes thre,** If I pleased, before three days were past, 1108 **So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.** Providing that you might behave well towards me.

1109 **"But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse** "But, since you speak of such nobility 1110 **As is descended out of old richesse,** As is descended out of old riches, 1111 **That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,** That therefore you should be noble men, 1112 **Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.** Such arrogance is not worth a hen. 1113 **Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,** Look who is most virtuous always, 1114 **Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay** In private and public, and most intends ever 1115

To do the gentil dedes that he kan; To do the noble deeds that he can; 1116 **Taak**
hym for the grettest gentil man. Take him for the greatest noble man. 1117 **Crist wole**
we clayme of hym oure gentillesse, Christ wants us to claim our nobility from him, 1118
Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse. Not from our ancestors for their old riches. 1119
For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage, For though they give us all their heritage, 1120
For which we clayme to been of heigh parage, For which we claim to be of noble
lineage, 1121 **Yet may they nat biquethe for no thyng** Yet they can not bequeath by
any means 1122 **To noon of us hir vertuous lyvyng,** To any of us their virtuous living,
1123 **That made hem gentil men ycalled be,** That made them be called noble men,
1124 **And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.** And commanded us to follow them in
such matters.

1125 **"Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,** "Well can the wise poet of Florence, 1126
That highte Dant, speken in this sentence. Who is called Dante, speak on this matter.
1127 **Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:** Lo, in such sort of rime is Dante's speech:
1128 **`Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale`** Very seldom grows up from its small
branches 1129 **Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,** Nobility of man, for God,
of his goodness, 1130 **Wole that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse';** Wants us to
claim our nobility from him'; 1131 **For of oure eldres may we no thyng clayme** For
from our ancestors we can claim no thing 1132 **But temporel thyng, that man may**
hurte and mayme. Except temporal things, that may hurt and injure a man.

1133 **"Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,** "Also every person knows this as well as I,
1134 **If gentillesse were planted natureelly** If nobility were planted naturally 1135
Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne, Unto a certain lineage down the line, 1136
Pryvee and apert thanne wolde they nevere fyne Then in private and in public they would
never cease 1137 **To doon of gentillesse the faire office;** To do the just duties of
nobility; 1138 **They myghte do no vileynye or vice.** They could do no dishonor or vice.

1139 **"Taak fyr and ber it in the derkeste hous** "Take fire and bear it in the darkest
house 1140 **Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,** Between this and the mount of
Caucasus, 1141 **And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;** And let men shut the
doors and go away; 1142 **Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne** Yet will the fire as
brightly blaze and burn 1143 **As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;** As if twenty
thousand men might it behold; 1144 **His office natureel ay wol it holde,** Its natural
function it will always hold, 1145 **Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.** On peril of my life (I
say), until it dies.

1146 **"Heere may ye se wel how that genterye** "Here may you see well that nobility
 1147 **Is nat annexed to possessioun,** Is not joined with possession, 1148 **Sith folk**
ne doon hir operacioun Since folk not do behave as they should 1149 **Alwey, as dooth**
the fyr, lo, in his kynde. Always, as does the fire, lo, in its nature. 1150 **For, God it**
woot, men may wel often fynde For, God knows it, men may well often find 1151 **A**
lordes sone do shame and vileynye; A lord's son doing shame and dishonor; 1152 **And**
he that wole han pris of his gentrye, And he who will have praise for his noble birth, 1153
For he was boren of a gentil hous Because he was born of a noble house 1154 **And**
hadde his eldres noble and vertuous, And had his noble and virtuous ancestors, 1155
And nel hymselfen do no gentil dedis And will not himself do any noble deeds 1156 **Ne**
folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is, Nor follow his noble ancestry that is dead, 1157
He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl, He is not noble, be he duke or earl, 1158 **For**
vileyns synful dedes make a cherl. For churlish sinful deeds make a churl. 1159 **For**
gentillesse nys but renomee For nobility is nothing but renown 1160 **Of thyne**
auncestres, for hire heigh bountee, Of thy ancestors, for their great goodness, 1161
Which is a strange thyng to thy persone. Which is a thing not naturally part of thy person.
 1162 **Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.** Thy nobility comes from God alone. 1163
Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace; Then our true nobility comes from
 grace ; 1164 **It was no thyng biquethe us with oure place.** It was not at all
 bequeathed to us with our social rank.

1165 **"Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius,** "Think how noble, as says Valerius, 1166
Was thilke Tullius Hostillius, Was that same Tullius Hostillius, 1167 **That out of**
poverte roos to heigh noblesse. That out of poverty rose to high nobility. 1168
Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece; Read Seneca, and read also Boethius; 1169
Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is There shall you see clearly that it is no doubt
 1170 **That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.** That he is noble who does noble deeds.
 1171 **And therefore, leeve housbonde, I thus conclude:** And therefore, dear husband, I
 thus conclude: 1172 **Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,** Although it is so that
 my ancestors were rude, 1173 **Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,** Yet may the high
 God, and so hope I, 1174 **Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.** Grant me grace to live
 virtuously. 1175 **Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne** Then am I noble, when I
 begin 1176 **To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.** To live virtuously and abandon sin.

1177 **"And ther as ye of poverte me repreeve,** "And whereas you reprove me for
 poverty, 1178 **The hye God, on whom that we bileeve,** The high God, on whom we
 believe, 1179 **In wilful poverte chees to lyve his lyf.** In voluntary poverty chose to live

his life. 1180 **And certes every man, mayden, or wyf** And certainly every man, maiden,
 or woman 1181 **May understonde that Jhesus, hevene kyng,** Can understand that
 Jesus, heaven's king, 1182 **Ne wolde nat chese a vicious lyvyng.** Would not choose a
 vicious form of living. 1183 **Glad poverte is an honest thyng, certeyn;** Glad poverty is
 an honest thing, certain; 1184 **This wole Senec and othere clerkes seyn.** This will
 Seneca and other clerks say. 1185 **Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,** Whoever
 considers himself satisfied with his poverty, 1186 **I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a**
sherte. I consider him rich, although he had not a shirt. 1187 **He that coveiteth is a**
povre wight, He who covets is a poor person, 1188 **For he wolde han that is nat in his**
myght; For he would have that which is not in his power; 1189 **But he that noght hath,**
ne coveiteth have, But he who has nothing, nor covets to have anything, 1190 **Is riche,**
although ye holde hym but a knave. Is rich, although you consider him but a knave. 1191
Verray poverte, it syngeth proprely; True poverty, it rightly sings; 1192 **Juvenal**
seith of poverte myrily: Juvenal says of poverty merrily: 1193 **'The povre man, whan**
he goth by the weye, 'The poor man, when he goes along the roadway, 1194 **Bifore the**
theves he may synge and pleye.' Before the thieves he may sing and play.' 1195
Poverty is hateful good and, as I gesse, Poverty is a hateful good and, as I guess, 1196
A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse; A very great remover of cares; 1197 **A greet**
amendere eek of sapience A great amender also of wisdom 1198 **To hym that taketh**
it in pacience. To him that takes it in patience. 1199 **Poverty is this, although it seme**
alenge: Poverty is this, although it may seem miserable: 1200 **Possessioun that no**
wight wol challenge. A possession that no one will challenge. 1201 **Poverty ful ofte,**
whan a man is lowe, Poverty very often, when a man is low, 1202 **Maketh his God and**
eek hymself to knowe. Makes him know his God and also himself. 1203 **Poverty a**
spectacle is, as thynketh me, Poverty is an eye glass, as it seems to me, 1204 **Thurgh**
which he may his verray freendes see. Through which one may see his true friends. 1205
And therefore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve, And therefore, sir, since I do not injure
 you, 1206 **Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.** You (should) no longer reprove me
 for my poverty.

1207 **"Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;** "Now, sir, of old age you reprove me; 1208
And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee And certainly, sir, though no authority 1209
Were in no book, ye gentils of honour Were in any book, you gentlefolk of honor 1210
Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon favour Say that men should be courteous to an
 old person 1211 **And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillesse;** And call him father,
 because of your nobility; 1212 **And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.** And authors
 shall I find, as I guess.

1213 **"Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old,** "Now where you say that I am ugly and
old, 1214 **Than drede you noght to been a cokewold;** Than do not fear to be a cuckold;
1215 **For filthe and eelde, also moot I thee,** For filth and old age, as I may prosper,
1216 **Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.** Are great guardians of chastity. 1217
But nathelees, syn I knowe youre delit, But nonetheless, since I know your delight, 1218
I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit. I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.

1219 **"Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges tweye:** "Choose now," she said,
"one of these two things: 1220 **To han me foul and old til that I deye,** To have me ugly
and old until I die, 1221 **And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,** And be to you a true,
humble wife, 1222 **And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,** And never displease you in all
my life, 1223 **Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,** Or else you will have me young and
fair, 1224 **And take youre aventure of the repair** And take your chances of the crowd
1225 **That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,** That shall be at your house because
of me, 1226 **Or in som oother place, may wel be.** Or in some other place, as it may well
be. 1227 **Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh."** Now choose yourself,
whichever you please."

1228 **This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh,** This knight deliberates and painfully
sighs, 1229 **But atte laste he seyde in this manere:** But at the last he said in this
manner: 1230 **"My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,** "My lady and my love, and
wife so dear, 1231 **I put me in youre wise governance;** I put me in your wise
governance; 1232 **Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance** Choose yourself
which may be most pleasure 1233 **And moost honour to yow and me also.** And most
honor to you and me also. 1234 **I do no fors the wheither of the two,** I do not care
which of the two, 1235 **For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me."** For as it pleases you, is
enough for me."

1236 **"Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie," quod she,** "Then have I gotten mastery of
you," she said, 1237 **"Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?"** "Since I may choose
and govern as I please?"

1238 **"Ye, certes, wyf," quod he, "I holde it best."** "Yes, certainly, wife," he said, "I
consider it best."

1239 **"Kys me," quod she, "we be no lenger wrothe,** "Kiss me," she said, "we are no
longer angry, 1240 **For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe --** For, by my troth, I will
be to you both -- 1241 **This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.** This is to say, yes, both
fair and good. 1242 **I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,** I pray to God that I may

die insane 1243 **But I to yow be also good and trewe** Unless I to you be as good and
true 1244 **As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe.** As ever was wife, since
the world was new. 1245 **And but I be to-morn as fair to seene** And unless I am
tomorrow morning as fair to be seen 1246 **As any lady, emperice, or queene,** As any
lady, empress, or queen, 1247 **That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,** That is
between the east and also the west, 1248 **Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow**
lest. Do with my life and death right as you please. 1249 **Cast up the curtyn, looke how**
that it is." Cast up the curtain, look how it is."

1250 **And whan the knyght saugh verrailly al this,** And when the knight saw truly all
this, 1251 **That she so fair was, and so yong therto,** That she so was beautiful, and so
young moreover, 1252 **For joye he hente hire in his armes two.** For joy he clasped her
in his two arms. 1253 **His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.** His heart bathed in a bath of
bliss. 1254 **A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,** A thousand time in a row he did
her kiss, 1255 **And she obeyed hym in every thyng** And she obeyed him in every thing
1256 **That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.** That might do him pleasure or
enjoyment.

1257 **And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende** And thus they live unto their lives' end
1258 **In parfit joye; and Jhesu Crist us sende** In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send
1259 **Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,** Husbands meek, young, and
vigorous in bed, 1260 **And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde;** And grace to outlive
them whom we wed; 1261 **And eek I praye Jhesu shorte hir lyves** And also I pray Jesus
shorten their lives 1262 **That noght wol be governed by hir wyves;** That will not be
governed by their wives; 1263 **And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,** And old and
angry misers in spending, 1264 **God sende hem soone verray pestilence!** God send
them soon the very pestilence!

Heere endeth the Wyves Tale of Bathe