

## **THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE.**

### **THE PROLOGUE. <1>**

Experience, though none authority\*                      \*authoritative texts\*  
Were in this world, is right enough for me To speak of woe that is in marriage: For,  
lordings, since I twelve year was of age, (Thanked be God that \*is etern on  
live),\*                      \*lives eternally\* Husbands at the church door have I had  
five,<2> For I so often have y-wedded be, And all were worthy men in their  
degree. But me was told, not longe time gone is That sithen\* Christe went  
never but ones                      \*since To wedding, in the Cane\* of Galilee,  
\*Cana That by that ilk\* example taught he me,                      \*same That  
I not wedded shoulde be but once. Lo, hearken eke a sharp word for the  
nonce,\*                      \*occasion Beside a welle Jesus, God and man, Spake in  
reproof of the Samaritan: "Thou hast y-had five husbandes," said he; "And  
thilke\* man, that now hath wedded thee,                      \*that Is not thine  
husband:" <3> thus said he certain; What that he meant thereby, I cannot  
sayn. But that I aske, why the fifthe man Was not husband to the  
Samaritan? How many might she have in marriage? Yet heard I never tellen  
\*in mine age\*                      \*in my life\* Upon this number definitioun. Men  
may divine, and glosen\* up and down;                      \*comment But well I  
wot, express without a lie, God bade us for to wax and multiply; That gentle  
text can I well understand. Eke well I wot, he said, that mine husband  
Should leave father and mother, and take to me; But of no number mention  
made he, Of bigamy or of octogamy; Why then should men speak of it  
villainy?\*                      \*as if it were a disgrace

Lo here, the wise king Dan\* Solomon,                      \*Lord <4> I trow that  
he had wives more than one; As would to God it lawful were to me To be  
refreshed half so oft as he! What gift\* of God had he for all his wives?  
\*special favour, licence No man hath such, that in this world alive is. God  
wot, this noble king, \*as to my wit,\*                      \*as I understand\* The first  
night had many a merry fit With each of them, so \*well was him on live.\*  
\*so well he lived\* Blessed be God that I have wedded five! Welcome the sixth  
whenever that he shall. For since I will not keep me chaste in all, When  
mine husband is from the world y-gone, Some Christian man shall wedde  
me anon. For then th' apostle saith that I am free To wed, \*a' God's half,\*  
where it liketh me.                      \*on God's part\* He saith, that to be wedded is no  
sin; Better is to be wedded than to brin.\*                      \*burn What

recketh\* me though folk say villainy\*\*                      \*care \*\*evil Of shrewed\*  
 Lamech, and his bigamy?                      \*impious, wicked I wot well Abraham  
 was a holy man, And Jacob eke, as far as ev'r I can.\*  
 \*know And each of them had wives more than two; And many another holy  
 man also. Where can ye see, \*in any manner age,\*                      \*in any  
 period\* That highe God defended\* marriage                      \*forbade <5>  
 By word express? I pray you tell it me; Or where commanded he virginity? I  
 wot as well as you, it is no dread,\*                      \*doubt Th' apostle,  
 when he spake of maidenhead, He said, that precept thereof had he none:  
 Men may counsel a woman to be one,\*                      \*a maid But  
 counseling is no commandement; He put it in our owen judgement. For,  
 hadde God commanded maidenhead, Then had he damned\* wedding out of  
 dread;\*\*                      \*condemned \*\*doubt And certes, if there were no seed y-  
 sow,\*                      \*sown Virginity then whereof should it grow? Paul  
 durste not commanden, at the least, A thing of which his Master gave no  
 hest.\*                      \*command The dart\* is set up for virginity;  
 \*goal <6> Catch whoso may, who runneth best let see. But this word is not  
 ta'en of every wight, \*But there as\* God will give it of his might.  
 \*except where\* I wot well that th' apostle was a maid, But natheless,  
 although he wrote and said, He would that every wight were such as he, All  
 is but counsel to virginity. And, since to be a wife he gave me leave Of  
 indulgence, so is it no reprove\*                      \*scandal, reproach To wedde me,  
 if that my make\* should die, \*mate, husband Without exception\*  
 of bigamy;                      \*charge, reproach \*All were it\* good no woman  
 for to touch                      \*though it might be\* (He meant as in his bed or in his  
 couch), For peril is both fire and tow t'assemble Ye know what this example  
 may resemble. This is all and some, he held virginity More profit than  
 wedding in frailty: (\*Frailty clepe I, but if\* that he and she                      \*frailty I  
 call it, Would lead their lives all in chastity),                      unless\* I grant  
 it well, I have of none envy Who maidenhead prefer to bigamy; It liketh them  
 t' be clean in body and ghost;\*                      \*soul Of mine estate\* I will not  
 make a boast.                      \*condition

For, well ye know, a lord in his household Hath not every vessel all of gold;  
 <7> Some are of tree, and do their lord service. God calleth folk to him in  
 sundry wise, And each one hath of God a proper gift, Some this, some that,  
 as liketh him to shift.\*                      \*appoint, distribute Virginity is great perfection,  
 And continence eke with devotion: But Christ, that of perfection is the well,\*  
 \*fountain Bade not every wight he should go sell All that he had, and give it  
 to the poor, And in such wise follow him and his lore:\*\br/>
 \*doctrine He spake to them that would live perfectly, -- And, lordings, by  
 your leave, that am not I; I will bestow the flower of mine age In th' acts and  
 in the fruits of marriage. Tell me also, to what conclusion\*

\*end, purpose Were members made of generation, And of so perfect wise a  
 wight\* y-wrought? \*being Trust me right well, they were not  
 made for nought. Glose whoso will, and say both up and down, That they  
 were made for the purgatioun Of urine, and of other thinges smale, And eke  
 to know a female from a male: And for none other cause? say ye no?  
 Experience wot well it is not so. So that the clerkes\* be not with me wroth,  
 \*scholars I say this, that they were made for both, That is to say, \*for office,  
 and for ease\* \*for duty and Of engendrure, there we God not  
 displease. for pleasure\* Why should men elles in their bookes set,  
 That man shall yield unto his wife her debt? Now wherewith should he make  
 his payement, If he us'd not his silly instrument? Then were they made  
 upon a creature To purge urine, and eke for engendrure. But I say not that  
 every wight is hold,\* \*obliged That hath such harness\* as I to  
 you told, \*equipment To go and use them in engendrure; Then  
 should men take of chastity no cure.\* \*care Christ was a  
 maid, and shapen\* as a man, \*fashioned And many a saint,  
 since that this world began, Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity. I will not vie\*  
 with no virginity. \*contend Let them with bread of pured\*  
 wheat be fed, \*purified And let us wives eat our barley bread.  
 And yet with barley bread, Mark tell us can,<8> Our Lord Jesus refreshed  
 many a man. In such estate as God hath \*cleped us,\* \*called us  
 to I'll persevere, I am not precious,\* \*over-dainty In wifehood  
 I will use mine instrument As freely as my Maker hath it sent. If I be  
 dangerous\* God give me sorrow; \*sparing of my favours Mine  
 husband shall it have, both eve and morrow, When that him list come forth  
 and pay his debt. A husband will I have, I \*will no let,\* \*will bear no  
 hindrance\* Which shall be both my debtor and my thrall,\*  
 \*slave And have his tribulation withal Upon his flesh, while that I am his  
 wife. I have the power during all my life Upon his proper body, and not he;  
 Right thus th' apostle told it unto me, And bade our husbands for to love us  
 well; All this sentence me liketh every deal.\* \*whit

Up start the Pardoner, and that anon; "Now, Dame," quoth he, "by God and  
 by Saint John, Ye are a noble preacher in this case. I was about to wed a  
 wife, alas! What? should I bie\* it on my flesh so dear? \*suffer for  
 Yet had I lever\* wed no wife this year." \*rather "Abide,"\*  
 quoth she; "my tale is not begun \*wait in patience Nay, thou shalt  
 drinken of another tun Ere that I go, shall savour worse than ale. And when  
 that I have told thee forth my tale Of tribulation in marriage, Of which I am  
 expert in all mine age, (This is to say, myself hath been the whip), Then  
 mayest thou choose whether thou wilt sip Of \*thilke tunne,\* that I now shall  
 broach. \*that tun\* Beware of it, ere thou too nigh approach, For  
 I shall tell examples more than ten: Whoso will not beware by other men, By

him shall other men corrected be: These same wordes writeth Ptolemy; Read in his Almagest, and take it there." "Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were," Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began, Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man, And teach us younge men of your practique." "Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like. But that I pray to all this company, If that I speak after my fantasy, To take nought agrief\* what I may say; \*to heart For mine intent is only for to play.

Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale. As ever may I drinke wine or ale I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had Three of them were good, and two were bad The three were goode men, and rich, and old \*Unnethes mighte they the statute hold\* \*they could with difficulty In which that they were bounden unto me. obey the law\* Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie.\* \*by God As God me help, I laugh when that I think How piteously at night I made them swink,\* \*labour But, \*by my fay, I told of it no store:\* \*by my faith, I held it They had me giv'n their land and their treasure, of no account\* Me needed not do longer diligence To win their love, or do them reverence. They loved me so well, by God above, That I \*tolde no dainty\* of their love. \*cared nothing for\* A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one\* \*constantly To get their love, where that she hath none. But, since I had them wholly in my hand, And that they had me given all their land, Why should I take keep\* them for to please, \*care But\* itwere for my profit, or mine ease? \*unless I set them so a-worke, by my fay, That many a night they sange, well-away! The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow, That some men have in Essex at Dunmow.<9> I govern'd them so well after my law, That each of them full blissful was and fawe\* \*fain To bringe me gay things from the fair. They were full glad when that I spake them fair, For, God it wot, I \*chid them spiteously.\* \*rebuked them angrily\* Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand, Thus should ye speak, and \*bear them wrong on hand,\* \*make them For half so boldly can there no man believe falsely\* Swearen and lien as a woman can. (I say not this by wives that be wise, \*But if\* it be when they them misadvise.)\* \*unless\*\*act unadvisedly A wise wife, if that she can\* her good, \*knows Shall \*beare them on hand\* the cow is wood, \*make them believe\* And take witness of her owen maid Of their assent: but hearken how I said. "Sir olde kaynard,<10> is this thine array? Why is my neigheoure's wife so gay? She is honour'd \*over all where\* she go'th, \*wheresoever I sit at home, I have no \*thrifty cloth.\* \*good clothes\* What dost thou at my neigheoure's house? Is she so fair? art thou so amorous? What rown'st\* thou with our maid? benedicite, \*whisperest Sir olde

lechour, let thyjapes\* be. \*tricks And if I have a gossip, or  
 a friend (Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend, If that I walk or play unto  
 his house. Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse, And preacheest on thy  
 bench, with evil prefe:\* \*proof Thou say'st to me, it is a great  
 mischief To wed a poore woman, for costage.\* \*expense  
 And if that she be rich, of high parage;\* \* birth <11> Then say'st  
 thou, that it is a tormentry To suffer her pride and melancholy. And if that  
 she be fair, thou very knave, Thou say'st that every holour\* will her have;  
 \*whoremonger She may no while in chastity abide, That is assailed upon  
 every side. Thou say'st some folk desire us for richness, Some for our shape,  
 and some for our fairness, And some, for she can either sing or dance, And  
 some for gentilles and dalliance, Some for her handes and her armes smale:  
 Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale; Thou say'st, men may not keep a  
 castle wall That may be so assailed \*over all.\* \*everywhere\*  
 And if that she be foul, thou say'st that she Coveteth every man that she  
 may see; For as a spaniel she will on him leap, Till she may finde some man  
 her to cheap;\* \*buy And none so grey goose goes there in  
 the lake, (So say'st thou) that will be without a make.\* \*mate  
 And say'st, it is a hard thing for to weld \*wield, govern A thing that  
 no man will, \*his thanks, held.\* \*hold with his goodwill\* Thus say'st thou,  
 lorel,\* when thou go'st to bed, \*good-for-nothing And that no wise man  
 needeth for to wed, Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven. With wilde  
 thunder dint\* and fiery leven\*\* \*stroke \*\*lightning Mote\* thy wicked  
 necke be to-broke. \*may Thou say'st, that dropping  
 houses, and eke smoke, And chiding wives, make men to flee Out of their  
 owne house; ah! ben'dicite, What aileth such an old man for to chide? Thou  
 say'st, we wives will our vices hide, Till we be fast,\* and then we will them  
 shew. \*wedded Well may that be a proverb of a shrew.\*  
 \*ill-tempered wretch Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds, They be  
 \*assayed at diverse stounds,\* \*tested at various Basons and  
 lavers, ere that men them buy, seasons Spoones, stooles, and  
 all such husbandry, And so be pots, and clothes, and array,\*  
 \*raiment But folk of wives make none assay, Till they be wedded, -- olde  
 dotard shrew! -- And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew. Thou say'st  
 also, that it displeaseth me, But if \* that thou wilt praise my beauty,  
 \*unless And but\* thou pore alway upon my face, \*unless  
 And call me faire dame in every place; And but\* thou make a feast on  
 thilke\*\* day \*unless \*\*that That I was born, and make me fresh  
 and gay; And but thou do to my norice\* honour, \*nurse <12>  
 And to my chamberere\* within my bow'r, \*chamber-maid And  
 to my father's folk, and mine allies;\* \*relations Thus sayest  
 thou, old barrel full of lies. And yet also of our prentice Jenkin, For his crisp  
 hair, shining as gold so fine, And for he squireth me both up and down, Yet

hast thou caught a false suspicioun: I will him not, though thou wert dead  
 to-morrow. But tell me this, why hidest thou, \*with sorrow,\* \*sorrow on  
 thee!\* The keyes of thy chest away from me? It is my good\* as well as thine,  
 pardie. \*property What, think'st to make an idiot of our dame?  
 Now, by that lord that called is Saint Jame, Thou shalt not both, although  
 that thou wert wood,\* \*furious Be master of my body, and my good,\*  
 \*property The one thou shalt forego, maugre\* thine eyen. \*in spite of  
 What helpeth it of me t'inquire and spyen? I trow thou wouldest lock me in  
 thy chest. Thou shouldest say, 'Fair wife, go where thee lest; Take your  
 disport; I will believe no tales; I know you for a true wife, Dame Ales.'\*  
 \*Alice We love no man, that taketh keep\* or charge \*care  
 Where that we go; we will be at our large. Of alle men most blessed may he  
 be, The wise astrologer Dan\* Ptolemy, \*Lord That saith  
 this proverb in his Almagest:<13> 'Of alle men his wisdom is highest, That  
 recketh not who hath the world in hand. By this proverb thou shalt well  
 understand, Have thou enough, what thar\* thee reck or care \*needs,  
 behoves How merrily that other folkes fare? For certes, olde dotard, by your  
 leave, Ye shall have [pleasure] <14> right enough at eve. He is too great a  
 niggard that will werne\* \*forbid A man to light a candle at his  
 lantern; He shall have never the less light, pardie. Have thou enough, thee  
 thar\* not plaine\*\* thee \*need \*\*complain Thou say'st also, if that we  
 make us gay With clothing and with precious array, That it is peril of our  
 chastity. And yet, -- with sorrow! -- thou enforcest thee, And say'st these  
 words in the apostle's name: 'In habit made with chastity and shame\*  
 \*modesty Ye women shall apparel you,' quoth he,<15> 'And not in tressed  
 hair and gay perrie,\* \*jewels As pearles, nor with gold, nor  
 clothes rich.' After thy text nor after thy rubrich I will not work as muchel as  
 a gnat. Thou say'st also, I walk out like a cat; For whoso woulde singe the  
 catte's skin Then will the catte well dwell in her inn;\* \*house  
 And if the catte's skin be sleek and gay, She will not dwell in house half a  
 day, But forth she will, ere any day be daw'd, To shew her skin, and go a  
 caterwaw'd.\* \*caterwauling This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrew, I  
 will run out, my borel\* for to shew. \*apparel, fine clothes Sir olde fool,  
 what helpeth thee to spyen? Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen  
 To be my wardecorps,\* as he can best \*body-guard In faith he shall  
 not keep me, \*but me lest:\* \*unless I please\* Yet could I  
 \*make his beard,\* so may I the. \*make a jest of him\*

"Thou sayest eke, that there be thinges three, \*thrive Which  
 thinges greatly trouble all this earth, And that no wighte may endure the  
 ferth:\* \*fourth O lefe\* sir shrew, may Jesus short\*\* thy life.  
 \*pleasant \*\*shorten Yet prechest thou, and say'st, a hateful wife Y-reckon'd  
 is for one of these mischances. Be there \*none other manner resemblances\*

\*no other kind of That ye may liken your parables unto,  
 comparison\* But if a silly wife be one of tho? \*those  
 Thou likenest a woman's love to hell; To barren land where water may not  
 dwell. Thou likenest it also to wild fire; The more it burns, the more it hath  
 desire To consume every thing that burnt will be. Thou sayest, right as  
 wormes shend\* a tree, \*destroy Right so a wife destroyeth her  
 husband; This know they well that be to wives bond."

Lordings, right thus, as ye have understand, \*Bare I stiffly mine old  
 husbands on hand,\* \*made them believe\* That thus they saiden in  
 their drunkenness; And all was false, but that I took witness On Jenkin, and  
 upon my niece also. O Lord! the pain I did them, and the woe, 'Full  
 guilteless, by Godde's sweete pine;\* \*pain For as a horse I  
 coulde bite and whine; I coulde plain,\* an' \*I was in the guilt, \*complain  
 \*\*even though Or elles oftentime I had been spilt\* \*ruined  
 Whoso first cometh to the nilll, first grint;\* \*is ground I plained  
 first, so was ourwar y-stint.\* \*stopped They were full glad to  
 excuse them full blive\* \*quickly Of things that they never \*aguilt  
 their live.\* \*were guilty in their  
 lives\* Of wenches would I \*beare them on hand,\* \*falsely accuse  
 them\* When that for sickness scarcely might they stand, Yet tickled I his  
 hearte for that he Ween'd\* that I had of him so great cherte:\*\* \*though  
 \*\*affection<16> I swore that all my walking out by night Was for to espy  
 wenches that he dight:\* \*adorned Under that colour had I  
 many a mirth. For all such wit is given us at birth; Deceit, weeping, and  
 spinning, God doth give To women kindly, while that they may live.  
 \*naturally And thus of one thing I may vaunte me, At th' end I had the  
 better in each degree, By sleight, or force, or by some manner thing, As by  
 continual murmur or grudging,\* \*complaining Namely\* a-  
 bed, there hadde they mischance, \*especially There would I  
 chide, and do them no pleasance: I would no longer in the bed abide, If that  
 I felt his arm over my side, Till he had made his ransom unto me, Then  
 would I suffer him do his nicety.\* \*folly <17> And therefore  
 every man this tale I tell, Win whoso may, for all is for to sell; With empty  
 hand men may no hawkes lure; For winning would I all his will endure, And  
 make me a feigned appetite, And yet in bacon\* had I never delight:  
 \*i.e. of Dunmow <9> That made me that I ever would them chide. For,  
 though the Pope had sitten them beside, I would not spare them at their  
 owen board, For, by my troth, I quit\* them word for word  
 \*repaid As help me very God omnipotent, Though I right now should make  
 my testament I owe them not a word, that is not quit\*  
 \*repaid I brought it so aboute by my wit, That they must give it up, as for  
 the best Or elles had we never been in rest. For, though he looked as a

wood\* lion,                         \*furious Yet should he fail of his conclusion.  
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe\* tak keep\*\*             \*dear \*\*heed How  
 meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep! Come near, my spouse, and let me ba\*  
 thy cheek                         \*kiss <18> Ye shoulde be all patient and meek, And  
 have a \*sweet y-spiced\* conscience,                         \*tender, nice\* Since ye so  
 preach of Jobe's patience. Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach, And  
 but\* ye do, certain we shall you teach\*                         \*unless That it is fair to  
 have a wife in peace. One of us two must bowe\* doubteless:  
 \*give way And since a man is more reasonable Than woman is, ye must be  
 suffrable. What aileth you to grudge\* thus and groan?  
 \*complain Is it for ye would have my [love] <14> alone? Why, take it all: lo,  
 have it every deal,\*                         \*whit Peter! <19> shrew\* you but ye love  
 it well                         \*curse For if I woulde sell my \*belle chose\*,  
 \*beautiful thing\* I coulde walk as fresh as is a rose, But I will keep it for  
 your owen tooth. Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth." Such manner  
 wordes hadde we on hand.

Now will I speaken of my fourth husband. My fourthe husband was a  
 revellour; This is to say, he had a paramour, And I was young and full of  
 ragerie,\*                         \*wantonness Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a  
 pie.\*                         \*magpie Then could I dance to a harpe smale, And sing,  
 y-wis,\* as any nightingale,                         \*certainly When I had drunk a  
 draught of sweete wine. Metellius, the foule churl, the swine, That with a  
 staff bereft his wife of life For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,  
 Never should he have daunted me from drink: And, after wine, of Venus  
 most I think. For all so sure as cold engenders hail, A liquorish mouth must  
 have a liquorish tail. In woman vinolent\* is no defence,\*\*                         \*full of wine  
 \*resistance This knowe lechours by experience. But, lord Christ, when that  
 it rememb'reth me Upon my youth, and on my jollity, It tickleth me about  
 mine hearte-root; Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot,\*  
 \*good That I have had my world as in my time. But age, alas! that all will  
 envenime,\*                         \*poison, embitter Hath me bereft my beauty and my  
 pith:\*                         \*vigour Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith. The  
 flour is gon, there is no more to tell, The bran, as I best may, now must I  
 sell. But yet to be right merry will I fand.\*                         \*try Now forth  
 to tell you of my fourth husband, I say, I in my heart had great despise, That  
 he of any other had delight; But he was quit,\* by God and by Saint  
 Joce:<21>     \*requited, paid back I made for him of the same wood a cross;  
 Not of my body in no foul mannere, But certainly I made folk such cheer,  
 That in his owen grease I made him fry For anger, and for very jealousy. By  
 God, in earth I was his purgatory, For which I hope his soul may be in glory.  
 For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung, When that his shoe full bitterly him  
 wrung.\*                         \*pinched There was no wight, save God and he, that



wist In many wise how sore I did him twist.<20> He died when I came from  
 Jerusalem, And lies in grave under the \*roode beam:\* \*cross\*  
 Although his tomb is not so curious As was the sepulchre of Darius, Which  
 that Apelles wrought so subtly. It is but waste to bury them preciously. Let  
 him fare well, God give his soule rest, He is now in his grave and in his  
 chest.

Now of my fifthe husband will I tell: God let his soul never come into hell.  
 And yet was he to me the moste shrew,\* \*cruel, ill-tempered That  
 feel I on my ribbes all \*by rew,\* \*in a row And ever shall,  
 until mine ending day. But in our bed he was so fresh and gay, And  
 therewithal so well he could me glose,\* \*flatter When that he  
 woulde have my belle chose, Though he had beaten me on every bone, Yet  
 could he win again my love anon. I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he Was  
 of his love so dangerous\* to me. \*sparing, difficult We women  
 have, if that I shall not lie, In this matter a quaint fantasy. Whatever thing  
 we may not lightly have, Thereafter will we cry all day and crave. Forbid us  
 thing, and that desire we; Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee. With  
 danger\* utter we all our chaffare;\*\* \*difficulty \*\*merchandise Great press  
 at market maketh deare ware, And too great cheap is held at little price;  
 This knoweth every woman that is wise. My fifthe husband, God his soule  
 bless, Which that I took for love and no richness, He some time was \*a clerk  
 of Oxenford,\* \*a scholar of Oxford\* And had left school, and went at  
 home to board With my gossip,\* dwelling in oure town:  
 \*godmother God have her soul, her name was Alisoun. She knew my heart,  
 and all my privity, Bet than our parish priest, so may I the.\*  
 \*thrive To her betrayed I my counsel all; For had my husband pissed on a  
 wall, Or done a thing that should have cost his life, To her, and to another  
 worthy wife, And to my niece, which that I loved well, I would have told his  
 counsel every deal.\* \*jot And so I did full often, God it wot,  
 That made his face full often red and hot For very shame, and blam'd  
 himself, for he Had told to me so great a privity.\* \*secret  
 And so befell that ones in a Lent (So oftentimes I to my gossip went, For ever  
 yet I loved to be gay, And for to walk in March, April, and May From house  
 to house, to heare sundry tales), That Jenkin clerk, and my gossip, Dame  
 Ales, And I myself, into the fieldes went. Mine husband was at London all  
 that Lent; I had the better leisure for to play, And for to see, and eke for to  
 be sey\* \*seen Of lusty folk; what wist I where my grace\*  
 \*favour Was shapen for to be, or in what place? \*appointed  
 Therefore made I my visitations To vigilies,\* and to processions,  
 \*festival-eves<22> To preachings eke, and to these pilgrimages, To plays of  
 miracles, and marriages, And weared upon me gay scarlet gites.\*  
 \*gowns These wormes, nor these mothes, nor these mites On my apparel

frett\* them never a deal\*\*                    \*fed \*\*whit And know'st thou why?  
for they were used\* well.                    \*worn Now will I telle forth what  
happen'd me: I say, that in the fieldes walked we, Till truely we had such  
dalliance, This clerk and I, that of my purveyance\*                    \*foresight I  
spake to him, and told him how that he, If I were widow, shoulde wedde me.  
For certainly, I say for no bobance,\*                    \*boasting<23> Yet was I  
never without purveyance\*                    \*foresight Of marriage, nor of  
other thinges eke: I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek, That hath but one  
hole for to starte\* to,<24>                    \*escape And if that faile, then is all y-  
do.\*                    \*done [\*I bare him on hand\* he had enchanted me  
\*falsely assured him\* (My dame taughte me that subtilty); And eke I said, I  
mette\* of him all night,                    \*dreamed He would have slain me, as I  
lay upright, And all my bed was full of very blood; But yet I hop'd that he  
should do me good; For blood betoken'd gold, as me was taught. And all was  
false, I dream'd of him right naught, But as I follow'd aye my dame's lore, As  
well of that as of other things more.] <25> But now, sir, let me see, what  
shall I sayn? Aha! by God, I have my tale again. When that my fourthe  
husband was on bier, I wept algate\* and made a sorry cheer,\*\*  
\*always \*\*countenance As wives must, for it is the usage; And with my  
kerchief covered my visage; But, for I was provided with a make,\*  
\*mate I wept but little, that I undertake\*                    \*promise To  
churche was mine husband borne a-morrow With neighebour that for him  
made sorrow, And Jenkin, our clerk, was one of tho:.\*  
\*those As help me God, when that I saw him go After the bier, methought he  
had a pair Of legges and of feet so clean and fair, That all my heart I gave  
unto his hold.\*                    \*keeping He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,  
And I was forty, if I shall say sooth, But yet I had always a colte's tooth. Gat-  
toothed\* I was, and that became me well,                    \*see note <26> I had the  
print of Sainte Venus' seal. [As help me God, I was a lusty one, And fair, and  
rich, and young, and \*well begone:\*                    \*in a good way\* For certes I am all  
venerian\*                    \*under the influence of Venus In feeling, and my heart is  
martian;\*                    \*under the influence of Mars Venus me gave my lust and  
liquorishness, And Mars gave me my sturdy hardiness.] <25> Mine  
ascendant was Taure,\* and Mars therein:                    \*Taurus Alas, alas,  
that ever love was sin! I follow'd aye mine inclination By virtue of my  
constellation: That made me that I coulde not withdraw My chamber of  
Venus from a good fellow. [Yet have I Marte's mark upon my face, And also  
in another privy place. For God so wisely\* be my salvation,  
\*certainly I loved never by discretion, But ever follow'd mine own appetite,  
All\* were he short, or long, or black, or white,                    \*whether I took no  
keep,\* so that he liked me,                    \*heed How poor he was,  
neither of what degree.] <25> What should I say? but that at the month's  
end This jolly clerk Jenkin, that was so hend,\*                    \*courteous Had

wedded me with great solemnity, And to him gave I all the land and fee That ever was me given therebefore: But afterward repented me full sore. He woulde suffer nothing of my list.\* \*pleasure By God, he smote me ones with his fist, For that I rent out of his book a leaf, That of the stroke mine eare wax'd all deaf. Stubborn I was, as is a lioness, And of my tongue a very jangleress,\* \*prater And walk I would, as I had done befor, From house to house, although he had it sworn:\* \*had sworn to For which he oftentimes woulde preach prevent it And me of olde Roman gestes\* teach \*stories How that Sulpitius Gallus left his wife And her forsook for term of all his For nought but open-headed\* he her say\*\* \*bare-headed\*\*saw Looking out at his door upon a day. Another Roman <27> told he me by name, That, for his wife was at a summer game Without his knowing, he forsook her eke. And then would he upon his Bible seek That ilke\* proverb of Ecclesiast, \*same Where he commandeth, and forbiddeth fast, Man shall not suffer his wife go roll about. Then would he say right thus withoute doubt: "Whoso that buildeth his house all of sallows,\* \*willows And pricketh his blind horse over the fallows, And suffreth his wife to \*go seeke hallows,\* \*make pilgrimages\* Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows." But all for nought; I \*sette nota haw\* \*cared nothing for\* Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw; Nor would I not of him corrected be. I hate them that my vices telle me, And so do more of us (God wot) than I. This made him wood\* with me all utterly; \*furious I woulde not forbear\* him in no case. \*endure Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas, Why that I rent out of his book a leaf, For which he smote me, so that I was deaf. He had a book, that gladly night and day For his disport he would it read alway; He call'd it Valerie,<28> and Theophrast, And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast. And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome, A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome, That made a book against Jovinian, Which book was there; and eke Tertullian, Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise, That was an abbess not far from Paris; And eke the Parables\* of Solomon, \*Proverbs Ovide's Art, <29> and bourdes\* many one; \*jests And alle these were bound in one volume. And every night and day was his custume (When he had leisure and vacation From other worldly occupation) To readen in this book of wicked wives. He knew of them more legends and more lives Than be of goodde wives in the Bible. For, trust me well, it is an impossible That any clerk will speake good of wives, (\*But if\* it be of holy saintes' lives) \*unless Nor of none other woman never the mo'. Who painted the lion, tell it me, who? By God, if women haddde written stories, As clerkes have within their oratories, They would have writ of men more wickedness Than all the mark of Adam <30> may redress The children of Mercury and of Venus,<31> Be in their working full contrarious. Mercury loveth wisdom and science, And Venus loveth riot and dispence.\*

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

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire,\* \*goodman Read on  
his book, as he sat by the fire, Of Eva first, that for her wickedness Was all  
mankind brought into wretchedness, For which that Jesus Christ himself  
was slain, That bought us with his hearte-blood again. Lo here express of  
women may ye find That woman was the loss of all mankind. Then read he  
me how Samson lost his hairs Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,  
Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen. Then read he me, if that I  
shall not lien, Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire, That caused him to set  
himself on fire. Nothing forgot he of the care and woe That Socrates had with  
his wives two; How Xantippe cast piss upon his head. This silly man sat  
still, as he were dead, He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn, But,  
"Ere the thunder stint\* there cometh rain." \*ceases Of Phasiphae,  
that was queen of Crete, For shrewedness\* he thought the tale sweet.  
\*wickedness Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing, Of her horrible lust and  
her liking. Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery That falsely made her husband  
for to die, He read it with full good devotion. He told me eke, for what  
occasion Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life: My husband had a legend of his  
wife Eryphile, that for an ouche\* of gold \*clasp, collar Had  
privily unto the Greekes told, Where that her husband hid him in a place,  
For which he had at Thebes sorry grace. Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;  
They bothe made their husbands for to die, That one for love, that other was  
for hate. Luna her husband on an ev'ning late Empoison'd had, for that she  
was his foe: Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so, That, for he should always  
upon her think, She gave him such a manner\* love-drink,  
\*sort of That he was dead before it were the morrow: And thus algates\*  
husbands hadde sorrow. \*always Then told he me how one  
Latumeus Complained to his fellow Arius That in his garden growed such a  
tree, On which he said how that his wives three Hanged themselves for heart  
dispiteous. "O leve\* brother," quoth this Arius, \*dear  
"Give me a plant of thilke\* blessed tree, \*that And in my  
garden planted shall it be." Of later date of wives hath he read, That some  
have slain their husbands in their bed, And let their \*lechour dight them\* all  
the night, \*lover ride them\* While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:  
And some have driven nails into their brain, While that they slept, and thus  
they have them slain: Some have them given poison in their drink: He spake

more harm than hearte may bethink. And therewithal he knew of more  
 proverbs, Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs. "Better (quoth he)  
 thine habitation Be with a lion, or a foul dragon, Than with a woman using  
 for to chide. Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide, Than with an angry  
 woman in the house, They be so wicked and contrarious: They hate that  
 their husbands loven aye." He said, "A woman cast her shame away When  
 she cast off her smock;" and farthermo', "A fair woman, but\* she be chaste  
 also, \*except Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose. Who could  
 ween,\* or whocoulde suppose \*think The woe that in mine  
 heart was, and the pine?\* \*pain And when I saw that he would  
 never fine\* \*finish To readen on this cursed book all night,  
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight\* \*plucked Out of his  
 book, right as he read, and eke I with my fist so took him on the cheek, That  
 in our fire he backward fell adown. And he up start, as doth a wood\* lion,  
 \*furious And with his fist he smote me on the head, That on the floor I lay as  
 I were dead. And when he saw how still that there I lay, He was aghast, and  
 would have fled away, Till at the last out of my swoon I braid,\*  
 \*woke "Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said "And for my land  
 thus hast thou murder'd me? Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee." And near  
 he came, and kneeled fair adown, And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun, As help  
 me God, I shall thee never smite: That I have done it is thyself to wite,\*  
 \*blame Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."\* \*beseech And  
 yet eftsoons\* I hit him on the cheek, \*immediately; again And saide,  
 "Thief, thus much am I awak.\* \*avenged Now will I die, I may  
 no longer speak."

But at the last, with mucche care and woe We fell accorded\* by ourselves  
 two: \*agreed He gave me all the bridle in mine hand To  
 have the governance of house and land, And of his tongue, and of his hand  
 also. I made him burn his book anon right tho.\* \*then And  
 when that I had gotten unto me By mast'ry all the sovereignty, And that he  
 said, "Mine owen true wife, Do \*as thee list,\* the term of all thy life,  
 \*as pleases thee\* Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate; After that  
 day we never had debate. God help me so, I was to him as kind As any wife  
 from Denmark unto Ind, And also true, and so was he to me: I pray to God  
 that sits in majesty So bless his soule, for his mercy dear. Now will I say my  
 tale, if ye will hear. --

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this: "Now, Dame," quoth he, "so  
 have I joy and bliss, This is a long preamble of a tale." And when the  
 Sompnour heard the Friar gale,\* \*speak "Lo," quoth this  
 Sompnour, "Godde's armes two, A friar will intermete\* him evermo':  
 \*interpose <33> Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere Will fall in ev'ry dish

and eke mattere. What speak'st thou of perambulation?\*

\*preamble What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down: Thou lettest\* our disport in this mattere." \*hinderesst "Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the Frere; "Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go, Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two, That all the folk shall laughen in this place." "Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew\* thy face," \*curse Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me, But if\* I telle tales two or three \*unless Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne, That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn: For well I wot thy patience is gone." Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;" And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale. Ye fare\* as folk that drunken be of ale. \*behave Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best." "All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest,\* \*please If I have licence of this worthy Frere." "Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will hear."