





if ye will hear, Read in Ovid, and there ye may it lear.\*

\*learn

This knight, of whom my tale is specially, When that he saw he might not  
come thereby, That is to say, what women love the most, Within his breast  
full sorrowful was his ghost.\*                   \*spirit But home he went, for he  
might not sojourn, The day was come, that homeward he must turn. And in  
his way it happen'd him to ride, In all his care,\* under a forest side,  
\*trouble, anxiety Where as he saw upon a dance go Of ladies four-and-  
twenty, and yet mo', Toward this ilke\* dance he drew full yern,\*\*                   \*same  
\*\*eagerly <10> The hope that he some wisdom there should learn; But  
certainly, ere he came fully there, Y-vanish'd was this dance, he knew not  
where; No creature saw he that bare life, Save on the green he sitting saw a  
wife, A fouler wight there may no man devise.\*                   \*imagine, tell  
Against\* this knight this old wife gan to rise,                   \*to meet And said,  
"Sir Knight, hereforth\* lieth no way.                   \*from here Tell me what ye are  
seeking, by your fay. Paraventure it may the better be: These olde folk know  
muche thing." quoth she. My leve\* mother," quoth this knight, "certain,  
\*dear I am but dead, but if\* that I can sayn                   \*unless What  
thing it is that women most desire: Could ye me wiss,\* I would well \*quite  
your hire."\*                   \*instruct <11> "Plight me thy troth here in mine hand,"  
quoth she,                   \*reward you\* "The nexte thing that I require of thee Thou  
shalt it do, if it be in thy might, And I will tell it thee ere it be night." "Have  
here my trothe," quoth the knight; "I grant." "Thenne," quoth she, "I dare me  
well avaunt,\*                   \*boast, affirm Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby,  
Upon my life the queen will say as I: Let see, which is the proudest of them  
all, That wears either a kerchief or a caul, That dare say nay to that I shall  
you teach. Let us go forth withoute longer speech Then \*rownd she a pistel\*  
in his ear,                   \*she whispered a secret\* And bade him to be glad, and have  
no fear.

When they were come unto the court, this knight Said, he had held his day,  
as he had hight,\*                   \*promised And ready was his answer, as he  
said. Full many a noble wife, and many a maid, And many a widow, for that  
they be wise, -- The queen herself sitting as a justice, -- Assembled be, his  
answer for to hear, And afterward this knight was bid appear. To every wight  
commanded was silence, And that the knight should tell in audience, What  
thing that worldly women love the best. This knight he stood not still, as  
doth a beast, But to this question anon answer'd With manly voice, that all  
the court it heard, "My liege lady, generally," quoth he, "Women desire to  
have the sovereignty As well over their husband as their love And for to be in  
mast'ry him above. This is your most desire, though ye me kill, Do as you  
list, I am here at your will." In all the court there was no wife nor maid Nor

widow, that contraried what he said, But said, he worthy was to have his life. And with that word up start that olde wife Which that the knight saw sitting on the green.

"Mercy," quoth she, "my sovereign lady queen, Ere that your court departe, do me right. I taughte this answer unto this knight, For which he plighted me his trothe there, The firste thing I would of him requere, He would it do, if it lay in his might. Before this court then pray I thee, Sir Knight," Quoth she, "that thou me take unto thy wife, For well thou know'st that I have kept\* thy life.                   \*preserved If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay."\*

\*faith This knight answer'd, "Alas, and well-away! I know right well that such was my behest.\*                   \*promise For Godde's love choose a new request Take all my good, and let my body go." "Nay, then," quoth she, "I shrew\* us bothe two,                   \*curse For though that I be old, and foul, and poor, I n'ould\* for all the metal nor the ore,                   \*would not That under earth is grave,\* or lies above                   \*buried But if thy wife I were and eke thy love." "My love?" quoth he, "nay, my damnation, Alas! that any of my nation Should ever so foul disparaged be. But all for nought; the end is this, that he Constrained was, that needs he muste wed, And take this olde wife, and go to bed.

Now woulde some men say paraventure That for my negligence I do no cure\* \*take no pains To tell you all the joy and all th' array That at the feast was made that ilke\* day.                   \*same To which thing shortly answeren I shall: I say there was no joy nor feast at all, There was but heaviness and mucche sorrow: For privily he wed her on the morrow; And all day after hid him as an owl, So woe was him, his wife look'd so foul Great was the woe the knight had in his thought When he was with his wife to bed y-brought; He wallow'd, and he turned to and fro. This olde wife lay smiling evermo', And said, "Dear husband, benedicite, Fares every knight thus with his wife as ye? Is this the law of king Arthoures house? Is every knight of his thus dangerous?\*"                   \*fastidious, niggardly I am your owen love, and eke your wife I am she, which that saved hath your life And certes yet did I you ne'er unright. Why fare ye thus with me this firste night? Ye fare like a man had lost his wit. What is my guilt? for God's love tell me it, And it shall be amended, if I may." "Amended!" quoth this knight; "alas, nay, nay, It will not be amended, never mo'; Thou art so loathly, and so old also, And thereto\* comest of so lowa kind,                   \*in addition That little wonder though I wallow and wind;\*                   \*writhe, turn about So woulde God, mine hearte woulde brest!"\*                   \*burst "Is this," quoth she, "the cause of your unrest?" "Yea, certainly," quoth he; "no wonder is." "Now, Sir," quoth she, "I could amend all this, If that me list, ere it were dayes three, \*So well ye mighte bear you unto me.\*                   \*if you could conduct But, for ye



His grace to live virtuously: Then am I gentle when that I begin To live  
virtuously, and waive\* sin. \*forsake

"And whereas ye of povert' me reprove,\* \*reproach The highe  
God, on whom that we believe, In wilful povert' chose to lead his life: And  
certes, every man, maiden, or wife May understand that Jesus, heaven's  
king, Ne would not choose a virtuous living. \*Glad povert'\* is an honest  
thing, certain; \*poverty cheerfully This will Senec and other clerkes  
sayn endured\* Whoso that \*holds him paid of\* his povert',  
\*is satisfied with\* I hold him rich though he hath not a shirt. He that  
coveteth is a poore wight For he would have what is not in his might But he  
that nought hath, nor coveteth to have, Is rich, although ye hold him but a  
knave.\* \*slave, abject wretch \*Very povert' is sinne,\* properly. \*the  
only true poverty is sin\* Juvenal saith of povert' merrily: The poore man,  
when he goes by the way Before the thieves he may sing and play <13>  
Povert' is hateful good,<14> and, as I guess, A full great \*bringer out of  
business;\* \*deliver from trouble\* A great amender eke of sapience To  
him that taketh it in patience. Povert' is this, although it seem elenge\*  
\*strange <15> Possession that no wight will challenge Povert' full often,  
when a man is low, Makes him his God and eke himself to know Povert' a  
spectacle\* is, as thinketh me \*a pair of spectacles Through which he  
may his very\* friendes see. \*true And, therefore, Sir, since  
that I you not grieve, Of my povert' no more me reprove.\*  
\*reproach "Now, Sir, of elde\* ye reprove me: \*age And  
certes, Sir, though none authority\* \*text, dictum Werein no  
book, ye gentles of honour Say, that men should an olde wight honour, And  
call him father, for your gentleness; And authors shall I finden, as I guess.  
Now there ye say that I am foul and old, Then dread ye not to be a  
cokewold.\* \*cuckold For filth, and elde, all so may I the,\*  
\*thrive Be greate wardens upon chastity. But natheless, since I know your  
delight, I shall fulfil your wordly appetite. Choose now," quoth she, "one of  
these thinges tway, To have me foul and old till that I dey,\*  
\*die And be to you a true humble wife, And never you displease in all my  
life: Or elles will ye have me young and fair, And take your aventure of the  
repair\* \*resort That shall be to your house because of me,  
-- Or in some other place, it may well be? Now choose yourselfe whether that  
you liketh.

This knight adviseth\* him and sore he siketh,\*\* \*considered \*\*sighed But  
at the last he said in this mannere; "My lady and my love, and wife so dear, I  
put me in your wise governance, Choose for yourself which may be most  
pleasance And most honour to you and me also; I \*do no force\* the whether  
of the two: \*care not For as you liketh, it sufficeth me." "Then

have I got the mastery," quoth she, "Since I may choose and govern as me  
 lest."\* \*pleases "Yea, certes wife," quoth he, "I hold it best." "Kiss  
 me," quoth she, "we are no longer wroth,\* \*at variance For by my  
 troth I will be to you both; This is to say, yea, bothe fair and good. I pray to  
 God that I may\*sterve wood,\* \*die mad\* But\* I to you be all  
 so good and true, \*unless As ever was wife since the world  
 was new; And but\* I be to-morrow as fair to seen, \*unless As  
 any lady, emperess or queen, That is betwixt the East and eke the West Do  
 with my life and death right as you lest.\* \*please Cast up the  
 curtain, and look how it is."

And when the knight saw verily all this, That she so fair was, and so young  
 thereto, For joy he hent\* her in his armes two: \*took His  
 hearte bathed in a bath of bliss, A thousand times \*on row\* he gan her kiss:  
 \*in succession\* And she obeyed him in every thing That mighte do him  
 pleasance or liking. And thus they live unto their lives' end In perfect joy;  
 and Jesus Christ us send Husbandes meek and young, and fresh in bed,  
 And grace to overlive them that we wed. And eke I pray Jesus to short their  
 lives, That will not be governed by their wives. And old and angry niggards of  
 dispence,\* \*expense God send them soon a very pestilence!