

## The Wife of Bath's Prologue

“Experience, though no authority  
Were in this world, would be enough for me  
To speak of woe that married life affords;  
For since I was twelve years of age, my lords,  
Thanks be to God eternally alive,  
Of husbands at the church door I've had five  
(If I have wed that often legally),  
And all were worthy men in their degree.  
But I was told not very long ago  
That as but once did Jesus ever go  
To a wedding (in Cana, Galilee),  
By that example he was teaching me  
That only once in life should I be wed.  
And listen what a sharp word, too, was said  
Beside a well by Jesus, God and man,  
In a reproof of the Samaritan:  
'Now you have had five husbands,' Jesus said,  
'But he who has you now, I say instead,  
Is not your husband.' That he said, no doubt,  
But what he meant I haven't figured out;  
For I must ask, why is it the fifth man  
Wasn't husband to the Samaritan?  
How many men was she allowed to wed?  
In all my years I've never heard it said  
Exactly how this number is defined;  
Men may surmise and gloss how it's divined,  
But I expressly know it's not a lie  
God bade us to increase and multiply—  
That noble text I well appreciate.  
I also know the Lord said that my mate  
Should leave for me his father and his mother,  
But mentioned not one number or another,  
Not bigamy nor yet octogamy.  
Why should men speak, then, disapprovingly?  
“Look, here's the wise king, lordly Solomon:  
I do believe his wives were more than one.  
Would that the Lord permitted me to be  
Refreshed as half as often as was he.

A gift from God he had for all his wives,  
No man will ever have such in our lives. 40  
God knows, this noble king, if I am right,  
Had many a merry bout on that first night  
5 With each of them, he was so much alive.  
And God be blest that I have married five,  
Of which I have picked out the very best, 44 A  
Both for their hanging purse and for their chest.  
As many different schools make perfect clerks,  
10 So practice that's diverse in sundry works  
Will make a perfect workman certainly;  
Five-husband schooling's done the same for me. 44F  
The sixth is welcome when he comes along; 45  
I won't be keeping myself chaste for long,  
15 For when one husband from this world is gone  
Some Christian man will wed me early on—  
For as the Apostle says, then I am free  
To wed in God's name when it pleases me. 50  
It's no sin to be married, he has said,  
20 For if you're burning, better to be wed.  
What do I care if folks speak evilly  
Of curséd Lamech and his bigamy?  
A holy man was Abraham, I know, 55  
And Jacob, too, as far as that may go,  
25 Yet each with more than two wives came to dwell,  
Like many other holy men as well.  
And where in any age can it be said  
That God on high forebade that we be wed 60  
By any word express? Please answer me.  
30 Or when did he command virginity?  
I know as well as you, for there's no doubt,  
When maidenhood the Apostle spoke about  
He said he had no precept. To be sure, 65  
A woman may be counseled to be pure,  
35 But counsel and commandment aren't the same.  
To leave it to our judgment was his aim.  
For if God did command virginity,  
Then marriage he condemned concurrently; 70

And surely if no seed were ever sown,  
From where then would virginity be grown?  
Paul wouldn't dare command, would least invoke  
A thing on which his Master never spoke.  
A prize is set up for virginity:  
Who runs the best may have it, let us see.  
    "But not for all is this word seen as right,  
It's only as God wills it in his might.  
The Apostle was a virgin, well I note;  
But nonetheless, although he said and wrote  
That he wished everyone would be as he,  
It was but to advise virginity.  
He allows I be a wife, if that's my place,  
In his indulgence, so it's no disgrace  
To marry if my latest mate should die—  
Without the 'bigamy' that some would cry.  
'It's best a man should not a woman touch';  
He meant in bed or on the couch or such.  
In mixing fire and tinder danger lies;  
What this example means you realize.  
And that's the sum: he held virginity  
Was better than to wed in frailty.  
(I call it 'frailty' unless the two  
Would chaste remain till both their lives were through.)

    "I grant it well, but envy I do not,  
That maidenhood may be the better lot.  
In soul and body some like being clean,  
And I can make no boasts. But have you seen  
Among possessions that the nobles hold  
If each and every vessel is of gold?  
Some are of service though they be of wood.  
In sundry ways God calls us to his good,  
Each by his own God-given gift sustained,  
Some this, some that, as heaven has ordained.

    "A great perfection is virginity,  
And continence maintained devotedly;  
But Christ, who of perfection is the well,  
Did not bid everyone to go and sell  
All that he had and give it to the poor  
And thereby follow him; no, this was for

**The ones desiring to live perfectly—  
And by your leave, my lords, that isn't me.**  
For I'll bestow the flower of my life  
In all the acts and fruits of being wife.

75            "And tell me for what reason, if you can,            115  
Were organs made for reproducing man  
Who's made in such a wise and perfect way?  
They were not made for nothing, safe to say.  
Gloss over whoso will, tell all creation

80 Our little things both are for urination,            120  
And that they're made so different in detail  
So we can know the female from the male  
And for no other reason—you say 'No'?  
Experience knows well it isn't so.  
85 That learned men I not provoke to oath,            125  
I mean to say that they were made for both—  
That is, both for relief and for our ease  
To procreate, so God we not displease.  
Why else should men into their ledgers set

90 That every man yield to his wife her debt?            130  
**And how can he pay this emolument  
Unless he use his simple instrument?**  
That's why upon all creatures these are set,  
To urinate and also to beget.

95            "But I don't say that everyone possessing            135  
Equipment such as this as I was stressing  
Must go and use it for engendering,  
Lest chastity be held a worthless thing.  
Christ was a virgin though shaped as a man,  
And many a saint since this world first began            140  
Has also lived in perfect chastity.  
I don't begrudge them their virginity;  
They're bread from finest wheat, so be it said,  
And let us wives be known as barley bread.

105 And yet with barley bread, as Mark can tell,            145  
Was many a man by Jesus nourished well.  
In such estate as God calls each of us  
I'll persevere. I'm not fastidious,  
**In wifehood I will use my instrument  
As freely as my Maker has it sent.**  
110            150

If I hold back, God bring me misery!

My spouse shall have it day and night, when he

Desires he may come forth and pay his debt.

I'll have a husband—I'm not quitting yet—

And he will be my debtor and my slave,

And in the flesh his troubles will be grave

As long as I continue as his wife;

For I will have the power all my life

Over his body, I and never he.

It's just as the Apostle said to me

And bade them love us well, which I must say

Are teachings to my liking all the way."

### An Interlude

The Pardoner spoke up immediately.

"Now dame, by God and by Saint John," said he,

"As a noble preacher on the case you'll pass.

I almost wed a wife, but then, alas,

Why buy it with my flesh, a price so dear?

I'd rather not get married, not this year."

"Abide," she said, "my tale is not begun!

No, you'll be drinking from another tun,

Before I'm through, that tastes much worse than ale.

And when I'm finished telling you my tale

Of tribulation known to man and wife—

Of which I've been an expert all my life

(That is to say, of which I've been the whip)—

Then make your choice whether you would sip

From this same tun that I'm about to broach.

Be wary lest too near it you approach.

I'll tell you good examples, more than ten.

'Whoso would not be warned by other men,

By him shall other men corrected be.'

These words were written by Ptolemy,

You'll find it if you read his *Almagest*."

"Dame, if you will, I prayerfully request,"

The Pardoner said, "that just as you began

Tell us your tale and do not spare a man

And of your practice teach us younger men."

"If you desire, I'll do so gladly, then,"

She said. "But first I pray this company,

If I should speak as it may fancy me,

Will not be too upset by what I say,

155 For my intent is nothing but to play.

### The Wife Continues

"My lords, I now will offer you my tale.

160 If ever I may drink of wine or ale,

I'll tell the truth on husbands that I've had,

As three of them were good and two were bad.

The three men who were good were rich and old,

Indeed were scarcely able to uphold

The contract binding them. By God above,

You know exactly what I'm speaking of.

So help me God, I laugh to think, all right,

165 How pitifully I made them work all night,

Though, by my faith, it meant not much to me;

They gave me so much of their treasury

I didn't need to practice diligence

To win their love or show them reverence.

170 For they loved me so well, by God above,

That I put little value in their love.

The woman's wise who's busy till she's won

The love she wants, or she'll be left with none.

But since I had them wholly in my hand

175 And they had given to me all their land,

Why should I pay them heed and try to please,

Unless it were for profit and for ease?

But by my faith, I worked them for so long

That many a night they sang a plaintive song.

180 The bacon wasn't fetched for them, I know,

Like for some men in Essex at Dunmow.

I governed them so strictly by my law

That each of them was happy to a flaw

To bring me back some nice things from the fair,

185 And glad when I would speak with pleasant air,

For God knows I would chide them spitefully.

"Now hear how well I bore myself, and see,



And by the fact he squires me where I go, Gives you a false suspicion. Kindly know I wouldn't want him if you died tomorrow.		Like pearls and gold, nor other rich array." About your text and rubric, let me say I'd follow them as much as would a gnat.	345	
"But tell me this, why hide (be it your sorrow!) The keys from me that lock your chest? I'll tell You this, your property is mine as well. Am I an idiot like some other dames? I tell you by that lord they call Saint James, <b>You won't be—you can rave mad in the woods!— Master of both my body and my goods;</b> You'll forgo one, I tell you to your eye. What help is it to ask around and spy? I think that you would lock me in your chest. To say, "Go where you please, wife," would be best, "Have fun, I won't believe tales told in malice, For I know you to be a good wife, Alice." We love no man who keeps such watchful eyes On where we go, our liberty we prize.		"You also say that I am like a cat, For if somebody sings a cat's fur She'll be content to stay inside and purr, But if her fur is sleek and fine she'll stay Inside the house not more than half a day; Before the dawn can break she's to her calling, She's showing off her fur and caterwauling— In other words, Sir Rascal, if well dressed I run out to be sure I'm well assessed. "Old fool, what help to you are all your spies? If you asked Argus with his hundred eyes To be my bodyguard—what better measure?— He'd guard me only if it were my pleasure; As I may thrive, I'd really tweak his beard! "You also speak of three things to be feared For troubling all the earth, and that for sure The fourth one there's no man could long endure. Sir Rascal dear, may Christ cut short your life, For still you preach and say a hateful wife Is one of these misfortunes. Sir, are there No other things to speak of and compare In telling all your parables? Must you Always include a poor wife ere you're through? "You also liken woman's love to hell, To barren land without a stream or well, And also to a wildly raging fire— The more it burns, the stronger its desire To consume all that will burn. You say to me That just as little worms destroy a tree A wife destroys her husband. "They have found This to be true, those who to wives are bound."	310	350
"Above all men may he most blessed be, That wise astronomer Ptolemy, Who wrote this proverb in his <i>Almagest</i> : "He has much higher wisdom than the rest Who doesn't care who has the world in hand." And by this proverb you should understand That if you have enough, why should you care How merrily some other people fare? <b>For by your leave, old dotard, of my stuff Tonight you surely will have quite enough.</b> How great a niggard is he who refuses A candlelight from the lantern that he uses; He'd have no less light than he did before. You have enough, so don't complain for more.		"Old fool, what help to you are all your spies? If you asked Argus with his hundred eyes To be my bodyguard—what better measure?— He'd guard me only if it were my pleasure; As I may thrive, I'd really tweak his beard! "You also speak of three things to be feared For troubling all the earth, and that for sure The fourth one there's no man could long endure. Sir Rascal dear, may Christ cut short your life, For still you preach and say a hateful wife Is one of these misfortunes. Sir, are there No other things to speak of and compare In telling all your parables? Must you Always include a poor wife ere you're through? "You also liken woman's love to hell, To barren land without a stream or well, And also to a wildly raging fire— The more it burns, the stronger its desire To consume all that will burn. You say to me That just as little worms destroy a tree A wife destroys her husband. "They have found This to be true, those who to wives are bound."	320	360
"And if in finest clothes, you also say, In jewelry and other fine display, We dress ourselves, we risk our chastity; To back up what you say, you quote to me The following in the Apostle's name: "Clothes chastely made with proper sense of shame Is what your women's dress should always be— No fancy hairdos, no bright jewelry		"Old fool, what help to you are all your spies? If you asked Argus with his hundred eyes To be my bodyguard—what better measure?— He'd guard me only if it were my pleasure; As I may thrive, I'd really tweak his beard! "You also speak of three things to be feared For troubling all the earth, and that for sure The fourth one there's no man could long endure. Sir Rascal dear, may Christ cut short your life, For still you preach and say a hateful wife Is one of these misfortunes. Sir, are there No other things to speak of and compare In telling all your parables? Must you Always include a poor wife ere you're through? "You also liken woman's love to hell, To barren land without a stream or well, And also to a wildly raging fire— The more it burns, the stronger its desire To consume all that will burn. You say to me That just as little worms destroy a tree A wife destroys her husband. "They have found This to be true, those who to wives are bound." "My lords, just so, as you now understand, I accused all my old husbands out of hand Of saying such while they were drunk. And all Was false, but as my witnesses I'd call On Jenkin and my niece to say, 'It's so.' O Lord, the pain I gave them and the woe!	330	370
		"Old fool, what help to you are all your spies? If you asked Argus with his hundred eyes To be my bodyguard—what better measure?— He'd guard me only if it were my pleasure; As I may thrive, I'd really tweak his beard! "You also speak of three things to be feared For troubling all the earth, and that for sure The fourth one there's no man could long endure. Sir Rascal dear, may Christ cut short your life, For still you preach and say a hateful wife Is one of these misfortunes. Sir, are there No other things to speak of and compare In telling all your parables? Must you Always include a poor wife ere you're through? "You also liken woman's love to hell, To barren land without a stream or well, And also to a wildly raging fire— The more it burns, the stronger its desire To consume all that will burn. You say to me That just as little worms destroy a tree A wife destroys her husband. "They have found This to be true, those who to wives are bound." "My lords, just so, as you now understand, I accused all my old husbands out of hand Of saying such while they were drunk. And all Was false, but as my witnesses I'd call On Jenkin and my niece to say, 'It's so.' O Lord, the pain I gave them and the woe!	340	380



<p>Their guilt? By God's sweet grief, they hadn't any;                  And yet just like a horse I'd bite and whinny,                  Complaining well when I myself had guilt,                  For they'd have killed me had the beans been spilt.                  Who comes first to the mill is first to grind;                  I'd be first to complain, and always find                  Our war was quickly over—gladly they                  Repented things they didn't do or say.                  On wenches I would give them reprimand                  When they were so sick they could hardly stand.                  "Yet each was tickled in his heart to see                  What he thought was such love for him in me.                  I swore that all my walking out by night                  Was just to keep his wenches in my sight.                  With that excuse I had me lots of mirth.                  For we are given such keen wits at birth                  To cheat and weep and spin; these God will give                  To women naturally long as they live.                  So one thing I can speak of boastfully,                  The one who came out best was always me,                  By sleight or force, or by some other thing                  Like long complaint and constant bickering.                  Especially in bed were they undone,                  For there I'd scold them and deny them fun;                  I would no longer in the bed abide,                  Once I could feel his arm upon my side,                  Until he paid his ransom as he must—                  Then I would suffer him to do his lust.                  And so to every man I tell this tale:                  Gain what you can, for everything's for sale,                  And no hawk by an empty hand is lured.                  For profit all his lust I so endured                  And feigned for him a lusty appetite;                  In bacon, though, I never took delight,                  And that is why I would forever chide.                  For even had the pope sat down beside                  Them there, I wouldn't spare them at the table,                  To pay back word for word I was so able.                  So help me God who is omnipotent,                  Were I to make right now my testament</p>	<p>385 390 400 405 410 415 420</p>	<p>I'd owe them not a word that's not repaid.                  I did this by the wits that I displayed                  So that they had to give up and be bested                  Or else we never would have finally rested.                  Though like a raging lion he would look,                  Yet he would fail at every tack he took.                  "Then I would say, 'Good dear, just take a peep                  At how meek-looking Wilkin is, our sheep;                  Come here, my spouse, and let me kiss your cheek;                  You should always be patient, always meek,                  And have a good man's conscience, as so much                  You like to preach of patient Job and such.                  Be always patient, since so well you preach—                  If not, a lesson we will have to teach,                  How fair it is to have a wife in peace,                  For there's no doubt that one of us must cease;                  Since woman's less reasonable than the male,                  You must therefore be patient. What can ail                  You, husband, that so much you gripe and groan?                  Is it my thing? You'd have it yours alone?                  Why, take it all, here, take it every bit.                  By Peter, curse you! such a love for it.                  If I were selling some of my belle chose                  I then could walk fresh-looking as a rose,                  But I will keep it for your own sweet tooth.                  You are to blame, by God, and that's the truth.'                  "The words we'd have were always of that sort.                  And now on my fourth husband I'll report.                  "A reveler was husband number four,                  That is to say, he had a paramour.                  And I was young and wanton, passionate,                  As jolly as a magpie, obstinate                  And strong. How I could dance to a small harp, too,                  And sing like any nightingale can do                  When I had drunk a draught of good sweet wine!                  Metellius, that dirty churl, the swine,                  Picked up a staff and took his spouse's life                  For drinking wine. If I had been his wife,                  He never would have daunted me from drinking!                  And after wine, on Venus I'd be thinking,</p>	<p>425 430 435 440 445 450 455 460</p>
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For as surely as cold engenders hail	465	And yet he was to me the very worst;	505
A lustful mouth will have a lustful tail.		I feel it in my ribs from last to first	
A tipsy woman is without defense,		And always will until the day I die.	
As lechers know by their experience.		But in our bed he was so fresh and spry,	
“But Lord Christ! when it all comes back to me,		To gloss away so able, heaven knows,	
Remembrance of my youth and jollity,	470	Whenever he was wanting my belle chose,	510
It warms the cockles of my heart. Today		That though each bone he’d beaten was in pain,	
It still does my heart good that I can say		At once he’d win back all my love again.	
I’ve had the world, what time’s been mine to pass.		I swear I loved him best of all, for he	
But age that poisons everything, alas,		Was always playing hard to get with me.	
Bereft me of my beauty and my pith.	475	We women have—the truth, so help me God—	515
Well, let it go, the devil go therewith!		In this regard a fancy that is odd;	
The flour is gone, there is no more to tell;		That which we can’t get in an easy way	
The bran as best I can I now must sell		Is what we’ll crave and cry for all the day.	
And strive to be as merry as before.		Forbid us something and then we’ll desire it,	
And now I’ll tell of husband number four.	480	But press it on us and we’ll not require it.	520
“I had within my heart a great despite		With coyness we trade in our affairs;	
That he in any other took delight.		Great market crowds make more expensive wares	
I paid him back, by God and by Saint Joyce,		And what’s too cheap will not be held a prize.	
With a hard staff from wood of his own choice;		This every woman knows if she is wise.	
Not with my body, not by sinful means,	485	“My husband number five, God bless his soul,	
But entertaining folks in merry scenes,		I took for love, no riches were my goal.	
I made him fry in his own grease till he		He once had been an Oxford clerk, but then	
Was quite consumed with angry jealousy.		Had left school and gone home, and boarded in	
By God, on earth I was his purgatory,		Our town with a good friend of mine, the one,	
For which I hope his soul is now in glory.	490	God bless her soul, whose name was Alison.	530
God knows how often he would sit and sing		She knew my heart, each of my secrets well,	
While his shoe pinched him, such a painful thing;		Much better than the parish priest. I’d tell	
For there was none save God and me who knew		Her everything, disclosing to her all;	
The many torments that I put him through.		For had my husband pissed upon a wall	
He died when I came from Jerusalem;	495	Or done something that could have cost his life,	535
Beneath the rood-beam where we buried him,		To her and to another worthy wife—	
His tomb was surely not as finely done		And also to my niece, whom I loved well—	
As was great King Darius’s, the one		His every secret I would fully tell.	
Built by Apelles with such skill and taste.		God knows, I did this so much, to his dread,	
A costly burial would have been a waste.	500	It often made his face get hot and red.	540
May he fare well and God give his soul rest,		He felt ashamed, but blamed himself that he	
For he’s now in his grave, his wooden chest.		Had told to me so great a privy.	
“Of husband number five I now will tell.		“It so befell that one time during Lent,	
God grant his soul may never go to hell!		As often to this close friend’s house I went	

(And I so loved to dress up anyway  
 And take my walks in March, April, and May  
 From house to house, to hear what tales were spun),  
 This clerk named Jenkin, my friend Alison,  
 And I myself into the meadows went.  
 My husband was in London all that Lent,  
 So I had much more leisure time to play,  
 To see and to be seen along the way  
 By lusty folks. How could I know when there  
 Would come good fortune meant for me, or where?  
 And so I made my visits, I'd attend  
 Religious vigils and processions, wend  
 With pilgrims, hear the sermons preached; also  
 To miracle plays and weddings I would go.  
 The clothes that I would wear were scarlet bright;  
 There never was a worm or moth or mite,  
 As I may live, could bring to them abuse.  
 Do you know why? They always were in use.  
 "I'll tell you now what happened next to me.  
 I've said we walked into the fields, we three;  
 And there we really had a chance to flirt,  
 This clerk and I. My foresight to assert,  
 While we were talking I suggested he,  
 If I wound up a widow, marry me.  
 For certainly—I say it not to boast—  
 Of good purveyance I have made the most  
 In marriages and other things as well.  
 A mouse's heart's not worth a leek in hell  
 If he has just one hole for which to run,  
 For if that one hole fails then all is done.  
 "I made pretense that he enchanted me  
 (My mother taught to me this subtlety);  
 I dreamt of him all night, I also said,  
 And dreamt he slew me as I lay in bed,  
 My bed as full of blood as it could be.  
 'But still I hope that you'll bring good to me,  
 For blood betokens gold, or so I'm taught.'  
 And all was false, for I'd been dreaming naught,  
 I only followed all my mother's lore  
 (On that as well as on a few things more).

545 "And now, sirs—let me see, what was I saying? 585  
 Aha! by God, I have it, no more straying.  
 "When my fourth husband lay upon the bier,  
 I wept, of course, grief-stricken to appear,  
 As wives must do (the custom of the land),  
 550 And hid my face with the kerchief in my hand. 590  
 But as I'd be provided with a mate,  
 I wept but little, I can truly state.  
 "Now as my husband to the church was borne  
 That morning, neighbors went along to mourn,  
 555 With our clerk Jenkin being one. As God 595  
 May help me, when I saw him trod  
 Behind the bier, I thought that he had feet  
 And legs as fair as ever I could meet,  
 And all my heart was then in his dear hold.  
 560 He was, I think, then twenty winters old, 600  
 And I was forty, telling you the truth;  
 But I have always had a coltish tooth.  
 Gap-toothed I was, and that was for the best;  
 The birthmark of Saint Venus I possessed.  
 565 So help me God, I was a lusty one 605  
 And fair and rich and young and full of fun;  
 And truly, as my husbands said to me,  
 I had the finest what's-it there could be.  
 My feelings come from Venus and my heart  
 570 Is full of Mars; for Venus did impart 610  
 To me all of my lecherousness and lust,  
 And Mars gave me a hard and sturdy crust.  
 My ascendant sign was Taurus, Mars therein.  
 Alas, alas, that ever love was sin!  
 For I have always followed inclination 615  
 By virtue of my taurine constellation;  
 That made me so that I could not deny  
 A good fellow my Venus chamber. I  
 Still have the mark of Mars upon my face  
 580 (And also in another, private place). 620  
 As truly as the Lord is my salvation,  
 My love was never by discrimination;  
 I always catered to my appetite,  
 Though he be short or long or black or white.



<p>I didn't care, just so he pleased me, How poor he was or what was his degree. "What shall I say except, when that month ended, This jolly Jenkin whom I thought so splendid Had married me midst great solemnity. I gave him all the land and property That ever had been given me. And yet It was thereafter much to my regret; Of nothing that I wanted he would hear. By God, he struck me so once on the ear (Because I tore a page out of his book) That it went deaf from that one blow it took. But I was stubborn like a lioness And lashed him with my tongue without redress. And I'd go walking as I'd done before From house to house (though I would not, he swore), For which he oftentimes would start to preach To me. Old Roman stories he would teach, Like how Simplicius Gallus left his wife, Forsaking her the remainder of his life, Because he caught her looking out the door One day bareheaded—that and nothing more. "A Roman, too, he told me of by name Whose wife had gone out to a summer's game Without his knowledge; he forsook her too. And then he'd go and search his Bible through For a proverb of Ecclesiasticus Wherein he gives a firm command to us: No man should let his wife go roam about. And after that he'd quote without a doubt: 'Whoever builds his house by using shallows And goes and pricks his blind horse over fallows And lets his wife seek any shrine one hallows Is worthy to be hung upon the gallows!' But all for naught, for I cared not a straw For all his proverbs or for his old saw. I'd not correct myself by his advices. I hate a man who tells me of my vices, And so do more of us, God knows, than I. So mad with me this made him he could die,</p>	<p>625</p> <p>630</p> <p>635</p> <p>640</p> <p>645</p> <p>650</p> <p>655</p> <p>660</p>	<p>But I would not forbear in any case. "I'll tell you, by Saint Thomas, face-to-face The reason I tore from his book a page, Why he gave me a deaf ear in his rage. "He had a book that he read night and day For his amusement. He would laugh away At this book, which he called 'Valerius And Theophrastus,' with its various Selections: there was once a clerk in Rome, A cardinal whose name was Saint Jerome, Who wrote a book against Jovinian; This book also contained Tertullian, Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise, An abbess who once lived near Paris; these Along with parables of Solomon And Ovid's Art—the books were many a one, And all of them in this one volume bound. And day and night he always could be found, When he had leisure or was on vacation From any sort of worldly occupation, Reading some passage about wicked wives. Of them he knew more legends and more lives Than of the best of wives in Holy Writ. It is impossible, no doubting it, For any clerk to speak some good of wives Unless it deals with saints, their holy lives; No woman not a saint he's kindly to. Who painted, though, the lion, tell me who? By God, if women ever wrote some stories As clerks have done in all their oratories, They would have told of men more wickedness Than all the sons of Adam could redress. Children of Venus and of Mercury Have always worked in great polarity; For Mercury loves wisdom, science pure, While Venus loves good times, expenditure. Because their dispositions are divergent, One's descendant, the other one emergent; So Mercury, God knows, has desolation When Venus has in Pisces exaltation,</p>	<p>665</p> <p>670</p> <p>675</p> <p>680</p> <p>685</p> <p>690</p> <p>695</p> <p>700</p>
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And Venus falls when Mercury is raised. 705 Of where her husband had his hiding place, 745  
 So by no clerk is woman ever praised. For which he met at Thebes with sorry grace.  
 The clerk, when he is old and cannot do "He told of Livia, Lucilia too,  
 For Venus any work worth his old shoe, Who made their husbands die, albeit true  
 Will in his dotage sit and write of how One was for love, the other was for hate.  
 A woman cannot keep her marriage vow! 710 For Livia, one evening very late, 750  
 "Now let me tell the reason why I say Gave poison to her husband as a foe;  
 That I was beaten for a book, I pray. But lecherous Lucilia loved hers so  
 One night this Jenkin, who was my fifth sire, That, so he might forever of her think,  
 Was reading in his book beside the fire. She gave him such a love potion to drink  
 He read of Eve, who by her wickedness 715 That he was dead before the morning sun. 755  
 Had brought all of mankind to wretchedness, And therefore husbands always are undone.  
 The reason Jesus Christ himself was slain "He told me then how one Latumius  
 To bring us back with his heart's blood again. Complained one day to his friend Arrius  
 'Of women here expressly you may find That growing in his garden was a tree  
 That woman was the ruin of all mankind.' 720 On which, he said, his wives (who numbered three) 760  
 "He read to me how Samson lost his hair, Had hung themselves out of their hearts' despite.  
 Sheared by his mistress, sleeping unaware, Said Arrius, 'Dear brother, if you might,  
 And how by this he lost both of his eyes. Give me a cutting from that blessed tree,  
 "He read then to me—I will tell no lies— And in my garden planted shall it be.'  
 Of Dejanira, she who was to blame 725 "Of later date, of wives to me he read  
 That Hercules had set himself aflame. Who sometimes slew their husbands while in bed,  
 "He left out not a whit about the woe Then with their lechers screwed the night away  
 That Socrates' two wives caused him to know; While flat upon the floor the bodies lay.  
 When Xantippe poured piss upon his head, Some others would drive nails into the brain  
 The hapless man sat there as still as dead, 730 While they were sleeping, that's how they were slain. 770  
 Then wiped his head and dared not to complain, Still others gave them poison in their drink.  
 But said, 'Ere thunder stops, there comes a rain.' Of evil more than any heart can think  
 "The tale of Pasiphaë, the queen of Crete, About he read, and he knew more proverbs  
 For cursedness he thought was really sweet. Than in this world there's growth of grass or herbs.  
 Fie on it! I'll not speak in any measure 735 'It's better that your dwelling place,' said he, 775  
 About her horrid lust, her grisly pleasure. 'With a foul dragon or a lion be  
 "Of Clytemnestra, who for lechery Than with a woman who is wont to chide.  
 Brought to her husband death by treachery, High on the roof it's better to abide  
 With greatest fervor then to me he read. Than with an angry wife down in the house.  
 "He told me, too, the circumstance that led Each wicked and contrary to her spouse, 780  
 Amphiaras at Thebes to lose his life; They hate all that their husbands love.' He'd say,  
 My husband had a legend of his wife 'A woman casts all of her shame away  
 Eriphyle, who for a brooch of gold When she casts off her smock.' He'd further tell,  
 Had gone in secret to the Greeks and told 'A woman fair, if she's not chaste as well,

Is like a golden ring in a sow's nose.	785	So help me God, and he was so to me.	825
Who could have thought, whoever would suppose The woe and torment that was in my heart?		I pray that God who sits in majesty Will bless his soul for all his mercy dear. Now I will tell my tale if you will hear."	
"And when I saw that he would never part With reading in this curséd book all night, Three leaves all of a sudden I tore right Out of his book while he was reading it, Then with my fist I gave his cheek a hit And he fell backwards right into the fire. He jumped up like a lion full of ire And with his fist he hit me in the head, And I lay on the floor then as if dead. And when he saw how stilly there I lay, He was aghast and would have run away, But then at last out of my swoon I woke. 'O false thief, have you slain me?' then I spoke. 'You've murdered me for all my land, that's why, Yet let me kiss you now before I die.'	790	<b><i>Another Interruption</i></b>	
"Then near he came and knelt down by my side, And said, 'Dear sister Alison, my bride, So help me God, I'd never hit my dame; For what I've done you are yourself to blame. Forgive me, I beseech you and implore.' And then I hit him on the cheek once more. 'This much I am avenged, O thief,' I said. 'I can no longer speak, I'm nearly dead.'	805	The Friar laughed when he had heard all this. He said, "If ever I have joy or bliss, Your tale has quite a long preamble, dame!" And when the Summoner heard the Friar exclaim, The Summoner said, "Behold, by God's two arms! See how a meddling friar ever swarms. A fly and friar, good men, will fall into Each dish, into all kinds of matter. You Speak of preambulation? Amble or Go trot, shut up, or go sit down! No more, You're spoiling all our fun, the way you act." The Friar said, "Summoner, is that a fact? Now by my faith, I will, before I'm through, Tell of a summoner such a tale or two That everyone will laugh throughout the place." "Now, Friar, damn your bloody eyes and face!" The Summoner said. "And damn myself as well If two tales, or if three, I do not tell Of friars ere I come to Sittingbourne. And with them I will cause your heart to mourn, For I can see your patience now is gone." Our Host said, "Peace! No more such goings on!" He said, "Now let this woman tell her tale. You act like people who are drunk with ale. Now, madam, tell your tale, for that is best." "I'm ready, sir," she said, "as you request, With license from this worthy Friar here." "Yes, dame," said he, "speak on, you'll have my ear."	830 835 840
"But in the end, for all we suffered through, We finally reached accord between us two. The bridle he put wholly in my hand To have complete control of house and land, And of his tongue and hands as well—and when He did, I made him burn his book right then. And when I had by all my mastery Thus gained for myself all the sovereignty— When he had said to me, 'My own true wife, Do as you please the balance of your life; Keep your honor as well as my estate'— From that day on we never had debate. I was as true as any wife you'd find From India to Denmark, and as kind,	810 820		