

The Canterbury Tales for Gentlefolke

by Ellen Johnston McHenry (protected under copyright law)

About the original author, Geoffrey Chaucer:

Chaucer lived from about 1340 until the year 1400. The Age of the Crusades had recently ended and England was now fighting the Hundred Years' War with France. The famous Black Death plague was during Chaucer's childhood.

Chaucer was the son of a well-to-do wine merchant who was within the social circle of the king, Edward III. Chaucer grew up under the protection of the nobility and received goods and money from them. As a young man, he was enrolled as an Esquire in the royal household. His first appointment was as the Controller of Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and Hides in London. During this time he also was sent abroad by the king for various errands of state. He was sent often to Italy, which was where he was introduced to Roman culture and literature. He then moved to Kent, and represented this area in Parliament for a while, although he didn't get re-elected.

When Richard II came to the throne, Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works. Chaucer was responsible for construction and repair of royal residences and parks, as well as the walls, bridges, and sewers along the Thames River. He had to handle payrolls, manage labor, and travel a lot. His last major appointment was as deputy forester of the royal forest of Petherton. Chaucer married, but what became of his wife and whether he had children are unknown. When and where he did his writing is also unknown.

About the Canterbury Tales:

"The Canterbury Tales" represents English life at the end of the Medieval Age. It is a collection of stories that were told during the Middle Ages. It is about stereotypes and social classes. The pilgrims are chosen so that every aspect of Medieval society is represented: the aristocracy, the trades, the clergy, and the laborers. The order in which the tales are presented is important to Chaucer; even this reflects his views about class structure in his society. The aristocratic knight goes first, and tells a noble story using noble language. The next three tales use the same theme (two men in love with the same woman), but the language deteriorates in each successive tale, until the last one gets downright crass in both language and subject matter. This begs the question: "Do people speak the way they do because of who they are, or do people act the way they do because of the way they speak?"

The original work is a poem written in Middle English and is difficult, though not impossible, for a modern reader to understand. The pronunciations of many words are different from modern English, and may sound more like Dutch or German. The meanings of many words have changed, also, so that the modern reader may not quite understand the meaning of some sentences. The text is written in rhymed verse, with ten syllables in each line. The tales represent a vast array of dialects and writing styles in Chaucer's time, including "rhyme royal," parody, comic ribaldry, "fablio humor."

Modern English speakers are likely to be unable to appreciate the differences in language between the various tales. It all looks and sounds "antique" to us. However, language experts have been able to study and appreciate these variations and complexities and they assure us that Chaucer was the Shakespeare of his day. He based many of his tales on even older sources, as did Shakespeare, but told them in an original way. Chaucer was the best poet England ever produced before the time of Shakespeare. His writings were considered "the classics" for hundreds of years.

One theme that runs through the tales is the idea of "quitting." The word "quit," in Middle English, meant to answer back to something or someone, as in a rebuttle in a debate. The knight kicks off the story telling, then the miller "quits" the knight's story with another that has the same theme but is highly comic and a bit bawdy. Another pilgrim quits the miller's story, then yet another quits that story. We then have a break where Chaucer stopped writing for some reason. The next section is a series of paired stories, where a pilgrim tells a story then someone else quits it with one of their own. Often the stories have long prologues in front of them where the pilgrims make philosophical or critical statements. Sometimes the host (Harry Bailey) responds to the tales himself. He cuts off Chaucer in mid-story, telling him it is so bad he should not continue. He also responds to the pardoner's tale with criticism so acute that it is offensive. In the following literary era, Shakespeare would continue this idea of quitting; his writings often were based on past pieces of literature. (In fact, this trend continued in English literature for centuries, as the writers of each century would quit those that came right before them.)

The Canterbury Tales is certainly a bridge between medieval and modern literature. It is medieval in that it follows certain conventions such as being written in rhymed verse, presenting the tales in a certain order according to social class, and using the “frame tale” structure of stories within a story. The characters express typical beliefs and values common in the Middle Ages. One modern aspect of the Tales is that Chaucer presents things exactly as he sees them. He makes apologies for this in several places and asks the readers not to be offended, telling them to just skip the parts they don’t want to read. Chaucer lets us see these folks as they really were, bad language and all. The bad language isn’t recommended or held up to be an example, it is simply reported in all honesty. Chaucer at certain times says something akin to: “Don’t blame me, I’m just telling you what I heard.”

About this script:

In this dramatic version of the tales, every effort has been made to stay true to the original work, while at the same time adapting it for the stage and making it suitable for family audiences. Some dialogue had to be added in order to make the Tales work as a play, but I have made every attempt to have this dialogue directly reflect the inner nature of each character (according to Chaucer) or to reflect beliefs of modern commentators who have studied the Tales extensively. I have tried to add as little as possible. In the original, there is a section of tales that has almost no dialogue in between. For this section, I took ideas that occurred elsewhere in the Tales, and placed them between these tales. In some places I simply had to invent, but always with an attempt to retain the feel of authenticity.

Notes about stage and set:

This script was originally designed to be performed “in the round,” with audience on all sides, and no front or back to the stage. The pilgrims march around in a circle, around the edge of the performance area, and when tales are told, the tale actors perform inside the circle of pilgrims. The advantage to doing it in the round is that you avoid having to building and painting lots of set pieces. The tales require some props and might do well with a few simple set pieces, but they can be kept to a minimum. However, it does equally as well in a standard setting, on a stage with a backdrop. When my group did the play we painted a 10 ft x 30 ft backdrop of English countryside. We decorated a stepladder to be Chanticleer’s tree, and made houses and cathedral doors out of painted cardboard panels.

You might also want to add some period piece medieval music before and after the show and during intermission. If you don’t have any musicians in your group, you might be able to download some medieval music from the Internet.

Cast of pilgrims:

The descriptions listed here are taken from the text written by Chaucer. (*) denotes tale-tellers

***Geoffrey Chaucer**, the author of the tales, and here, a pilgrim going to Canterbury
(Chaucer does not provide a description of himself)

Harry Bailey, the innkeeper of the Tabard Inn

*He was a big man, and his eyes bulged wide, no sturdier citizen lived in all Cheapside.
Lacking no trace of manhood, bold in speech, prudent, and well versed in what life can teach.
And with all this he was a jovial man.*

A servant to help Harry serve food in the first scene

***The Knight**

He loved truth, openhandedness, and courtesy, and he was wise. He had traveled all over the world in crusades, yet was meek and gentle in his ways. His tunic was still spattered by the rust left by his coat of mail, for he had just returned from an adventure.

The Yeoman (the knight's servant)

Wore a coat and hood of green. His peacock-feathered arrows he carried under his belt in tidy fashion. In his hand he held a mighty bow. He kept his hair close-cropped, and his face was brown. On his arm we wore a bracer on his arm, brightly trimmed, and had at his hip a sword and buckler on one side and a dagger on the other. He also had a horn, tied on with a sling of green and in his hand he held a bow. On his chest he wore a silver image of St. Christopher.

***Prioress Eglantine** (a prioress is a kind of nun)

*Her smile was gentle and free of guile. She had a well-formed nose, her eyes were gray, her mouth was small and red, and she had a wide forehead. The worst she would ever say was "By St. Loy!" She sang well, spoke good French, and was an extremely neat eater. She was tender-hearted and would weep at the sight of something as trivial as a mouse caught in a trap. She wore a rosary on her arm made of green and coral-colored beads. She also wore a gold piece of jewelry with a large letter A on it, underneath a crown. There was an inscription on it saying, "All things are subject unto love."
(Note: The prioress's priest is omitted in this script, in order to make more female roles. It is actually her priest who tells the tale (Chanticleer) in the original. The director can add him back in if needed.)*

A nun, accompanying Prioress Eglantine

Chaucer does not give us a description of the nun.

***The Friar** (whose name was Hubert)

Gay and merry he was, and he loved to eat. He played the lute and loved to sing ballads. He had little gifts secretly stored away in his cloak that he would pass out to young women. He was an expert beggar and took in far more money than he paid out in rent. He could sweet-talk anyone out of anything. But everyone liked him and he was often invited to stay at rich peoples' houses.

The Merchant

He wore a forked beard and a beaver hat. He delivered his opinions pompously. He knew the exchange rates and the right time to sell your French currency. He seemed more well-to-do than he actually was.

The Oxford Student

He was skinny, and his coat was threadbare. He was very quiet and never smiled or laughed. But when he did speak, it was with conviction and dignity. He owned a twenty-volume set of books by Aristotle. He didn't have a "real job" but rather was supported by friends and family who made sure he didn't starve. He liked to learn, but he also liked to teach.

***The Lawyer**

He traveled in a plain, silk-belted coat. He was cunning and discreet and had served in important positions, appointed by the king. He was wealthy and owned a lot of land. He knew every law case back to King William in 1066. No one could find any loopholes in contracts he drew up.

***The Wife of Bath**

She was a little hard of hearing, which made her speak more loudly than the rest. She wore a huge hat on her head, and her stockings were scarlet-red. Her shoes were soft and new. Her face was bold, but fair in complexion, with rosy red cheeks. She had been married five times and thought herself to have been a good wife to all of them. She had traveled a lot, and even been to Jerusalem three times. She was a worldly-wise woman, but everyone considered her a decent and generous person. (We also find out, in another part of the tales, that she had worked in the cloth industry. During the pilgrimage she is wearing about 20 pounds of clothing.)

***The Miller**

He was big and tough, but also a little short and squat. He had thick arms and thighs. His beard was big and red and he had a wart on his nose. He carried a sword and buckler at his side and played the bagpipe. He loudly told stories and jokes about subjects that were, shall we say, less than holy. Everyone said he cheated his customers, but since all millers have that reputation, he wasn't so bad, as millers go.

The Reeve (a steward, or caretaker, of someone else's farm or estate) In some translations, the reeve is also called the carpenter, because that is the trade he had trained in as a youth.

A slender, fiery-tempered man, his legs were long and lean. He was clean-shaven and he had a short, neat haircut. He wore

a long, blue coat, hitched up at the side, like a friar's. His job was to manage the estate of his employer, a young noble. He was honest, but shrewd, and was wise to peoples' tricks. No auditor or bailiff could pull one over on him! He had also managed his own finances well and lived a good life on a nice piece of property. He wore a rusty sword at his side and always traveled in the back of the company.

The physician

He had a good general knowledge of not only medicine and surgery, but also astrology. He would keep his patients waiting for their cure until the astrological time was right and all the planets were in the best position! His clothes were lined with taffeta, their hue was all of blood red and Persian blue. He knew how to turn a dollar on his profession and during times of pestilence he earned extra gold.

The Summoner (A person who summoned "sinners" to come see the bishop for discipline. These people often bribed him not to turn them in. He gladly took the bribes and considered it income.)

His face was red and marked with pocks (probably from having small pox). His eyes were narrow, his brows were scabby and black, and he had a thin beard. His face was one that little children feared. He smelled of onions and garlic. He knew some Latin, but only because he had to be in church all the time because of his job. (He wasn't a scholar.) He liked to spout Latin phrases he knew, just to impress people.

The Pardoner (brought official "pardons" from the bishops or the pope, to people in his parish.)

He had long, straight yellow hair, a beardless face, and a generally disheveled appearance. His voice was like a goat's bleat. He carried a bag in which he said was the Virgin Mary's veil, a piece of the sail of the apostle Peter's boat and the bones of some saints (actually pig bones). He would charge money for people to see these relics, and had become rather well-off doing this.

***The Alchemist's Apprentice**

He joins the pilgrims at the end of the play. He has run away from his master and is seeking refuge among the pilgrims. He tells a story about an alchemist. (We assume he is talking about his former master.)

There are other pilgrims who are included in Chaucer's original cast, but who have been omitted for simplification. The director may want to add them back in as non-speaking roles, or give them either impromptu lines, or lines of others characters that are easily reassigned.

The Plowman, brother of the parson

He was a hearty worker and had forked up many a load of manure. He wore a coarse, rough coat. He loved God with his whole heart and loved his neighbor as himself. He was the sort who would give you the shirt off his back if he thought you needed it.

The Squire

Some twenty years in age; he desired to become a knight; in stature he was of moderate height, but powerful and wonder fully quick. He had been in Flanders in a battle and had borne up very well for one so young. He wore embroidered flowers, red and white, and his hair was curly. He played the flute, and he seemed as fresh as the month of May.

The Monk

He was a hunter, owned greyhounds, and kept a hunting stable. The cuffs of his sleeves were trimmed with gray fur. He was a manly man, and fully able to be an abbot, but he was not overly religious- he would have swapped the text of St. Benedict for a freshly plucked hen! His hood was fastened with a curious pin- made of gold, in the shaped of a love knot. His head was bald and both his head and face were shiny. His eyes were large and full of life.

The Franklin

Whiter could never a daisy petal be than was his beard. His ruddy face gave sign that he liked his morning sop of toast and wine. He lived in comfort and offered hospitality to everyone who came his way. His bread and ale were first rate and he had a farm that grew not only the usual cows and chickens, but exotic game such as partridges and fish. He had a well-made dagger and a purse of white silk. He had been a sheriff and a county auditor.

The Manciple

He had attended a lawyers' college and was the equivalent of a local magistrate. He had only a little law training but was extremely shrewd and could use what knowledge he had to his advantage. He could get the better end of any deal.

The Skipper

His face was brown from the summer sun at sea. He had a dagger on a string hanging around his neck. He had been to every harbor in Europe on his ship, The Madeleine. In a sea skirmish, however, he was ruthless and drowned his prisoners of war. He had the habit of "borrowing" fine wine from his rich patrons while they slept on deck.

Five Guildsmen: a weaver, a dyer, a carpenter, a tapestry-maker, a haberdasher

Their gear was furbished new and clean as glass, the mountings of their knives were not of brass, but silver. Their pouches were well made and neat, and each of them, it seemed, deserved a seat on the platform at the Guildhall. They had goods enough and money to be spent. Each guildsman also had brought along a cook to do their cooking for them.

A priest, accompanying Madame Eglantine (it is he, in the original, who tells the tale of Chanticleer)

Chaucer gives us no description of the priest.

The Cook (who spends the entire pilgrimage drunk and falling off his horse)

You may also want to add some young ladies for the squire to admire, and the guildsmen could be guildswomen or they could bring along their wives, to add more female roles.

DIRECTING NOTES:

1) Minor lines in the script can be reassigned to various pilgrims to accommodate your particular cast, especially if you are working with a reduced number of actors.

2) Pilgrims who "hang out" together: summoner/pardoner, prioress/nun, parson/plowman, knight/yeoman, the squire/any young ladies in the cast who aren't clergy

Tale cast:

The Knight's Tale:

- Arcite
- Palamon
- Emily
- Duke Theseus or Duchess Hippolyta
- Perotheus, a friend of the Duke
- Two guards

The Miller's Tale

- Oswald, the reeve
- Alison, his beautiful young daughter
- Absolom, a clerk
- Nicholas, a young scholar who rents a room from Oswald

The Prioress's Tale (The tale of Chanticleer)

- Chanticleer
- Pertelote
- the fox
- the widow
- the widow's two daughters, Elizabeth and Maggie
- Non-speaking roles: extra hens, Molly the sheep, Colly the dog, cows, pigs, ducks.

The Wife of Bath's Tale:

- King Arthur
- Queen Guinevere
- knight
- maiden
- ladies of the court (five of them speak)
- six people for the knight to interview: persons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
- old hag

The Friar's Tale

- A summoner (part is marked TALE SUMMONER, to keep it distinct from the pilgrim summoner)
- the devil in disguise (dressed as a yeoman)
- a villager
- a horse
- an old woman

The Pardoner's Tale

- Ruffians 1, 2, and 3
- Townsperson 1 and 2
- Strange old man
- Apothecary

The Alchemist's Apprentice's Tale

- The alchemist
- A merchant (part is marked TALE MERCHANT to keep it distinct from pilgrim merchant)
- The merchant's wife

“Canterbury Tales for Gentlefolke”

SCENE 1

Setting: Southwark (pronounced “suth-uck”), England, in the late 1300’s. It is April and it has been raining. Geoffrey Chaucer crosses the stage toward the Tabard Inn. Most of the other pilgrims are already at the inn. Only the parson, the plowman, the merchant and the physician are not present. They will come in when indicated in the script. Harry will also need a few servants to help him distribute the food.

HARRY: Geoffrey! *(Harry barges his way through and past customers to go over and greet Chaucer.)* You’ll have good company for your pilgrimage this year, my friend. There must be at least two dozen of them here already.

KNIGHT: *(Overhearing Harry and deciding to put in his two-cents worth on the subject.)* It’s that time of the year. The spring comes round clean and fresh and people want to put themselves right with God. Winter roads just aren’t passable. I’ve been up to my knees in mud for the past two months.

Chaucer sits down next to the knight.

CHAUCER: Do you know any of these people?

KNIGHT: *(include this line if you have the squire in the pilgrim cast; omit if you do not)* The lad over there is my son- the one playing the lute and singing to the kitchen girl. He wrote the song himself.

KNIGHT: Not many. I just arrived here a few hours ago. This is my yeoman. *(The yeoman nods.)*

I’m on my way to Canterbury tomorrow.

CHAUCER: And the same with me.

KNIGHT: I think most of these folks are going our way, too.

A few more pilgrims straggle into the inn: the parson, the plowman, the merchant, and the physician. Harry and at least one servant are busily serving food and drinks. You may want to have the Wife of Bath let out a loud laugh once in a while that interrupts folks while they are talking. Other comments about the food can be added, as well.

MILLER: I’ll have another drink, Harry.

HARRY: Another round for you. / Who ordered the steak and eggs?

REEVE: Here! Are they still hot?

HARRY: What kind of a place do you think this is-- of course they are hot! *(serves him)*

CHAUCER: I take it you are a knight.

KNIGHT: That is so.

CHAUCER: Do you travel much?

KNIGHT: Just a little.

FRIAR: Harry, you are a fine host! This ale is first-rate!

SUMMONER: And he should know- he makes a habit, de jure, of dining with the rich folk in his parish.

(Latin: day jur-ay, meaning “by right” meaning he thinks he has a right to do so.)

HARRY: The best for the best!

CHAUCER: Have you been anywhere really interesting?

KNIGHT: Prussia.

CHAUCER: Oh, that’s an interesting place.

MERCHANT: I need three more slices of bread.

LAWYER: Here, you can have mine, I’m getting full

KNIGHT: And Lithuania and Russia.

CHAUCER: Really?

KNIGHT: North Africa, Algeria, Armenia, Granada, and a few places in Asia Minor. And you?

CHAUCER: I’ve been to Rome on the king’s business. And also some places in France.

PARDONER: This bacon is stone cold!

HARRY: Stick it under your armpit for a few minutes. It’ll warm right up.

WIFE OF BATH: You can use mine. I’m hot-blooded!

CHAUCER: Between you and me we’ve just about got the world covered I guess. This journey to Canterbury cathedral is a very small one for you and me.

KNIGHT: Small in distance, but large in importance. The shrine of the blessed martyr Saint Thomas a Becket is a worthy goal.

Harry is obviously enjoying all this good business. He is all smiles and warmth. Suddenly he gets up on a chair to make an announcement.

HARRY: Listen here, folks! You will all ride to Canterbury as one party tomorrow, won't you? Everyone could enjoy safe travel that way.

KNIGHT: It sounds sensible to me. Thieves and highwaymen will stay clear of such a large group.

YEOMAN: Have no fear of thieves and highway men.

WIFE OF BATH: *(Looks at yeoman)* Hmm, yes. We would have an arsenal walking along with us!

HARRY: Well, *(clears his throat)* I have an announcement. I am thinking about going along with you all. *(Guests cheer)* But... I've made this trip before and I know how long and dull the trip can be. It's a long way from here to Canterbury. I suggest livening up the journey with a competition.

KNIGHT: Excellent! My sword has not seen action for months. *(He calmly takes out his sword and checks its sharpness. Yeoman gets all excited and starts getting out his weapons, too.)*

YEOMAN: My bow has been idle too long...

HARRY: Each pilgrim can tell a story. *(He says this very pointedly in their direction. Knight puts his sword away. Yeoman follows knight's cue and puts his away, too.)* And whoever tells the best story will get a free dinner on the way back, paid for by all us runners-up.

Several people shout "Yes! Yes!" and there is general cheering and approval, and other appropriate comments for each character. The scholar is oblivious, though, and doesn't look up from his book.

HARRY: I will be the judge, and the judge's word is final.

LAWYER: Ah.. er.. um. perhaps a vote would be the best....

HARRY: And anyone who quarrels with my rules pays the expenses for the rest of the trip!

VARIOUS PILGRIMS: Yes! Done! Agreed! Settled! Here, here! Yes! *General hand clapping, cheers, and approval.*

HARRY: Now off to bed with all of you. There's a long day of travel tomorrow.

Pilgrims gradually exit doorways to go to other rooms, and a few lay mats down right on the floor of the inn.

Lights dim. Set crew slides the set around so that the exterior of the inn is seen, with the doorway in the middle. (If you are doing the play in the round, make appropriate adjustments. All pilgrims can simply lie down on the floor to sleep.)

SCENE 2

Lights go on again. A rooster crows.

Harry Bailey appears at the door first and begins pushing sleepy pilgrims out to start the journey, saying things like "Up you get. Time to be on the road. The saints are awaiting us at Canterbury cathedral. We'll break our fast on the way." Chaucer is one of the first out the front door. He and Harry pause outside the inn.

HARRY: Geoffrey, liven the steps of these pilgrims with a poem!

CHAUCEER: Come now, pilgrims, move with haste, and none of the morning will go to waste. *(pauses)*

HARRY: Um.. very practical. Not bad, but do you think you could do something more inspirational? Something to glorify our departure?

CHAUCEER: *Pauses and thinks for a few second, maybe wanders around for a few seconds lost in thought, then begins grandly. The pilgrims continue to come out while he is speaking. After a few lines a few people begin to listen, as he goes on, more and more stop to listen, till at the end they are all listening.*

When April has with its showers soaked,
The drought of March and pierced it to the root,
And bathed every vein in its sweet power,
Of which virtue engendered is the flower,
(To Harry) How am I doing?

HARRY: Very inspiring. Please continue.

CHAUCEER:

When Zephyrus has with his sweet breath, *(alter pronunciation of breath, to rhyme with heeth)*
Brought to life in every holt and heeth
The tender crops, *(pause)* and the young sun
Has in the Ram half his course run,

MERCHANT: The sun running in a ram?

OXFORD STUDENT: Not a ram, THE Ram, you know the constellation of stars that we call The Ram.

HARRY: Ah yes, how poetic Geoffrey, do go on.

CHAUCEER:

And small fowl make melody

That sleep away the night with open eye

So Nature pricks them and their heart engages

Then people long to go on pilgrimages *(alter word pilgrimages to make it sound as much like engages as possible, without changing it so much that it can't be understood)*

And these pilgrims long to seek the helping hands,

Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands.

And specially, from every shire's end,

In England, down to Canterbury they wend

To seek the holy blissful martyr, who was quick

In giving help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day

In Southwark (*"suth-uck"*), at The Tabard, if I may say

We were ready to go on a pilgrimage and start

For Canterbury. We were most devout at heart.

(At this point all have begun to slowly follow Chaucer and Harry and all are attentively listening.)

HARRY: To Canterbury we go!

Dim lights as pilgrims start to march. Have set crew remove Tabard Inn. Pilgrims begin to walk in their circle path around the stage.

HARRY: Well, let us begin the stories. Who shall go first?

(Silence)

HARRY: No brave volunteers? Well then, we shall have to draw lots. *(He pulls out some straws from his pocket and arranges them in his hand.)* All gentlemen take a straw! Perhaps our resident poet will get the first turn?

CHAUCEER: *(draws a long straw)* I guess not.

HARRY: Who shall it be? Who shall it be?

(He goes to each man and allows him to take a straw from his hand. Each character may react however they see fit. Then the knight draws the short straw.)

HARRY: It shall be our knight! That's only fitting!

(Pilgrims applaud. They think he will tell an exciting story since he is a knight.)

KNIGHT: Well, I see that Providence has chosen my lot. So be it. *(pauses for a moment)* I shall tell you a story about two brave knights.

Pilgrims stop walking and sit down to rest. The tale will be acted out in the middle of the large circle (or semi-circle) of pilgrims. This is the basic pattern for the rest of the play. As each tale begins, the pilgrims stop walking and sit down to listen. (Or the pilgrims can simply stand instead of sit, if that is better in your situation.) The tale actors come out and perform in the middle of the pilgrims. When the tale is over, the pilgrims get up and start walking again. The dialogue between the tales is done as the pilgrims are walking.

The Knight's Tale

SCENE 3

KNIGHT: Once upon a time, in the ancient Greek city of Thebes, there lived two cousins named Arcite and Palamon.
(Enter Arrcite and Palamon)

They went to war along with their fellow countrymen to defend their land against the enemy invaders from the city of Athens. I am sorry to say that the war did not go well for the Thebians. Most of them were killed and even Arcite and Palamon were left for dead on the battlefield. After the battle, Duke Theseus *(enter Duke Theseus and extra men if you have them)* and his men surveyed the battlefield, looking for any survivors that they could take prisoner. The Duke

found Arcite and Palamon laying side by side, just barely alive.

DUKE: Take these two men to my tent. I can tell by their coat of arms that they are cousins of royal blood. Princes perhaps. They shall make valuable prisoners.

(The director might want to have the tale cast freeze during the interruptions, as if the tale has stopped. Then after the comment is over, the tale cast picks up again.)

OXFORD SCHOLAR: Um...er....I don't think ancient Greeks wore coats of arms. Heraldry is a modern invention. I believe the ancient Greeks wore simple robes of white adorned with.....

YEOMAN: So these ancient Greeks were very advanced. Got a problem with that? *(Shows him the tip of one of his weapons in a threatening manner.)*

SCHOLAR: Ah... I see your... point. *(Looking at the point of the weapon, so hopefully everyone will get the pun.)*
(Duke's men carry out Arcite and Palamon)

KNIGHT: And so poor Arcite and Palamon were locked up in a tower, held prisoner for two years.
(Guards enter with Arcite and Palamon in custody)

GUARD 1: In you go, princess. Welcome to paradise.

GUARD 2: We'll be back tonight with your gourmet supper. I believe this evening's menu is "Pain rassis avec Eau." *(pronounced "pahn rah-see ah-veck oh")*

GUARD 1: *(aside to other guard)* What's that?

GUARD 2: Stale bread and water.
(Guards both laugh.)

(Arcite and Palamon sit totally bored behind whatever tower structure the set designers have built.)

ARCITE and PALAMON sigh out loud.

KNIGHT: Then, one day, the Duke's young sister, Emily, happened to stroll through the garden that lay below the tower where the prisoners were. *(Enter Emily)* Emily was fairer than the lily flower on its stalk of green, and fresher than early roses in the month of May.

EMILY: *(strolling in the garden, picking flowers)* Oh, my early roses have blossomed! Look at these delicate petals. How I love May flowers! I simply must gather a few to take indoors.

KNIGHT: Now Palamon just happened to go to the window to look out, and he chanced to see Emily strolling in the garden.

PALAMON: Aaahhh!

ARCITE: My cousin, what ails you?

PALAMON: My heart! My heart! *(Arcite is all concerned as Palamon drops to the floor. Palamon draws Arcite close to him then says in a melodramatic way:)* It's the pangs of true love.

ARCITE: Love??!! What are you talking about?

PALAMON: Is she a woman or is she a goddess? It must be Venus come to Earth!

OXFORD SCHOLAR: Venus was a Roman goddess, not Greek.. I think you must mean Aphrodite...

KNIGHT: Yes, of course. Then Arcite said:

ARCITE: What did you see? *(He goes over to the narrow slit window and looks out and sees Emily.)*
The freshness of her beauty strikes me dead.

DUKE: *(enters briefly, to call Emily in)* Emily, it is time to dine. Come!

EMILY: Yes, brother, I am coming. *(both exit)*

ARCITE: Emily! Emily! Her name is as beautiful as her face. Unless I see her every day from now on, I will die!

PALAMON: You traitor of a cousin! It was I that saw her first. She is mine!

ARCITE: No, it was I who first loved her as a woman. You didn't even know what she was! You thought she was the goddess Venus. I mean Aphrodite. No, it was I who first knew her. I loved her first.

PALAMON: By the laws of chivalry, I claimed her first and you are required to help me win her!

ARCITE: Love is a law unto itself. *(This is an actual quote from Chaucer's original, and is the origin of this saying.)*

PALAMON: Oh, we're like two dogs fighting, and neither one of us will get the bone. Prisoners we are. Prisoners for life!

KNIGHT: Then one day, it happened that a friend of the Duke's came to see the prisoners.

(The Duke enters, and his friend, Perotheus, who grew up in Thebes, with Emily behind them.)

DUKE: Here are the two prisoners I told you about. Cousins of the royal house of Thebes.

PEROTHEUS: *(Looks in the narrow window)* Arcite? Is that you?

ARCITE: Perotheus? My old friend?

DUKE: You know each other?

PEROTHEUS: Yes, Arcite and I grew up together in Thebes.

DUKE: Well, I can't have my friend's friends in my prison, can I? That wouldn't do. Arcite, I hereby release you from prison. *(Arcite comes out of the cell and stands in front of the men, but constantly tries to get glimpses of Emily.)* You are free to go, Arcite. On one condition.

ARCITE: *(Totally distracted, trying to look at Emily)* Yes, anything.

DUKE: The condition is that you must return to Thebes and never be seen in Athens ever again. Is that understood?

ARCITE: I must leave Em-- Athens forever?

DUKE: Yes, if I ever catch you in Athens again, I shall have you executed! After all, you are my enemy, right?

ARCITE: Leave Athens forever? *(Looking at Emily)*

DUKE: Yes, be off with you!

ARCITE: I am doomed! I wish I had never met you Perotheus! Prison was bliss! Oh lucky Palamon- he is trapped in Paradise! *(Then he turns and runs off.)*

DUKE: Whatever was that about?

PEROTHEUS: Beats me.

GUARD 1: I think he liked the cuisine here.

GUARD 2: The food must be terrible in Thebes.

EMILY: It's so drab in here. We need some color to brighten it up. *(Decorates guards with flowers somehow, such a flower behind the ear or in a buttonhole or something.)* May roses are just the thing to take the dreariness out of the atmosphere.

DUKE: Come, Emily. I like my prison drab. Let us be off to dinner now.

PEROTHEUS: Women! *(shaking head scornfully but playfully)*

Duke, Perotheus and Emily exit.

PALAMON: Oh lucky Arcite! Poor me! I can see it now- Arcite will go home to Thebes and raise an army and come back and attack Athens and win. And then Emily will be his. Oh woe is me! That back-stabbing traitor rat, Arcite, will steal my Emily from me! Oh, my life is over!

KNIGHT: So who suffered more, Arcite or Palamon? One was free, yet could never see Emily again, and the other was in prison, but saw Emily every day.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Arcite.

NUN: Palamon.

OXFORD SCHOLAR: Neither was free because love entrapped them both.

WIFE OF BATH: No, they were both free, because love had set them free! They were both free, just in different ways. I know all about true love. I've had five husbands--and I was true to all five.

MILER: That'll be a tale worth hearing!

KNIGHT: Now when Arcite got home to Thebes he was miserable. He decided that he would rather die in the attempt to see Emily than accept life without her. So he came up with a plan to get into Athens without being recognized. He disguised himself as a page and gave himself the name Philostrate.

(Emily enters garden first, begins picking flowers. Guards are already standing in front of prison cell wherein Palamon yet remains.)

EMILY: Red roses for the bed chamber, pink for the main hall.

(Then enter Duke, Arcite.)

DUKE: Emily, I'd like you to meet our new page, Philostrate.

ARCITE: *(Falls to his knees in front of Emily)* At your service, my lady. Your wish is my command.

EMILY: *(Puts small flower behind his ear.)* There, that's better. Not so colorless.

DUKE: Charming, isn't he, Emily? Come now, page. I will show you your duties. *(then looks at Emily)* Actually, your first chore can be carrying flowers. *(transfers flowers from Emily's arm to Arcite's)* There. Now follow behind us page. Don't lag!

ARCITE: *(taking in huge overly-dramatic smell of flowers)* Roses never smelled so sweet...

(Exit Duke, Emily, Arcite.)

PALAMON: To himself, and to the audience Ooohh-- that rat! That's no Philostrate. I've got to get out of this wretched place! I've got to!!

GUARD 1: It's time to do the daily security check. I think it's my turn to do the outside tour.

GUARD 2: Right. See you in a few minutes.

(Guard 1 goes around the back of the tower and disappears from the audience's view.)

Guard 2 goes over to look in at Palamon.)

PALAMON: Hey, guard. I thought you might like to know that the door is unlocked.

GUARD 2: It can't be. I locked it myself this morning.

PALAMON: Check it.

(Guard puts key in lock and turns it. Palamon quickly pushes door open, grabs guard, shoves guard in the cell, locks the door, and runs for it. This can even be done pantomime style, with an imaginary door.)

KNIGHT: And so Palamon was also free. But Palamon had to hide by day and travel by night so as not to be discovered. Of course, he never went very far from the palace where Emily lived. He lurked on the edges of the Duke's land, hoping to someday catch another glimpse of Emily. One day, as Palamon was hiding, destiny struck again.

(Palamon has entered and crouched behind or beside something, then Arcite enters. Arcite sits right near Palamon, without seeing him.)

ARCITE: *(sighs melodramatically)* Oh, my life is so tragic! So near and yet so far. The fiery darts of love burn through my heart constantly, and yet I can do nothing about it. You kill me with your eyes, my Emily.

PALAMON: *(jumping out suddenly at Arcite)* Your Emily??!! You false and wicked traitor!

ARCITE: Palamon?!! Is it really you? How did you--

PALAMON: How can you claim to love MY lady?! You have cheated Theseus with your cruel game! You shall give up Emily or else I will kill you!

ARCITE: You are a fool, Palamon! Love is free! I defy your claim!

(Arcite and Palamon begin to fight. Then Duke Theseus and some guests of his enter, including Emily. Perotheus could also be used again here. It appears as though the Duke is giving a tour of his property.)

DUKE: *(coming on stage)* And we are now coming up to my secondary hunting area. When the game gets scarce, we-- *(see the two fighting)* What? What's this squabble? Who are these?

(Guards separate them and hold them apart)

DUKE: Philostrate! And Palamon? I cannot believe my eyes.

PALAMON: This is no Philostrate! This is Arcite in disguise! The one you banished from Athens on pain of death!

DUKE: Well, this is entertaining. What is this fight about?

ARCITE AND PALAMON: *(Pointing to Emily)* Her!

(Emily reacts in surprise)

EMILY: Me?! What did I do??

PALAMON: This traitor and liar, Arcite by name, dares to say he loves Emily. It is only I that truly love her.

ARCITE: You don't know what love is, you wretched prisoner.

DUKE: Well, well, well. Two fools in love. Each could have escaped to Thebes and lived out their life in royal comfort and pleasure, but each chose to return to danger and death on account of passionate love. How romantic. This story must have a dramatic ending. Obviously, you cannot both have her. Since both of you seem to prefer death to life without her, this will be arranged. Since you both come of noble blood, I can agree to a contest where the winner receives the hand of Emily in marriage.

ARCITE: Yes, what a splendid idea!

PALAMON: I agree!

EMILY: I'm flattered, but...

DUKE: Come, all! Let us be off to a joust! *(All exit.)*

OXFORD SCHOLAR: *(rises)* A joust? In ancient Greece?

YEOMAN: *(Pulls out his sword and touches the point to the scholar's chest.)* Yes, you know, a contest where the loser gets thrust through with a lance. *(He hold the sword here until he says his next line.)*

KNIGHT: And so the Duke arranged for a joust to be held, in ancient Greece, between Arcite and Palamon. The Duke was so amused by this situation that he decided to turn it into a grand event. He spent a tenth of the money in his treasury just to decorate the jousting field, and he invited everyone in his kingdom to attend. *(During this section of dialogue the set crew set adds trimming for joust, then the crowd comes in. Emily could be handing out flowers to everyone.)*

PHYSICIAN: There was a grand parade before the joust, no doubt.

KNIGHT: Yes, of course.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: With all the lords riding their finest stallions.

NUN: And the ladies in their finest embroidered gowns.

REEVE: Visiting dukes from other kingdoms.

PHYSICIAN: Bright shields, golden helmets, and colorful coats of arms!

YEOMAN: *(He turns his attention away from the scholar as he says this line, and the scholar quickly takes the opportunity to sneak off and relocate himself in the group of pilgrims.)* Polished lances, tight bowstrings, and sharpened blades! *(As he turns back towards scholar, he notices that he is gone. He shrugs.)*

WIFE OF BATH: And a sumptuous banquet awaiting them in the grand hall of the nearby castle!

OXFORD SCHOLAR: And prayers and sacrifices to the gods, being that this WAS IN ANCIENT GREECE.

KNIGHT: Yes. Palamon prayed to Venus--I mean Aphrodite-- and Arcite prayed to Mars.

OXFORD SCHOLAR: Apollo!

KNIGHT: Apollo.

LAWYER: Love will triumph over war. I can see the outcome already. Palamon will win the joust because he sought the favors of the god of love.

FRIAR: God of love, god of war... what rot!

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WIFE OF BATH: *(to friar)* Sush!

KNIGHT: The day of the joust dawned bright and clear. The clattering sounds of armor and the neighing of impatient horses filled the air.

You can stage the joust without horses. Simply have Arcite and Palamon run at each other. If you want to be elaborate, you could use those horse costumes with fake legs.

The crowd is in place and ready for the joust to begin.

DUKE: Welcome to this most illustrious and unusual event. The winner of this contest shall win the hand of Emily in marriage. The loser shall forfeit his life. Are the brave knights ready to begin?

ARCITE and PALAMON: Ready!

KNIGHT: And with the sound of the trumpet, the joust began.

(Arcite and Palamon make several passes at each other, but only do minor damage. All actors ooh and aah at appropriate point. Then, on the final pass, Arcite spears Palamon. Palamon falls.)

DUKE: Halt! Stop the fight! It is done! No need to finish off Palamon. I am a man of mercy. Palamon may have his life if he can recover. Arcite is the man who shall have Emily.

(Arcite takes off his helmet. Onlookers cheer for him.)

KNIGHT: But fate was not done even yet. No, it was to strike one last time.

Looking at Emily, Arcite advances towards her. He accidentally trips and falls over Palamon's body and lands on his sword, stabbing himself. You may want to play this scene in "slow motion" to increase the melodrama and decrease the realism. All rush to Arcite's side. Emily screams and runs into the arms of female companions. Arcite is obviously dying.

ARCITE: Alas my sweetest Emily. Alas the parting of our company. After I am gone, forget not Palamon. If he should rise and recover his health, he can give you both true love and wealth. He will serve you all his life, if you should choose to be his wife. *(Arcite dies.)*

PALAMON: My cousin! No! Don't leave me!

DUKE: We are but pilgrims passing through this world. Come, let us find a site and build a sepulcher for good Arcite.

(All story characters except Emily and Palamon exit, carrying off Arcite. Palamon slowly gets up and stands, head down. Emily is also standing, but a little ways from Palamon. She also has her head down. They wait for more story from the knight, as are the pilgrims.)

All pilgrims look in silence at the knight, waiting for any more ending to the story.

THE WIFE OF BATH: *(After the right amount of dramatic silence)* So then what happened?

KNIGHT: Palamon recovered and, after the proper amount of time to finish grieving for Arcite, he married Emily. *(Palamon and Emily raise their heads, walk towards each other, joins hands, then leave the stage.)* An they lived happily ever after. *(Knight makes this last sentence sound like a grand ending. Then he gets up and starts walking. Others follow his cue. Silence as all think. Puzzled looks on some faces.)*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: That's it? They lived happily ever after?

KNIGHT: Yes, they were quite happy together.

All pilgrims start walking. Another pause, and puzzled faces.

CHAUCEER: Well, that was a very noble story, wasn't it, everyone?

All pilgrims give various words of agreement that it was indeed a very noble story. More silence as they continue to walk.

HARRY: That was a very noble story, sir knight, and very well told indeed.

PHYSICIAN: Yes, very noble it was.

Another pause, and more walking.

LAWYER: As a man of law, I'm always concerned about justice. Was justice served in that story? Why did Palamon win, and not Arcite? Was Palamon more worthy in some way?

MADAME EGLANTINE: I'd say not. I think they were both silly and impetuous!

NUN: Two sides of the same coin!

REEVE: Palamon didn't deserved Emily more than Arcite?

MILER: I don't think so.

LAWYER: So a really good story rewards good and punishes evil, right?

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Of course!

LAWYER: I've got just such a story. But I will need your help (*gestures to the audience, also, to indicate audience participation*). When good triumphs, you are to applaud and cheer, and when evil SEEMS to triumph, you are to "boo" and show your displeasure. We are ready then, for a tale from the days when Rome had just become a Christian Empire.

The Lawyer's Tale

SCENE 4

LAWYER: In ancient Syria there once lived a young Sultan (that's a prince). This sultan loved to have his merchants come to his palace and tell him about the things they had seen on their travels. Of all the things they told the sultan, one item impressed him more than anything else: tales about the daughter of the Roman Emperor, Lady Constance. The merchants related to the sultan everything they had heard about this lady Constance. "There never was such a daughter since the beginning of the world," everyone had said. "Such beauty and such goodness as you've never seen. Absolutely peerless in beauty, and yet untouched by pride. Lady Constance the pure!! (*APPLAUSE OR CHEERING*)". These stories began to haunt the sultan, and before he knew it, he had determined to make her his bride. In fact, even though he had never met her, he said he couldn't live without her!

The sultan knew that a Catholic princess would never agree to marry a Muslim prince, so he changed his religion and was baptized a Christian. This change of religion pleased the Roman emperor, and he agreed to send Lady Constance to Syria to marry the sultan. Poor Constance, sent off so far from home, never to see her friends and family, ever again! (*"AWS" OR BOOS*)

When Constance got to Syria, there was a huge celebration in her honor, the likes of which had never been seen in that land. (*CHEER*)

BUT..... the sultan's mother was not all please with this turn of events. She was outraged that her son had turned away from his country's religion. She hired soldiers to deal with the situation... (*BOO*) Can I say what they did?

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Is it very unpleasant?

LAWYER: Yes, a bit... well... rather a lot, really.

YEOMAN: Tell on! We want to hear the details!

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Have mercy on the gentle folks. Just tell only what you must.

LAWYER: Well... First they... (*looks as though he is trying to words, but can't come up with them*). (*Meanwhile, the yeoman is sort of acting out what the lawyer can't find words for- piercing, chopping, cutting, hacking, motions. He isn't making a display of it, he's just letting his violent imagination run. His pantomimes will suffice for description of the scene*). Then they..... and then..... and then..... well, and then it was all over (*yeoman does a finger snap indicating "drat"?*) and everyone was killed, ...EXCEPT for Lady Constance. Yes, miraculously, Lady Constance survived! (*CHEERS*) However, she was captured and put on a sailing ship (*BOO*) ... BUT, it was bound for her homeland, Rome! (*CHEER*) Unfortunately, there was mutiny aboard the ship, and the mutineers decided not to go to Rome! (*BOO*) They mutineers took the ship north, and they wrecked it on the coast of England. (*BOO*) Fortunately, however, a kindly English constable found Constance on the beach and took her in. (*CHEER*)

Lady Constance lived with the constable and his wife for many months. Everyone around noticed her beauty and her purity. (*CHEER*) Unfortunately, one of the neighbors happened to be a young knight who was less than chivalrous.

CHAUCER: No offense to any chivalrous knights present in this company, of course!

KNIGHT: None taken.

LAWYER: This less-than-chivalrous knight was determined to make this fair young girl his bride, whether she wanted him or not. But he could not win her affection. She did not like him at all and she let him know it!

WIFE OF BATH: Good for her!

LAWYER: The knight was furious that she would not love him (how could she—he was a scoundrel!) and so the knight thought of a plan of revenge upon poor Constance. (*BOO*)

The knight killed the constable's wife and made it look like Constance did it! (*BOO*) Poor, innocent Constance was taken before the king of that land, King Allan. The king heard the accusation of murder and looked at Constance. He saw the purity in her face (*CHEER*) and just could not believe she had done such a thing. He said that to be able to confer the death penalty upon her, he would need a witness to swear on a stack of Bibles that she had done this deed. If there

was a witness to take this oath, then he would have no choice but to execute Constance. Who was there to swear this? (pause dramatically) The knight stepped forward! (BOO)

Yes, the knight put his hand on the stack of Bibles, ready to lie and swear that Constance had indeed done this deed. (BOOOOO!!!!)

But then a voice spoke from heaven and said, “No! She is innocent!” (CHEER!) And a huge hand appeared out of nowhere and struck the knight on the head and he fell over dead! (CHEER!) And so Constance was vindicated by the Lord Himself, and King Allan was converted to Christianity right then and there! (CHEER) King Allan fell in love with Lady Constance, and since he was a good and virtuous king, she agreed to marry him, and the whole kingdom rejoiced. The end! (CHEER)

WIFE OF BATH: I love stories that end with weddings. I’ve had five weddings myself, you know.

PARDONER: Constance must have been carrying a powerful relic with her. Relics can work miracles, you know.

PHYSICIAN: No they can’t.

PARDONER: Have you ever tried one?

PHYSICIAN: No.

PARDONER: Then how do you know?

PHYSICIAN: I’m a physician and a scientist.

PARDONER: Oh.

HARRY: Well, we’ve got two tales entered in our contest now. We need some more.

FRIAR: How about something funny.

HARRY: Does anyone know a funny story?

MILLER: I do! I’ve got some real rip-snorters!

REEVE: I bet you do you old codger! And they are probably full of slander and scandal, too!

MILLER: Oh shut up, Oswald. My tale is just like the one the knight told... only better!

REEVE: You- a noble story? Give me a break!

MILLER: It’s the same as the knight’s—it’s about two men in love with the same woman. That’s what the knight’s tale was about, wasn’t it?

REEVE: Well, yes.. but..

MILLER: Well, then, let me begin.

HARRY: Yes, please do.

MILLER: And, my dear reeve, I will dedicate the story to you.

REEVE: Please don’t.

The Miller’s Tale

SCENE 5

(The Miller’s tale was intended by Chaucer to mimic the knight’s tale. The Miller tells a story with the same theme, of two men in love with the same woman, but does so in a lower class way. The knight’s story was noble and he told it in a aristocratic way. The miller is of a lower class in society. His story is earthy, almost “grungy.” The miller’s tone of voice and choice of words reflects his lower social class.)

MILLER: Once upon a time, there was a miserly old reeve named Oswald. *(enter Oswald, an old fellow, not very with-it)*

MADAME EGLANTINE: Well, that’s harmless start.

MILLER: Who had a beautiful young daughter, named Alison. *(enter Allison)*

NUN: Here’s trouble already.

MILLER: This reeve had a spare room that he rented out to earn extra money. At the time of my story the renter just happened to be a young university student named Nicholas. *(enter Nicholas)*

NUN: Double trouble!

MILLER: Nicholas took a liking to Allison, and Allison decided that she liked Nicholas, too. However, Nicholas was not the only person who had taken a liking to Alison. There was also young clerk named Absalom. *(enter Absalom)* But he will come into the story later. *(exit Absalom)*

Nicholas wanted to be alone with Allison to be able to whisper sweet nothings in her ear. But her father was always around. Nicholas saw that to get some time alone with Alison he was going to have to think of a plan that would keep Oswald out of the house for at least a couple of hours. Being a clever young fellow, he thought up a brilliant plan. *(Nicholas whispers in Alison’s ear and they both giggle)*

(Nicholas goes behind a door (real or imaginary) and lies down on the floor staring up at the ceiling. Enter Oswald and Allison.)

ALISON: Father, I'm worried about dear Nicholas. He's been in his room for three days. I think something may have happened to him.

OSWALD: Three days? He hasn't even come out for meals?

ALISON: No.

OSWALD: Let's see what the problem is, then. *(Knocks on the door.)* Son, are you in there? Open up! *(Knocks again.)* Hello? Nicholas? Are you all right in there? *(Knocks again.)* Open up, I say! Open up or I'm a comin' in after ya! *(No response from behind the door.)*

(Oswald runs at the door and bashes it open. Nicholas is there on the floor.)

NICHOLAS: *(pretending to be dazed, almost in a trance)* Must it be, then? Must this be the way it ends?

OSWALD: Ya scholarly fool! You've been studyin' to much! The books have addled your brain! *(He shakes him, trying to bring him to his senses.)*

NICHOLAS: It's all over tomorrow!

OSWALD: What's all over? You make no sense, lad.

NICHOLAS: The world... it's the end of the world. I've looked through my weather charts and checked my astrology charts and they both predict another flood- as big as old Noah's flood! And it's coming tomorrow! I read it in my books!

OSWALD: Alas! What can we do? Must we be swept away in the flood?

NICHOLAS: I have a plan!

ALISON: Tell him—I mean, tell us!

NICHOLAS: Get three big tubs that we can use as boats and put them on the roof. When it starts to rain, we'll go up on the roof, get into our tubs, and when the water comes we'll just float away in our little boats.

OSWALD: Wasn't Noah on his boat a long time? Don't you think we'll need a really big boat and supplies to last a couple of weeks at least?

NICHOLAS: Oh no, my book say the flood will only last a day. The waters will be gone by nine o'clock in the morning the following day. But oh what a terrible day tomorrow will be!!

OSWALD: Well what are we waiting for? I'm getting those tubs! *(Exit Oswald.)*

(Nicholas and Alison have a hysterical giggling fit.)

MILLER: And so, that night, Oswald was so afraid of getting swept away in the flood while he slept, that he decided to sleep sitting in his little tub boat on the roof. *(Oswald goes up on the roof and gets in his tub. This can be accomplished by having a ladder be the roof, and having him sit on top of the ladder with a flat, cut-out cardboard tub on his side, facing the audience. It will look to the audience that he is in the tub, but actually he is behind the cardboard tub shape.)* Oswald begins to snore loudly and keeps it up until he wakes up.

Meanwhile, Nicholas and Alison stole some precious moments together in the parlor. *(Nicholas and Alison ham it up here, with ridiculously silly lovey-dovey stuff, fake kissing noises, or whatever will make the little kids in the audience laugh.)*

Suddenly, there was a noise at the window.

ABSALOM: *(in a very, very, loud whisper)* Alison! Alison!

NICHOLAS: What's that noise?

ALISON: Nothing.

ABSALOM: Alison, honey-comb, are you at home?

NICHOLAS: Who is it?

ALISON: It's the clerk named Absalom, He's such a pain! He's always hanging around trying to get my attention.

ABSALOM: Alison, sweet cinnamon, wake up and greet me with tender words. I long to hear your angelic voice coming from your sweet lips.

ALISON: *(goes over to the window)* Go away, Absalom! Go away you great ape!

ABSALOM: I can't go! I am drawn to you like a bee is drawn to flowers, like a bird is drawn to the air, like a fawn is drawn to its mother, like flies are drawn to....well, never mind....

ALISON: Quit jabbering already and be off!

ABSALOM: I'll go away on one condition: I get a good-bye kiss.

ALISON: Oh all right. Just one. But I want to sweeten by breath first. I'll be right back.

(Goes over to Nicholas.) Come over here- you've got to see this. *(She has a fit of giggles just thinking about what she is going to do. She picks up a big, dead fish from a frying pan and holds it up. Both almost burst with silent laughter.)*

Alison goes over to the window.

Come over here, quick! Get your kiss and be gone!

Absalom puckers up and closes his eyes. Alison holds up the fish and puts the fish mouth to Absalom's.

ABSALOM: Yech!!! What the..? *(realizes he has been tricked, starts wiping his lips on his shirt sleeve)*

Nicholas joins Alison in a loud laugh.

ABSALOM: Who else is in there? Alison, who's with you? I thought you were alone!

NICHOLAS: *(in a falsetto voice, to imitate Alison's)* No, it's just little old me! There's no one else in here, and certainly not anyone named Nicholas.

Absalom exits, fuming and angry. Nicholas and Alison laugh again.

ABSALOM: Nicholas! I'll get him back really good!

MILLER: And so Absalom went off, determined to get revenge. He had a friend who was a blacksmith, and he sneaked into his shop, fired up the coals, and produced a red-hot branding iron. With this red-hot branding iron in his hand, he returned to see Alison again.

ABSALOM: *(outside the window)* Alison! My sweetie-pie!

NICHOLAS: *(in falsetto again)* Yes?

ABSALOM: My little flower-leaf, I'm back for another kiss. And I've also brought you a nice present.

NICHOLAS: I'll be right there my sweetie-dove. *(He goes over to the window.)*

ABSALOM: It is so dark I can't see where you are. Say something, my pretty little bird, so that I know where you are.

Nicholas can either use a whoopee cushion or just make that noise with his mouth. In the original, Nicholas actually does the real thing, and thus we know that the word "fart" goes back to at least the late 1300's.

NICHOLAS: I'm ready for my kiss. *(He sticks his rear end out of the window.)*

Absalom is ready with the hot iron and smites Nicholas on his rump.

NICHOLAS: Aaaaaaahhhh! Aaaaaaahhhh! Water! Water! Help! Water! Water!

OSWALD: *(Waking up suddenly on the roof.)* What? Water? Has the flood come?

NICHOLAS: HELP! Waa-t-eeerrr!

OSWALD: Water! It's the flood! I'm ready to sail! Cuts the ropes holding his tub and sails down off the roof in his tub.

(Descending the ladder holding the boat cut out will look like tub is going down the roof.)

Oswald smashes down on top of Absalom.

ABSALOM: Help! I'm being attacked!

All the pilgrims are laughing heartily at this preposterous scene.

The miller goes after Absalom, who runs away. They both exit. Nicholas and Alison are right behind them with Nicholas crying Water! Water! They exit.

MILLER: And thus ends my tale.

REEVE: I'll repay your tale soon enough. I've got to think for a while, but later on I'll tell a story about a miller. It will begin like this: "Once upon a time, there was a round-faced, flat-nosed, hairless, vain, sly, thieving miller...."

MILLER: I'm honored.

REEVE: And it'll be twice as funny as yours.

FRIAR: I don't think anyone will be able to top the miller's tale.

WIFE OF BATH: *(quoting from the tale)* "It's the flood! I'm ready to sail!" *(then laughs hysterically)*

FRIAR: *(imitating Nicolas)* "Water! Water!" *(then laughs hysterically)*

(Other members of the pilgrim cast laugh along with these two, reliving the funniest moments of the tale.)

HARRY: Ah yes, the miller's tale will be a tough act to follow! Who in our company will be up to the task? Who is good with words? How about Mr. Chaucer, our resident professional "word-smith" You're good with words, Geoffrey. Make yourself heard, as others have. Tell us a merry story.

CHAUCEER: I'm more of a poet than a story-teller. I don't know many funny stories and certainly not any as funny as the one the miller has told us. Can I recite a poem instead?

HARRY: Certainly.

CHAUCEER: It's not a funny poem. It's more in the grand style.

HARRY: I'm sure it will be exquisite.

CHAUCEER: I'll do my best.

The Tale of Sir Topaz

SCENE 6

Pilgrims can keep walking through Chaucer's tale, or they can sit, at the director's discretion.

CHAUCER:

The Tale of Sir Topaz:

Listen, my lords, and do consent;
I know a tale of merriment
As merry as ever was
Of a noble knight on winning bent
In combat and in tournament.
His name was Sir Topaz.

(Production note: Chaucer should go on, right through the following dialogue, oblivious to the banter going on while he is talking. The audience, of course, will be focused on this banter. Chaucer's tale is boring in comparison to this lively and funny conversatio. Chaucer may want to be slightly quieter in volume than the interrupters, to make sure that the audience is primarily tuned in on the interrupters.)

PARDONER *(to the merchant)*: Here we are on the way to Canterbury, where we hope to receive a special blessing.

MERCHANT: *(somewhat suspiciously)* Yes....

PARDONER: You are interested in receiving blessings, then?

MERCHANT: *(again, suspiciously)* Well, yes...

PARDONER: My pockets are full of blessings!

MERCHANT: Really?

PARDONER: If you've got problems, I've got the relics to cure them! They say that if you hold a piece of the true cross for ten seconds, you will ward off evil for ten years. One look at the Virgin Mother's head cloth can prevent multiple cases of dandruff and lice. One quick peek at a saint's tooth can cure a cavity. *(opens a pocket as if to show the merchant)*

MERCHANT: Can I see them? *(leans over to try to peek in)*

PARDONER: *(quickly slapping the pocket shut)* For a small fee.

MERCHANT: How much?

PARDONER: One crown.

MERCHANT: A whole crown? Forget it then, I'll just be unblessed till we get to Canterbury.

PARDONER: Half a crown then.

MERCHANT: Maybe.

PARDONER: I'll throw in a glimpse of St. Sebastian's toe bone and a peek at some trimmings from St. Peter's beard.

MERCHANT: Well... I guess it's a deal. *(Pantomimes giving half a crown to the pardoner, then looks in a pocket.)*

Sir Topaz was a handsome knight
Like fine wheat bread, his face was white.
His lips were red as rose.
Like scarlet cloth his lips were bright
Set in his face, firm and tight.
He had a shapely nose.

Saffron his hair, and his beard of the same,
And clear down to his waist it came.
His shoes were of fine leather.
His hosiery from Bruges it came
His robe was bright as scarlet flame.
Expensive altogether!

Sir Topaz rode out one fine day
(In the month of April, or was it May?)

It makes no difference- you decide)
He mounted his horse- dappled gray-
and with a lance, he took his way
A long sword by his side.

Into the woods a mile at least
He rode and searched for wild beasts.
He searched for buck and hare.
And as he rode to north and east
He met, or nearly met, at least,
Some beasts that were very rare.

(Make sure that the Pardoner and the merchant have finished talking by this point so that the audience is tuned back in on Chaucer.)

In the woods and in the dale,
Grew ginger and licorice without fail,
And gillyflowers by the score.
And nutmeg good to put in ale,
And to spice up meat that has gone a bit stale...

REEVE: Is this a botany lesson or a story?

CHAUCEER:
There sang the birds, I really must say,
Such as the woodpecker and the jay...

FRIAR: No, it's an ornithology lecture.

CHAUCEER:
And the wood dove in great cheer
Sang a song both loud and clear...

HARRY: That's enough! This is the most boring story I've ever heard. Your silly nonsense makes my ears ache! I expected better.

CHAUCEER: I told you I'm not a story teller.

KNIGHT: Actually, I liked it. I'd like to hear more-

HARRY: Who's next? We've heard from only gentlemen so far. Let's have one of our ladies try their luck at entertaining us. Prioress Eglantine, can you liven things up? Chaucer nearly put us to sleep.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Well if everyone is asleep, then we need a rooster to wake us up. My story will have to have a rooster in it. *(Chanticleer enters, maybe crows?)* And if we have a rooster, then we'll need some hens. *(enter the hens)* And if we have chickens, we must have a whole barnyard. *(enter other animals)* And if we let a fox loose in the barnyard, we'll make such a racket that even our sound sleepers will stay awake! *(Fox does a loop around the stage then disappears again.)* This is the story of Chanticleer.

The Tale of Chanticleer

(in the original it is called "The Nun's Priest's Tale" and is told by her priest)

SCENE 7

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Once upon a time there lived a poor widow and her two daughters. *(can omit "two daughters" if you are not using them).* She had a small barnyard in which she kept cows, sheep, pigs, ducks, and chickens. *(You could have each type of animal make its sounds as its name is mentioned.)* Her pride and joy was her rooster whose name was Chanticleer. His comb was the reddest and biggest ever seen on a chicken, and his crow put other roosters to shame.

CHANTICLEER: Cock-a-doodle-dooooo!

WIDOW: *(Widow and daughters come out of house)* What a masterful crow! It always gives a shine to my rising!

CHANTICLEER: Cock-a-doodle-dooooo!

MAGGIE: Mother, we won't ever have to eat Chanticleer, will we?

ELIZABETH: Maggie!

WIDOW: No, dearest. We would never even think of it.

ELIZABETH: I can't believe you asked that.

WIDOW: Come in girls, let's eat breakfast.

PROIRESS EGLANTINE: The widow was very proud of Chanticleer. Chanticleer, in turn, was very proud of his hens. His favorite hen was named Madame Pertelote. They would sing together every morning.

CHANTICLEER AND PERTELOTE sing chicken-fashion together for a few seconds. *(The original poem has them singing these words: My love has gone to the country far away!)"*

WIDOW: Come girls, let's have breakfast! *(Widow and daughter go into house.)*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: One night, when all the barnyard animals were asleep, *(may want to pause here for a moment while all the animals actors get settled down in a sleeping position)* and Chanticleer and Pertelote were sitting on their perch, *(same pause)* Chanticleer had a very bad dream.

CHANTICLEER *is disturbed in his sleep. He murmurs in his sleep, then screams.*

PERTELOTE *(wakes up startled)* My Dear, my dear! My sweetest Chanticleer, what is the matter?

CHANTICLEER: Oh, my sweetest love dear, I've had the most terrible dream!

PERTELOTE: It's probably indigestion. I told you that funny colored worm might be poisonous.

CHANTICLEER: No, it's nothing I ate. This is a warning about the future. I'm sure of it!

PERTELOTE: Nonsense, everyone knows that bad dreams come from bad food. You just need some fresh cracked corn to clear your system.

CHANTICLEER: No, my dear sweet hen, I'm sure this dream has a meaning for me, and it's not a good one. I dreamed that I was being attacked by a dreadful beast. It had the body of a dog but it was orange and had big pointed ears and golden glowing eyes! A dreadful monster! Enough to make a chicken die of fright!

PERTELOTE: Calm down my dear, dreams are just meaningless nonsense. Go back to sleep.

CHANTICLEER: I hope you are right, my dear. But I could tell you stories I've heard about people who've had their dreams come true. And not good ones, either!

PERTELOTE: The ancient philosophers tell us that dreams are nothing.

CHANTICLEER: The ancient prophets in the Bible had dreams that came true.

PERTELOTE: That was different.

CHANTICLEER: I hope you're right. But just the same I'd rather stay on my perch all day today, just to be safe.

PERTELOTE: For shame! Fie on you, you great coward! Now you have lost my heart and all my love! Go and take a laxative!

CHANTICLEER: My pretty Pertelote, do not disown me. My sweet hen, your beauty will make my terrors flee. When you are beside me I feel as though nothing can harm me. The sun is coming up, it's time to start the day! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

(After he crows, the animals of the barnyard wake up and stretch and begin moving around.)

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: And so Chanticleer took his hen's advice, as Adam took Eve's, and decided to forget about his dream. *(Widow and daughters come out of the house again.)*

WIDOW: Maggie, go and gather the eggs while I sweep the porch. Be mindful of old Prissy. Remember, she pecks.

MAGGIE: Yes, mother. I'll be careful. *(She goes into hen house to collect eggs from under hens, which could be a funny bit of visual humor.)*

WIDOW: Elizabeth, feed the ducks and the sheep. I'll milk the cow when I am done with the sweeping.

ELIZABETH: Yes, mother. Come, Collie! Let's feed the ducks! *(Collie follows Elizabeth wherever she goes, as working dogs do. Elizabeth pantomimes throwing out scratch grain for the ducks. So we have the widow sweeping, Maggie gathering eggs, and Elizabeth feeding ducks. Maggie can shoo each hen from its nest as she gathers eggs. Prissy pecks, remember! Chanticleer and Pertelote hop down from the perch.)*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: And so Chanticleer and his hens enjoyed the beautiful morning sunshine.

ELIZABETH: Here, chick, chick, chicks! Here chick, chick, chicks! *(Pantomimes scattering grain.)*

MAGGIE: *(in the coop)* Go on hens, go get your breakfast. Go get those yummy worms and beetles!

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Little did they know that a fox had gotten into the barnyard in the middle of the night and was lurking in the shadows, waiting until the time was right to strike. *(Fox makes himself obvious, though he is hiding.)*

FOX: Mmm... drumsticks, spicy wings, white meat, dark meat, slurp. *(Looking at hens)*

WIDOW: Girls, are you finished with the chores? Come in for breakfast. *(Widow and daughter go in the house.)*

As the chickens wander around barnyard the fox appears at the edge, unseen by the chickens. Chanticleer wanders a little off to the side where the fox is, but is unaware of the fox. The fox is crouched down, hiding behind something. Chanti-

cleer's attention is drawn to a butterfly (or something else you may want to improvise) and comes almost face-to-face with the fox without even knowing it. The fox pops up suddenly, right in Chanticleer's face.

FOX: Hello, Mr. Breakfast!

CHANTICLEER: Aaack!

FOX: How are you Mr. Chanticleer? Are you afraid of me? I've not come to do you any harm. I've only come to hear you sing. I've heard that you have the most beautiful voice of any rooster that ever lived. They say that your voice is like unto an angel's. Would you sing for me, Mr. Chanticleer?

CHANTICLEER: Well, I... it's a little early for a concert, but I'll see what I can manage. Ahem...

Chanticleer stands on tiptoe, closes his eyes, and begins to crow. The fox jumps up and grabs him around the neck. Suggestion: use a wrestling-type hold with the rooster's head under the fox's arm. Since the rooster will still be on its feet, just leaning over with its head stuck, the fox should be able to "drag" the rooster around without doing any harm. The actors must cooperate while making an appearance of strife. The rooster should cackle and make terrible noises. Per-telote screams and clucks. The other hens begin screaming and clucking. They begin chasing the fox and Chanticleer. The widow and the other animals enter again.

WIDOW: What is all the racket about? Aaah! There's a fox in the barnyard! Come back with my rooster you fiendish fox! *The widow and the other animals join in the chase. The fox eventually runs off stage and all the rest follow him.*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: The fox ran on and on with poor Chanticleer dangling by his side.

(Fox and Chanticleer re-enter. Others stay off stage.) When they came to the edge of the field and were about to enter the woods, Chanticleer had an idea that just might save his life.

CHANTICLEER: *(in a choked voice)* Mr. Fox, Sir. If I were you, I'd signal to the others to stay out of the woods. You don't want them following you to your den, do you? Wave your arms and signal to them that they are fools to try to follow you. Tell them to let you eat your dinner in peace.

FOX: Good idea. *(Lets go of Chanticleer in order to wave his arms to signal the crowd off stage. The crowd need not re-enter nor be visible to the audience.)* Turn back! Don't follow--

As the fox lifts his arms to wave, Chanticleer jumps away, clear of the fox. Chanticleer goes to some sort of higher point-- in the original it is a tree. The fox is foiled!

FOX: O Chanticleer! I meant you no harm. Really, I didn't. You totally misunderstand me. It was just a fun game I like to play. If you come down, I'll explain it all so that you can understand.

CHANTICLEER: You can't fool me twice, Mr. Fox! We're both fools through and through, but you shall never be able to flatter me again! I've learned my lesson! Cock-a-doodle-doooo...!

SCENE 8

HARRY: A blessing on you, Madame Prioress. That was a merry tale of Chanticleer. That was a fine entry into our contest. But here we are at the day's end. We must all stop and rest. How many say we should stop at the inn up ahead? *(You may want to have your set crew roll out the inn front so that the pilgrims can actually go through the doorway to exit the stage.)*

ALL: Aye!

FRIAR: If the food's no good at this inn, I'm going down the street to the ale house.

REEVE: I second that.

All exit (through the door if you have the inn front set up.) As the pilgrims are exiting, the pardoner makes sure he is the last in line, so that he has time to have the following conversation while the others are going in. The conversation trails off as he goes into the inn himself.)

PARDONER: *(to the knight)* You are on your way to Canterbury to receive a blessing. I gather you are interested in blessings.

KNIGHT: Of a certain kind.

PARDONER: My pockets are full of extra blessings.

KNIGHT: Not that kind.

PARDONER: You misunderstand, sir. I have relics that have come straight from Rome and were recently blessed by the Pope himself. These aren't just ordinary relics.

KNIGHT: I've been around the world quite a bit, and in my travels, I've met enough splinters of the true cross to be able to build Noah's whole ark! If you collected all the genuine Virgin Mary head-cloths, you could sew enough sails for the entire English navy! I once saw three holy grails in one town...all genuine so they claimed.... *(may continue on with similar comments if you need more dialogue)*

AFTER INTERMISSION

SCENE 9

(Enter all pilgrims. They continue their journey, slowing walking around the stage.)

HARRY BAILEY: Well, good sister, that was a merry tale of Chanticleer! It seems to me that the moral of the story is that husbands shouldn't listen to their wives.

WIFE OF BATH: Excuse me?

MILLER: The hen thought it was nothing but indigestion, when the cock knew better!

WIFE OF BATH: The cock was so vain and stupid he almost got eaten!

MADAME EGLANTINE: It was just a story.

NUN: What if it was just a coincidence? Henhouses always have foxes lurking around them. It's not like he dreamed about a castle falling from the sky and then it happened!

WIFE OF BATH: I can say from experience that wives have much more common sense than their husbands. I've had five husbands, myself, and not one of them had a lick of common sense. If it hadn't been for me, they'd never have survived.

CHAUCE: Why did you marry them, then?

WIFE OF BATH: Even a fool of a husband can keep your warm on cold winter nights.

FRANKLIN or REEVE: As a professional household manager myself, I can say that I've never met a woman who could manage a household as well as a man could.

FRIAR: I agree. Women can't be trusted.

WIFE OF BATH: How do you know? You've never been married.

FRIAR: I've heard confessions.

CHAUCE: Good wife, did you not love any of these unfortunate men?

WIFE OF BATH: The last of the five I married for love. His name was Jenkin. He had been an Oxford student once and owned a huge stack of books.

OXFORD STUDENT: What's wrong with owning books?

WIFE OF BATH: Nothing, of course, my dear sweet young man! In fact, you almost remind me of my dear, sweet Jenkin. *(Oxford student blushes and looks awkward.)* But beware of your books, my lad! Jenkin's favorite book led him into trouble!

OXFORD STUDENT: What kind of book was it?

WIFE OF BATH: It was a volume of stories about wicked wives. Every night he would sit before the fire and read out loud from his book. I heard about everyone of them- - from Eve and Delilah in the Bible, on up through Roman history and mythology, and right up to present day. One night, I had had enough. As he was reading, I tore three pages from his accursed book and threw them into the fire. As my arm swung towards the fire, I knocked him on the ear and sent him sprawling. Then he jumped up, mad as a lion and swung back at me and caught me across the head. I fainted and he thought he had killed me. He was going to run away from the scene of the crime-

LAWYER: Never a smart thing to do. That's my recommendation as a lawyer.

WIFE OF BATH: -but I began to talk so he knew I wasn't dead. I said, "Have you killed me to get my inheritance? I forgive you my love. Just give me one last kiss." Then he came to me and said, "Forgive me, my dear. I promise I'll never do that again." Then he promised to yield to me in all household matters. He sat and read while I ran the household. And after that, I was as kind to him as any wife ever was to a husband.

FRIAR: Do we have to go on hearing the story of her life? Let's have a tale instead!

SUMMONER: Stop butting in, friar. I think she's interesting. You friars are as pesky as flies and half as clever.

FRIAR: You think so, you measly summoner? I know some scathing stories about obnoxious summoners. Maybe everyone would like to hear one?

SUMMONER: Tell ahead, friar, and then we'll have a laugh at some friars when I tell a tale!

HARRY: Silence! You are acting like fools! The widow from Bath will be the next to tell a tale.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Yes, but do go on in the same vein. We're all very interested.

WIFE OF BATH: I know just the story to tell.

Wife of Bath's Tale

SCENE 10

WIFE OF BATH: Long ago, in the days of King Arthur, fairies and elves still lived in our land. One rarely sees any kind of elfin being nowadays, thanks to all the pesky friars running about saying their prayers and blessing every nook and cranny of the landscape. Nowadays if you look behind a bush you won't see an elf or a leprechaun, you'll find a friar saying his devotions.

FRIAR: We're safer.

WIFE OF BATH: We're boring! Well, anyway, back in these magical King Arthur days, there lived a young knight. *(enter knight first, then maiden)* Now when this knight had been given his knighthood, he had pledged to live by the laws of chivalry, which required him to treat ladies with the highest respect. The knight was walking through the forest one day when he met a beautiful young maiden. He was overcome with her beauty and without even asking her permission he grabbed her and kissed her. *(the knight kisses the maiden on the cheek)*

MAIDEN: You uncouth beast you! Where are your manners?! I'm going to tell the king! *(maiden runs off)*

KNIGHT: Oops. *(stays on stage but sits down, with head down, until he is summoned)*

WIFE OF BATH: And so it happened that the knight was called to stand before King Arthur and Queen Guenivere. *(re-enter maiden, along with king and queen)*

KING ARTHUR: Young knight, stand before me! *(he does)* The charge against you is breaking the sacred code of chivalry and kissing this innocent young maiden against her will. How do you plead?

KNIGHT: Guilty, my lord.

KING ARTHUR: Off with your head, then! Guards, come and take him away!

QUEEN GUENIVERE: Wait! My dearest husband, don't you think this is a severe penalty for such a small crime?

KING: Small crime? Breaking the code of chivalry is the worst crime! What will we come to if our knights are not chivalrous? Off with his head, I say!

QUEEN: Let us ask the maiden her opinion. She is the one who was wronged.

KING: You, maiden, do wish this brash knight to go unpunished?

MAIDEN: Well...no...but...

KING: See? She agrees.

QUEEN: Let me rephrase that for you, my dear. Young maiden, do you wish that this knight have his head cut off?

MAIDEN: Oh, no! Please don't do that.

QUEEN: Let's think of another punishment, my dear.

KING: Well, I'm out of ideas. I'll leave it up to you, my dear. I'm off to a stack of kingly business. I'll see you at supper. *(king exits)*

QUEEN: Come hither, young knight. *(knight comes and kneels before queen, fearful)* I require of you just one small task, and I will give you one year to complete it.

COURT LADY 1: Make him kill the dragon that terrifies people at the edge of the kingdom.

QUEEN: That's too easy. And besides, it doesn't fit the crime.

COURT LADY 2: Make him wash dishes for a year!

COURT LADY 3: Make him embroider a tapestry!

COURT LADY 4: Make him write an epic love poem!

QUEEN: No, it must be even more fitting to his crime.

COURT LADY 5: Make him wear a dress! *(then they all look at each other and try to smother hysterical giggles)*

QUEEN: Knight, I have decided your fate. Here is your task: you must find out what it is that women most desire. A year and a day from now you shall stand before me and give me the correct answer to this question: What do women most desire?

MAIDEN: What if he is wrong?

QUEEN: Well... then we'll hand him back over to the king again. That should motivate him to work hard to find the right answer. *(turns back to the knight)* Knight, I charge you to stand before me in this very room a year and a day from now and give me your answer to this question: "What do women most desire?" Now off with you!!

(knight bows, then exits quickly, queen and maiden exit more slowly)

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: A fitting punishment for the crime, I say. Well done, Guinevere!

OXFORD SCHOLAR: It's what they call "poetic justice." It's a standard literary technique.

MILLER: I don't care what it's called, it's just prolonging the agony, I say. The knight will lose his head in the end -- not

even women don't know what women want!

LAWYER: This can serve as a reminder to us all of how far law has progressed since those days. If that poor knight were to be tried before a modern judge-

(knight re-enters sometime during these side comments, along with six other people)

WIFE OF BATH: -it would be a very boring story. Now, the knight began to travel across the countryside asking this question to everyone he met. *(the six people line up in a half circle, and the knight goes around to each one)* And everyone he met had a different answer.

KNIGHT: *(takes out a notepad and pencil)* Excuse me, madam, can you tell me what women most desire?

PERSON 1: Well, being a woman, myself, I want to be rich! I want lots and lots of money to spend! Nothing can improve your life more than a bag of gold!

KNIGHT: *(writes this down on a notepad as he speaks)* To be rich. *(go to next person)* Madam, can you tell me what women most desire?

PERSON 2: That's easy. We women want to be beautiful. For better or for worse, being attractive can get you just about anything you want in this life—a handsome husband, admiring friends, maybe even an invitation to the royal court. No question beauty is important. Bring on the make-up!

KNIGHT: *(writing)* To be beautiful. *(goes on to next person)* What is your opinion- what do women most desire?

PERSON 3: No question about it, women want a good husband.

KNIGHT: *(writing)* A good husband.

PERSON 3: And a nice house.

KNIGHT: *(writing)* A nice house.

PERSON 3: And a tidy kitchen.

KNIGHT: *(writing)* A tidy kitchen.

PERSON 3: And a nice wardrobe full of nice clothes, and-

KNIGHT: That's enough, thank you. *(moves on to next person)* What do you think women most desire?

PERSON 4: Hmm...That's a hard one. Women want so much. What do they want the most? In my experience, it must be flattery. They want you tell them how nice they look in their new dress, and how young they look in their new hairstyle. I don't think it is the things that make them happy, but rather the compliments they receive about them.

KNIGHT: *(writing)* Flattery and compliments. *(to person 5)* And you, ma'm? What do you want most of all?

PERSON 5: Children, of course! And lots of them! Being a mother is a woman's greatest achievement. Women may say otherwise, but deep down inside, they desire motherhood.

KNIGHT: *(writing)* Lots of children. *(turns to person 6)* And you- what do think women want most?

PERSON 6: None of the answers you have so far is correct. I can tell you the right answer. Women want to be important. They want to be princesses and queens, or at least duchesses or baronesses. If you are important, you can get anything else you want.

KNIGHT: *(begins to write)* To be imp-

PERSON 4: That's not true. Women don't care that they really are important, they just want to feel important.

PERSON 3: I just want a nice house and a tidy kitchen.

KNIGHT: Thank you all for your help. I think I have plenty of answers to choose from.

(All six people say their "your welcomes" and "good days" and exit stage)

WIFE OF BATH: And so the knight wandered the countryside for a year gathering answers from everyone he met. At the end of the year he found that he was no closer to having the right answer than he was at the beginning.

KNIGHT: Look at this list! I have dozens of answers! No one can agree. I've written down everything from "true love and happiness" to "not having my sink clog ever again." And tomorrow I must stand before the queen and give the correct answer! Which one of these is right? Maybe none of them are! I'm doomed! *(while knight is saying these lines, the old hag hobbles onto stage unobtrusively)*

WIFE OF BATH: The knight was in despair. Tomorrow was the last day and he couldn't be sure that he had the right answer. But it happened that as he began walking in the direction of the castle, he met an ugly old hag.

HAG: Sir knight, where are you going with such anxious breath. You look like you are going to meet your death.

KNIGHT: I am. Tomorrow is the day I must stand before the queen and answer her question. If I do not give the correct answer or my life is forfeit. I have spent a whole year traversing the countryside looking for the right answer.

HAG: Tell me the question that has you so distraught. I will help you if you will be taught.

KNIGHT: I must find out what women most desire.

HAG: Give me your hand and swear to me true, that you will do whatever I ask of you. I know the answer and can save your life, but you must promise to make me your wife.

KNIGHT: Well, considering that the alternative is to have my head chopped off, I guess I'll accept your offer.

HAG: Your life is safe, or let me die, if the queen doesn't say the same thing as I. I will whisper the answer into your ear. Your life is safe, you have nothing to fear. *(knight leans over and hag whispers into his ear)*

KNIGHT: Really? Well, that figures. *(knight and hag exit)*

FRIAR: I'll bet I know exactly what she said.

SUMMONER: Is that a confession?

HARRY: Stop it, you two!

WIFE OF BATH: And so the knight, with the ugly old hag at his side, came into the presence of the queen the next day. *(enter queen, maiden, several other female members of the court, the knight and the hag)*

WIFE OF BATH: There was quite a stir at the court when the news came that the knight had returned with an answer to the queen's question. Many a court maiden gathered around to hear the conclusion of this matter.

COURT LADY 1: Can you believe he actually came back on time?

COURT LADY 2: And with an answer!

COURT LADY 3: I can't wait to hear what he says.

COURT LADY 4: I'll bet he's wrong.

COURT LADY 5: What is the right answer, anyway?

QUEEN GUENIVERE: Knight! You have returned on the appointed day. Very good. Do you now have an answer for me?

KNIGHT: Yes, my lady.

QUEEN: Tell me then. What is it that women most desire?

KNIGHT: Women want...

ALL LADIES: Yes? *(whole court leans forward in suspense)*

KNIGHT: Women most desire...

ALL LADIES: Yes? *(they lean even further forward)*

KNIGHT: Well...they want to have their own way. *(whole court leans back again, sighs)*

QUEEN: Well, what do we say ladies? Do we spare him? Can anyone contradict his answer? *(ladies all look around at each other)*

COURT LADY 1: But I thought that's what men want.

COURT LADY 2: How can men and women want the same thing?

COURT LADY 3: We're all human.

QUEEN: Young maiden, what do you say?

MAIDEN: He shall not die, he shall be spared. He is worthy of his life.

QUEEN: Knight, who told you this answer?

HAG: *(suddenly coming forward)* It was I your majesty! And he pledged by his honor, in my hand, that he would do whatever I would demand. I asked him to take me for his wife, if I was successful in sparing his life.

QUEEN: Is this true, sir knight?

KNIGHT: Alas, it is true, I must confess.

QUEEN: Well then, you must keep your promise. Or do you intend to break the code of chivalry again?

KNIGHT: Please, can I do something else instead? Move a mountain or kill a dragon or something? Please don't make me marry that... that thing.

QUEEN: A promise is a promise. Come ladies, let's prepare for a wedding!

COURT LADY 4: I'll gather the flowers!

COURT LADY 5: I'll call the priest!

YOUNG MAIDEN: I'll tell everyone in the castle there's to be a wedding tonight! *(queen and ladies all exit, followed by knight, then hag)*

WIFE OF BATH: And so the knight was forced to marry the old hag. There was no joy in the heart of the knight, there was only sorry and misery. After the ceremony was over, the knight took his new bride to his home. *(Knight and hag re-enter, and sit on a two-person bench facing the audience. There also needs to be a "dressing screen" that the hag can go behind to magically transform into a maiden. You might also want to set up a very small table with some decorative candles and champagne glasses on it to suggest festivity.) Knight is looking down, away from hag. He won't look at her.)*

HAG: Well, here we are together on our first night. It's so romantic, with the candles and moonlight *(long awkward pause while hag expects a return comment and gets nothing)* Is every knight so backward with a spouse? Is this part of chivalry in King Arthur's house? *(again a long pause while the hag waits for a response, but there is none)* I am your

love, you own wedded wife. I am the woman who saved your life. I have never done you anything but right. Why do treat me like this our first night? If I have a fault, please make it plain. I will try to amend, if I possibly can.

KNIGHT: Amend it? How? It never can be fixed, truth to tell. You are so loathsome I can't bear to look at you!

HAG: Is it my looks?

KNIGHT: Yes.

HAG: Is it my age?

KNIGHT: Yes.

HAG: Is it my poverty?

KNIGHT: Yes.

HAG: As for my poverty, at which you grieve, our Lord and Savior in whom we believe, Chose to live his life without money and wealth. Earthly poverty can give spiritual health. Poverty, too, by bringing us low, can help us better both God and self to know.

Poverty also can be a glass in which to see, which are our true friends, it seems to me.

As for my age, do you count it as fault? No, rather it is blessing, for folly to halt!

The old should be given the utmost respect, not a cold shoulder and daily neglect.

If I am ugly, it's better that way, for less is the chance I will be stolen away.

KNIGHT: I'm sorry, my lady. You are right. *(while the knight is speaking, he's still not looking at her. She gets up and quickly slips behind the dressing screen, takes off her hag mask, and waits to come in on cue, when the knight says "my bride would be...")* You are very wise and you have not done anything that I should reproach you for. It's not your fault that you're.. you're... the way you are. It's just that I always imagined that my bride would be...

HAG: *(coming out from behind the screen, now a beautiful young maiden)* Young, and fair, and beautiful as the first flowers of spring.

KNIGHT: Yes. *(turning around to look at her)* Yikes!

HAG/MAIDEN: I can fulfill your earthly desire, but a choice from you is what I require.

You may have me beautiful or ugly, it is your choice, but think it through first, before using your voice.

If I am fair and lovely, not only your eyes will see, but every eye in the kingdom will turned upon me.

Other young knights will long for a chance, to get my attention when you're away in France.

Jealousy and suspicion will haunt you each day. You'll wonder what I'm up to when you're away.

If I am ugly, however, I'll surely be, a devoted wife as ever could be.

I'll always be your true and humble wife, never displeasing you in all my life.

Now which will it be? What's best for you? Beautiful but false, or ugly but true?

KNIGHT: My lady, I cannot chose, for I want both. I cannot help but think of beauty, but I do not want the worries that go with it. I do not want ugly, but I do want you to be faithful. I don't know which to choose.

HAG/MAIDEN: You must choose.

KNIGHT: My dearest wife, I cannot choose. You choose for me. Whatever you want is what I want. I am content with whatever pleases you.

HAG/MAIDEN: That is the answer! You have passed the test! Now I will be both to you, and your life will be blest! Now that you've learned to yield me the reins, our marriage will last and be full of gains.

WIFE OF BATH: And so the knight's wife remained both beautiful and faithful. The knight had learned his lesson and they lived happily ever after. The end.

SCENE 11

FRIAR: Well now, doesn't this story hit some sore points. What do we all think about that ending?

OXFORD STUDENT: Sometimes difficult questions are best left in the hands of professional theologians.

SUMMONER: Well said, lad! Our persona non grata was about to stir up more trouble and you quenched him. Our thanks to you.

FRIAR: I haven't been quenched. I've been stoked! I'm ready to tell a tale, if our host will agree to let me be next.

SUMMONER: Oh no you don't. If you have something to say of me, go ahead and say it to me.

PARDONER: Yes, please don't stain all these honest pilgrims' ears with your filthy talk.

FRIAR: Filthy talk, indeed! I'll tell the truth about summoners—how they run all over towns with their false accusations, and when they leave, a beating awaits them at the edge of town!

SUMMONER: How dare you!!

HARRY BAILEY: Sirs! Keep your anger down. Be polite. In this company we cannot have a fight. Holy Friar, let us hear

your tale.

SUMMONER: You mean his lies...

HARRY BAILEY: You'll get your turn, summoner. Hold your peace.

FRIAR: This is a story about a summoner and his best friend.

SUMMONER: And who might my best friend be? Let me try to guess. A rat? A pig? A worm?

FRIAR: Oh no...much better than that!

SUMMONER: An apostate priest? An outcast bishop?

FRIAR: No, much higher ranking than those.

SUMMONER: I give up.

FRIAR: A summoner's best friend? Why, of course- who else but the Devil himself?!!!

SUMMONER: You lousy—(*Pardoner stops him from attacking the Friar*)

HARRY BAILEY: On with your story, friar, we all want to hear it.

The Friar's Tale

SCENE 12

FRIAR: As you all know, the only reason a summoner exits is to get people into trouble.

SUMMONER: Ipse dixit. (*ip-say dix-it*) That's his opinion. (*the Latin means: "so he says" meaning an assertion not proven*)

FRIAR: Summoners seem able to know about even secret sins. Some say they have spies all about the towns, looking in windows, and listening through doors. The spies report all kinds of sins to the summoner, and get a commission from every dollar the summoner makes. So when the summoner arrives at the door with a writ from the bishop calling them to account for their sins, people are glad to pay up, in order to have the summoner scratch their name out of his little black book. The summoner, he feigns compassion so well! "Sinner, I'll help you out a little," he says, "I'll show mercy upon you, and just forget this ever happened.... For a small fee, of course. Just a dollar or two, will be enough." Then they gladly pay, to have their little matter stay private and not be reported to the bishop. Yes, this is the life of a summoner. Well, there once was a certain summoner, who shall remain nameless. (*enter summoner*) This summoner was traveling through the countryside one day, on his way to a town, with a sack full of forged writs.

SUMMONER: Just a caveat, everyone: this story will be ad homineum, not de facto. (*Meaning a personal attack, not factual statements.*)

FRIAR: And as we was traveling, he met a handsome young yeoman. (*enter devil, disguised as a yeoman*)

DEVIL: Good day, sir! Where are you traveling to?

TALE SUMMONER: Yonder town, to collect.

DEVIL: You are a bailiff, then?

TALE SUMMONER: Ah... well, yes.

FRIAR: But of course, the summoner was lying. He was ashamed to tell the truth, that he was a summoner. So he let the yeoman believe he was a bailiff.

DEVIL: Well, isn't that a coincidence. I'm a bailiff, too! We should walk together. Maybe we could give each other some helpful tips.

TALE SUMMONER: Yes, surely. That would be fine.

DEVIL: I'm a stranger in these parts. You could help me find my way from town to town.

TALE SUMMONER: Where have you come from?

DEVIL: From the south.

TALE SUMMONER: From Kent?

DEVIL: No, much more south than that... in a more-- southerly-- direction. (*points down to the ground, meaning to hint "hell"*) It's very far away, but I hope to have you come and visit me there some day.

TALE SUMMONER: Oh yes, I'd love to. I promise I'll try.

DEVIL: It's a bit hot where I live.

TALE SUMMONER: Oh, that won't bother me.

DEVIL: I mean it's REALLY, REALLY, REALLY hot.

TALE SUMMONER: Heat doesn't bother me.

DEVIL: It's as hot as hell.

TALE SUMMONER: That's okay.

DEVIL: Actually, it is hell.

TALE SUMMONER: *(startled and jumping back)* Bless me! What's that you say? I took you for a yeoman! What I see is a man's shape, just like me. How can you be...the you know what? What do you look like down there?

DEVIL: I am without bodily form down there. When I go about on the earth I can appear in any shape I want to.

TALE SUMMONER: Well that certainly is an advantage. I wish I could do that.

DEVIL: I need this advantage, because I have a big disadvantage.

TALE SUMMONER: What's that?

DEVIL: I can only take what people willingly give me. "The devil take you!" they say, so I get it. Usually I just get things that annoy people- holes in the road, weeds in their gardens, in-laws they can't along with...

TALE SUMMONER: I never thought of it like that.

DEVIL: Look, there's someone in trouble over there, I'll show you what I mean. *(enter villager)*

VILLAGER: *(is trying to get his cart and horse out of a ditch by thrashing the horse and yelling at him)* You rotten lazy horse! Pull! Pull! You're nothing but trouble you stinking pile of skin and bones! The devil take you! And the cart and hay, too!

TALE SUMMONER: Did you hear what he just said? He gave you his horse and cart. That's a great catch for the day!

DEVIL: He doesn't mean it. He'll take it right back. You just wait and see. *(meanwhile the villager has been continuing to try to get his cart and horse unstuck)*

VILLAGER: Pull! Pull! *(cart finally comes free)* Yes! God bless you! My cart's out of the mud now, by Saint Loy! Well pulled, my old horse! God save you and bless you! *(villager and horse exit)*

DEVIL: See what I mean? I didn't get anything out of that. People so often say something they don't mean when they are angry.

TALE SUMMONER: Look, here's one of the people on the list of who I need to visit today. *(enter sick old woman)* Let's see if I can do any better than you. Mother Mabel, may I have a word with you?

MABEL: What do you want with me, good sir?

TALE SUMMONER: I have here a writ from the bishop concerning certain sins you have committed.

MABEL: Mercy me! I have done nothing!

TALE SUMMONER: You are to appear before the bishop tomorrow evening to answer his questions concerning certain things.

MABEL: What things?

TALE SUMMONER: Certain things.

MABEL: Could you be more specific?

TALE SUMMONER: Certain things you have done that are against God's law.

MABEL: Like what?

TALE SUMMONER: I think you know what I'm talking about.

MABEL: I have done nothing! I have been sick in bed for weeks now. Today is the first day I have ventured out of my house. How could I have done anything sinful while sick in bed?

TALE SUMMONER: Sick in bed and still able to sin! How shameful! You wicked woman!

MABEL: I've never been summoned to court in all my life. I'm innocent! How dare you do this to me!

TALE SUMMONER: Don't get upset, mother Mabel. I can arrange things so that you don't have to appear in court. But for such a serious case as this, I'll need charge a couple extra dollars, of course.

MABEL: You evil villain! You accursed tool of the devil! Get out of my sight. May the devil take you!

DEVIL: Do you really mean that, madam?

MABEL: Yes I do! The devil take him even before he dies!

DEVIL: Thank you! *(to the summoner)* Come my friend! It's time to visit me in my home down under!

(Devil grabs the summoner and hauls him off against his will.)

(The pilgrims find the story funny and they laugh.)

SUMMONER: *(steaming with anger)* I know a story about friars in hell! And I'm going to tell it right now!

HARRY BAILEY: Sir summoner, please, let's—

SUMMONER: *(ignoring Harry)* Once there was a friar who went down to hell. An angel took him on a tour of hell and he saw all sorts of people there—lawyers, butchers, millers, judges, politicians, even a few priests. But he didn't see a single friar.

FRIAR: Oh, no you don't! I've heard this one before!

SUMMONER: And the friar said to the angel, "I see that there are no friars in hell." And the angel then spoke to the devil and said, "Lift up your tail, sir, and show us--"

FRIAR: *(suddenly interrupting)* I appeal to our gracious host! This summoner is about to steer our pleasant company into a gutter! You must stop him!

HARRY: Sir summoner, we have heard enough of your tale. Let us return to funny stories. Humor is like oil. It reduces

squeaking when parts rub together the wrong way.

KNIGHT: I suggest the pardoner be next. He seems silly enough.

PARDONER: Thank you for the compliment.

YEOMAN: You're welcome to it.

CHAUCER: Let's not hear about the devil again, though.

HARRY: Sir pardoner, I call upon you to tell an amusing tale that does not have the devil in it.

PARDONER: There's a story I often tell my congregations—it's both funny and has a moral lesson to it. You can laugh and learn at the same time.

CHAUCER: Yes, let's hear a tale with a good solid moral ending.

PARDONER: My tale warns against the deadly sin of greed.

NUN: On with your tale. We're dying to hear it.

PARDONER: That's good, because one of my characters is "Death" himself!

HARRY: Remember, this is a contest, and I'm the judge. This had better be good.

PARDONER: Trust me.

The Pardoner's Tale

SCENE 13

PARDONER: Once there were three ruffians who had just come into an inn after a long night of gambling, drinking and carousing. *(enter ruffians, carrying a bench to sit on)*

RUFFIAN 1: What a night!

RUFFIAN 2: I'll say!

RUFFIAN 3: It's nine o'clock in the morning. Almost time for bed. Does anyone want to play a round of cards before bed?

RUFFIAN 1: Sure, I'm in.

RUFFIAN 2: I guess I'll play, too.

Ruffians all sit down and ruffian 3 deals cards. They can bring in a bench with them to sit on, and possibly two mugs to pretend to drink from while talking.

PARDONER: *(enter two townspeople, carrying a bench to sit on)* While these ruffians were at their cards, some local folks came into the inn and began talking about deadly events that had been taking place in their town recently.

TOWNSPERSON 1: Did you hear about what happened to old Norbert last night?

TOWNSPERSON 2: No. What happened to old Norbert last night?

RUFFIAN 1: *(to other ruffians)* I know old Norbert. I wonder what happened.

TOWNSPERSON 1: A local fellow, known round these parts as "Death" came creeping up on him and took him suddenly, while he wasn't looking. Stabbed him right in the back, I hear. He never knew what hit him. Death got him real quick.

RUFFIAN 1: Poor Norbert!

RUFFIAN 2: Who'd they say killed him?

RUFFIAN 3: Someone they called "Death."

TOWNSPERSON 2: That scoundrel "Death" has been carrying off more than his share recently. I heard that over in Dorset he's carried off 1000 men, women and children, due to the plague.

(The ruffians are obviously listening in.)

TOWNSPERSON 1: And up in York he's killed over 200. It was cholera some said.

TOWNSPERSON 2: Don't you hate Death?

TOWNSPERSON 1: Don't we all? Someone should give him what he deserves. They should kill him!

TOWNSPERSON 2: Kill death? That's an idea! Some fool should try it! *(They both laugh at the joke, but the ruffians take it seriously because they are so stupid.)*

TOWNSPERSON 1: Well, we'd better be off to work now.

TOWNSPERSON 2: Yes, have a good day smithing.

TOWNSPERSON 1: Have a good day planting.

(Townspersons exit, carrying off their bench with them.)

RUFFIAN 1: So that Mr. Death carried off my buddy Norbert, did he?! He'll pay for this.

RUFFIAN 2: But they said trying to kill death was something only a fool would try.

RUFFIAN 3: Yeah. Mr. Death must be really sly or else someone would have caught him by now.

RUFFIAN 2: Maybe he's an expert fighter and can beat anyone.

RUFFIAN 3: Maybe he's really good at disguises so no one can find him.

RUFFIAN 1: Maybe... maybe. But we're talking revenge for my pal Norbert. What kind of friend am I if I don't stand up for my buddies? I'm going out to find that Mr. Death and I'm going to kill him! Are you guys with me? Let's get him before he gets anyone else.

RUFFIAN 2: I'm with you.

RUFFIAN 3: So am I.

RUFFIAN 1: Okay. But let's stick together. This could be dangerous.

RUFFIAN 2: We'll be a team.

RUFFIAN 3: Partners till the end!

(they all do some sort of hand shake together to symbolize their pact)

RUFFIAN 1: Let's go find Death and kill him!

Ruffians exit, taking bench with them.

PARDONER: And so these brilliant theologians went off to find Death and kill him. They looked all over town for him, but of course he was nowhere to be seen. They concluded that maybe Death had run to the next town when he found out someone was after him, so they started on down the road to the next town. (enter ruffians, again) On the road they met a very strange old man. (*Enter old man, wearing a brown robe and carrying a sickle. He could represent death, or could be just an old farmer. The original text has an unbelievable ancient man who cannot die because Death won't take him. It is ambiguous as to who he really is.*) There was something familiar about him, but they were only interested in whether he had information they needed.

RUFFIAN 1: Hey! Old man! Have you seen someone called "Death" walking along this road today?

RUFFIAN 2: Yeah, we're going to kill him when we find him!

RUFFIAN 3: He deserves it, too!

STRANGE OLD MAN: You are in luck, gentlemen. I was just having a chat with him over there under that tree. If you hurry he may still be there.

RUFFIAN 1: Come on! Let's run! (*ruffians exit, running*)

STRANGE OLD MAN: Oh yes. Death awaits them there under the tree!

(*exit strange old man*)

While the pilgrims are talking, someone comes out and sets up the tree and the pot of gold.

PARDONER: What do you think will be under the tree? Will they really find Death?

NUN: I don't think so. I think it is a trick.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Maybe he will be waiting for them, and they'll find out that he can't be killed.

YEOMAN: There could be an executioner waiting for them.

PHYSICIAN: Or the plague.

PARDONER: You shall hear what they found.

(*enter ruffians, again*)

RUFFIAN 1: I don't see anyone here.

RUFFIAN 2: Oh no! We must have just missed him.

RUFFIAN 3: Look! What's that?

They go over and find the pot of gold.

RUFFIAN 1: It's gold!

RUFFIAN 2: A pot of gold!

RUFFIAN 3: We're rich!

RUFFIAN 1: Maybe it belongs to someone else.

RUFFIAN 2: I think Providence meant us to find it. I think it was left here for us.

RUFFIAN 3: It's our lucky day!

RUFFIAN 1: Remember, we're all in this together. It belongs to all three of us.

RUFFIANS 2 AND 3: Right!

RUFFIAN 1: Let's celebrate our good fortune.

RUFFIAN 2: We need some bottles of champagne.

RUFFIAN 3: Great idea. But we must guard the gold. Let's have just one of us go into town to buy champagne and the other two stay here to guard the gold.

RUFFIAN 1: It was your idea- you go and get the champagne.

RUFFIAN 2: Yes, you do the easy job of getting the drinks and we'll do the harder job of guarding the gold.

RUFFIAN 3: All right, but you'd better be here when I get back. We're all in this together, remember! The gold gets

divided three ways.

RUFFIANS 1 AND 2: Yes, of course!

(ruffian 3 exits)

RUFFIAN 1: Just think, we each get one third of this pot... *(they look into the pot and finger the coins greedily)*

RUFFIAN 2: Yes.. *(pause)* It's a shame we can't get half of it. A half is bigger than a third, isn't it?

RUFFIAN 1: Of course it is, you dolt.

RUFFIAN 2: I've got an idea.

RUFFIAN 1: I hope it's not about math.

RUFFIAN 2: Just supposed there were only two of us, instead of three. Then we would each get more gold, wouldn't we?

RUFFIAN 1: I think I see where you're going. Are you suggesting...?

RUFFIAN 2: No one would ever know but you and me. And we're as close as brothers, aren't we?

RUFFIAN 1: He is kind of a pain to have around, isn't he?

RUFFIAN 2: Yeah. He's too suspicious. I hate having someone around that doesn't trust me.

RUFFIAN 1: I agree. I hate the way he snores, too.

RUFFIAN 2: So how do we.. you know... do it?

RUFFIAN 1: I've got a pocket knife.

RUFFIAN 2: That'll do it.

While the pilgrims are saying the following comments, ruffians 1 and 2 freeze, and 3 comes back on, but a bit apart from the others, and carrying three bottles.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: What villains!

YEOMAN: A pocket knife! That's not a proper weapon.

KNIGHT: I have a feeling those two scoundrels are going to get what they deserve.

HARRY: This had better be decent, pardoner!

PARDONER: The third ruffian went into the town to buy champagne. But as he walked, he thought about the pot of gold.

RUFFIAN 3: It's too bad I have to share that pot of gold with those other two. If I had all the gold to myself, I'd only need about half of it. Well, maybe two-thirds of it. I could share the remaining third with the poor. Yeah. It would be much better for everyone that way. If those other two take their share, they'll spend it on only themselves, and no one else will ever get any. If it were all mine, I'd only spend nine-tenths of it, and give a tenth away, as I should. I doubt those other two have ever given anything to anyone. But how can I get rid of them?

PARDONER: *(enter apothecary with some kind of prop or set piece to indicate a shop)* Then he passed an apothecary shop and got an idea.

APOTHECARY: Good afternoon, sir.

RUFFIAN 3: Do you sell... um.. rat poison?

APOTHECARY: Why? You've got rats to kill?

RUFFIAN 3: Uh.. in a manner of speaking. How long does the poison take to work?

APOTHECARY: This poison is so strong it'll kill even very large rats. In fact, it's so strong it will kill almost any creature on earth almost instantly.

RUFFIAN 3: Perfect. I need two doses. One for each rat!

APOTHECARY: Two doses of poison. *(hands him the poison)* Be careful. It's very potent. That'll be twenty pence, please, ten pence for each dose.

RUFFIAN 3: That's expensive!

APOTHECARY: It's top quality poison.

RUFFIAN 3: Well... I'll be rich soon enough. Here. Good day. *(Ruffian hands the four pence to the apothecary.)*

APOTHECARY: Good day, and good luck with those rats.

(Apothecary exits. Ruffian 3 kneels, sets the three bottles down, and puts poison in two of them, then heads toward friends.)

PARDONER: As this ruffian came up to rejoin his friends, they fell upon him just as they had planned.

(A scuffle between the three ruffians, and ruffians 1 and 2 stab 3. Melodrama is called for. It should be anything but gruesome. Fake and funny.)

RUFFIAN 1: Well, that's done. Our plan is on schedule.

RUFFIAN 2: Let's celebrate and have a drink.

RUFFIAN 1: *(looks in a bottle)* Hey, this bottle's empty!

RUFFIAN 2: *(looks in the other two bottles)* Both of these are full. Bottoms up!

(Ruffians 1 and 2 drink from their bottles)

YEOMAN: Yes? Tell on.

PARDONER: You all know what happened. *(ruffians 1 and 2 just fall over without too much drama)*

KNIGHT: We don't need the details. Death by poison is a nasty subject.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Thank you, noble knight.

SUMMONER: Shall we do a post mortem on this tale?

EVERYONE groans at the bad pun.

SCENE 14

HARRY: Pardon, I didn't like that tale. It was too rough.

To get the ruffians off stage, you can either have them exit after the pardoner starts to preach, or you can have the apothecary and some others come to drag them off the stage.

PARDONER: *(begins preaching at the pilgrims)* Oh cursed sin of greed! See what it has led to! What treacherous homicide! And just think- we all harbor greed in our souls! Could we all be led into murder? Who knows what lurks in the depths of our being?! And the first symptom is simple greed! Are you all in need of repentance? Have you been greedy in recent days? Step forward, and I will absolve you. I have in my possession indulgences that you may purchase, to clear you of your sin. If you purchase one of these certificates from me, it will prove that you are forgiven! And once you are forgiven, you are eligible to purchase miracle-working relics. Yes, I have miracles in my pockets, and they're so affordable! Who will be the first to step forward? How about you, Harry Bailey?

HARRY: Me? What are you insinuating?!

PARDONER: As our host, you should set the example for everyone else. Come, unbuckle your purse, and share a few pennies. Remember the tale we just heard. Are you so greedy that you can't spare even a couple of cents?

HARRY: Why you—*(Harry lunges at the pardon, but those on either side of him keep him back)* I'll say you need cents from me—common sense! You'd swear your own undershirt was a relic! If I had your throat in my hands I'd squeeze so hard—*The clergy ladies are plugging their ears to avoid hearing such things.*

KNIGHT: Enough of this, gentlemen! You two are spoiling our fun. Fighting during a pilgrimage is shameful! Pardon, no more sales pitches. Harry, please don't take him seriously. Now you two shake hands and make up. *(Harry and the pardon try to regain their composure. They let Harry go and push him toward the pardon. The two shake hands reluctantly.)*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: *(Trying to change the subject)* Well, well, what an interesting day it has been. Did anyone notice the daffodils coming up along the road back there?

NUN: Yes, I did. And I saw some crocuses, too. I always look forward to the crocuses every spring.

REEVE: Can I tell my tale about the round-faced, flat-nosed, vain, sly, thieving miller now?

KNIGHT: No!

WIFE OF BATH: My first husband was fond of bulb flowers. We had tulips at our wedding.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Tulips, I love tulips!

NUN: Red tulips are my favorite.

WIFE OF BATH: I think I see some early daisies up ahead.

HARRY BAILEY: *(men are getting sick of flower talk)* How about a tale from our Oxford student? Maybe he can lift our minds to lofty heights.

PHYSICIAN: Yes, let's hear a tale from the scholar.

OXFORD STUDENT: I don't know many stories. I mainly read non-fiction. But I do know one good story. It's called "The Test of the Faithful Wife." It's about a husband named Walter, who gets carried away in testing his wife to see just how much humiliation she can endure.

HARRY BAILEY: Let's not have any more stories about husbands and wives. We've done enough on that subject.

MERCHANT: That means I can't tell my tale. I was going to tell a story about an old man named January and his young wife named May.

FRANKLIN: And I won't be able to tell my tale, either, which isn't fair, because although it is about a husband and wife, it is a very noble story. It has chivalry and loyalty, just like the knight's tale.

HARRY BAILEY: I've had enough of marriage stories for right now.

CHAUCER: Maybe we'll hear those tales on the way back home.

NUN: How about the martyrdom of St. Cecelia? That's one of my favorites.

HARRY BAILEY: No, nothing violent. *(Aside to nun:)* How does she die?

NUN: *(Aside to Harry:)* She was put into a boiling pot.

HARRY: Ugh.

MONK/ or PLOWMAN: How about the history of the world, starting with Adam and Eve?

HARRY BAILEY: Too long.

PHYSICIAN: I know a Roman story about a virtuous daughter.

HARRY: How does it end?

PHYSICIAN: Her father has to chop her head off to save her honor.

HARRY: That's worse than Saint Cecilia.

SCENE 15

At this point, a young man comes running into the company, out of breath. He sees his opportunity to hide in the crowd, and does so. He acts like he has been walking with them all along.

CHAUCE: Are you going to Canterbury, then?

ALCHEMIST'S APPRENTICE: No.

CHAUCE: That's where this company is going.

APPRENTICE: Oh yes, I mean. I'm going to Canterbury. Yes sir, off to Canterbury!

CHAUCE: To pay homage to Saint Thomas a Becket, right?

APPRENTICE: Yes, of course, Thomas Bucket, of course.

CHAUCE: Where are you really going?

APPRENTICE: To Canterbury, I told you.

CHAUCE: Okay, where have you come from?

APPRENTICE: Back there.

WIFE OF BATH: It's okay, lad. You can tell us your troubles. We're honest pilgrims, we are. You are welcome to join our company. You'll be safe with us. We've got a walking arsenal amongst us. *(Gestures towards Yeoman.)*

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: You are safe with us. If you tell us your distress, maybe we can help.

APPRENTICE: The best help you can be is to let me join your company. I don't think he will dare to bother me if I am in a crowd.

CHAUCE: Who is "he"?

APPRENTICE: My master. I mean my former master. I've gone into business for myself.

CHAUCE: How long have you been in business for yourself?

APPRENTICE: Oh—about five minutes.

NUN: Was he cruel to you? Did he hurt you?

APPRENTICE: He was a hard master, but nothing I couldn't bear. I spent hours chopping and grinding all sorts of strange ingredients, and gathering wood and coal. No, it was our patrons I felt sorry for.

CHAUCE: Your patrons?

APPRENTICE: Yes, the people he stole from.

CHAUCE: Was your master a professional thief?

APPRENTICE: Well, yes and no. He was, I mean he still is, an alchemist—one of those crazy chemists who thinks that they can mix a bunch of ingredients together and make gold. I don't think he really believes in it anymore. But he sure fools a lot of folks, and gets money for it, too.

HARRY: Well, lad, the only problem with joining our company is you will have to enter our story competition. We're having a story-telling contest to help pass the time. The price of joining our company is telling a story.

APPRENTICE: I'll tell one right now, if you wish.

HARRY: What do you all say?

EVERYONE: *(Various responses)* Yes. Here, here! Surely! Why not? We need some fresh tales.

APPRENTICE: I'll tell you a story about an alchemist. Not my master, of course. Just an alchemist I happened to know about, you understand.

HARRY: We understand. *(he winks)*

The Alchemist's Apprentice's Tale

SCENE 16

The alchemist can carry just a box, or he can carry some kind of fold-up table that sets up instantly. If he has no table, he will need to set his box on the ground and hold up his gear so the audience can see it. If he has a table, he can also sell that to the merchant and wife at the end of the story.

APPRENTICE: Once upon a time there was an alchemist. An alchemist I've only heard about, you understand. Not the one I worked for. *(enter alchemist)* Like many alchemists, he had a traveling workshop. This is because if alchemists stayed in one town too long, someone would eventually catch on to their game and arrest them! In this alchemist's traveling bag were all sorts of materials and chemicals which most certainly could never be turned into gold.

ALCHEMIST: *(putting down box, opening it up, and taking out bottles)* Let's see, how are my supplies holding out? Plenty of iron filings, bone powder, and borax. Enough arsenic, valerian, and moonwort to do in the entire population of London. An adequate supply of quicksilver and copper. I'll need to re-stock my chalk and saltpeter soon. And, of course... my secret ingredient! *(He holds up a small drawstring bag but doesn't show its contents.)* I think I'm ready for an honest day's work—well, a day's work, anyway. I'm off!

He puts the bottles back in his box and starts walking. Enter wealthy merchant and his wife.

APPRENTICE: And so the alchemist set out to his daily work- fooling people into thinking he could make gold. And how did he gain anything by this? So you shall see...

ALCHEMIST: Excuse me kind sir, and madam, do you happen to have a coin I could borrow for a few minutes? It would have to be a large coin, though. A ten-dollar coin would probably do.

TALE MERCHANT: Of course I have coins! But what do you take me for, a fool? Lend you a ten-collar coin? Hah! You mean be rob of a coin! The only person you'll return it to is a wine seller!

ALCHEMIST: Honestly, I only want to borrow it. Some of the lids on my jars are stuck and I thought I could use a ten-dollar coin might be large enough to go in the space under the lid.

MERCHANT'S WIFE: Harold, do be more open-minded. You always think everyone is out to rob you. Maybe he really does want to open his jars.

MILLER: Uh-oh, remember what happened to Chanticleer when he listened to his wife!

WIFE OF BATH: Yes, but remember what happened to the knight when he listened to his hag wife. Everything turned out well for him!

ALCHEMIST: Honestly, I only want to borrow it. Some of the lids on my jars are stuck and I thought a coin might be able to fit under the lids and pry them open.

WIFE: Harold, go on and give him a coin. *(aside, to the merchant)* I want to see what's in his bottles.

TALE MERCHANT: I'm not taking my eye off you or my coin. You look like a rascal to me. If you start making a run for it I'll... I'll...

WIFE: Harold, stop it!

Merchant hands coin to alchemist. Alchemist begins taking out bottles and setting up his traveling shop. Merchant and wife are obviously nebbly. Alchemist uses coin to open a few bottles.

WIFE: Ooo.. What are these, then?

ALCHEMIST: Just some ingredients..

WIFE: Are you a pharmacist, then? Do you make medicines?

ALCHEMIST: No, I used to do that, but what I make now is far better.

(A long pause-- they think the alchemist is going to tell them more but he doesn't)

TALE MERCHANT: Do you make poisons, then?

ALCHEMIST: No.

WIFE: Love potions?

ALCHEMIST: No. *(he continues to open bottles with coin)*

TALE MERCHANT: Glue?

ALCHEMIST: No.

WIFE: Secret recipes?

ALCHEMIST: No. *(after another pause)* There! I'm much obliged. Here is your coin. *(hands back the coin)*

WIFE: See, Harold? He's an honest workman. Honest as you or me!

ALCHEMIST: That's okay, I'm used to it. Everywhere I go everyone always thinks the same thing, at first. I win them over eventually. *(continues to set up his portable workshop)* I hate to work out in the open like this, but the smoke is unbearable if I work indoors.

TALE MERCHANT: Yes, of course.

ALCHEMIST: The biggest problem with working outdoors, you understand, is that I don't want the wrong sort of folks finding out what I'm making.

WIFE: Of yes, of course,

TALE MERCHANT: What DO you make??

ALCHEMIST: I don't make it a habit of talking about my profession to strangers, but you two seem like very reasonable and honest folks. I mean, you trusted me with your ten-dollar coin, didn't you? Not everyone would, you know. You're a decent sort of folk. Honest and kind. I'll tell you what. I'll do a little free demonstration for you.

WIFE: You would? We are so honored!

TALE MERCHANT: Jolly decent of you!

ALCHEMIST: Only, you'll have to stand on either side of me and make sure that folks passing by don't get a look at what we are up too. This is for your eyes only.

TALE MERCHANT: Yes, of course.

WIFE: Whatever you say.

(Alchemist places merchant and wife on either side of him, "on guard." They are a few steps away from him the alchemist has room to work.)

ALCHEMIST: Into my crucible go my five critical ingredients: *(He just counts the bottles as he opens them and dumps some of its contents into the crucible.)* 1... 2... 3... 4... 5. Now they must come to a boil while I stir. I need to make sure they don't calcify before the coagulation begins. *(begins to stir)* It's critical to prevent albefaction. *(Merchant and wife alternate between keeping watch and taking peeks at what the alchemist is doing.)*

WIFE: I think I smell moonwort.

TALE MERCHANT: It smells like beef bouillon to me.

ALCHEMIST: It's bouillon of a sort, but not an edible one. Now, the critical moment is coming. Oh, no! I think I see people approaching from both sides!

TALE MERCHANT AND WIFE: Where?! *(They both step away from the alchemist for a few seconds, looking intently into the distance, away from the alchemist. While they are doing this, the alchemist quickly pulls out his secret ingredient and slips it into the pot. The audience sees, but the merchant and his wife don't.)*

ALCHEMIST: Who is coming?

TALE MERCHANT: I can't see anyone.

WIFE: Neither can I.

ALCHEMIST: That's good, because I'm at the critical phase now. I think it will be done in just a moment. *(He stirs furiously, alternating with blowing on the coals.)*

WIFE: Is it working?

TALE MERCHANT: What will it be?

ALCHEMIST: There! It's done! Now I just need to pour off the impurities and the gold should have solidified in the bottom of the crucible.

TALE MERCHANT AND WIFE: GOLD??!!!!!!

TALE MERCHANT: Did you say gold?!

ALCHEMIST: Yes, of course, what is better than medicine or a love potion? *(He pours off top liquid and then the gold bar falls, "clunk," into a glass jar (?) so all can see. The eyes of the merchant and his wife just about pop out of their sockets.)*

WIFE: Harold, you're in the wrong job!

TALE MERCHANT: I.... I... I...

ALCHEMIST: There you go, one bar of pure gold! *(He takes it out and admires it, then hands it to the merchant.)*

WIFE: *(They go off to the side a bit, intending to be out of the hearing of the alchemist.)* Harold, let someone else sell buttons! You could be an alchemist! Just think of it- gold, gold, and more gold!! We'll be rich!

TALE MERCHANT: He might not be willing to give away his recipe, though. Don't get your hopes up.

SUMMONER: He'll sell the secret for a price-- you just wait and see!

OXFORD STUDENT: *Malae naturae numquam doctore indigent.* *(Mal-eye nat-ure-eye num-kwam dock-tor-ay in-di-gent)*

SUMMONER: What?

OXFORD STUDENT: Evil nature never lacks teachers.

PHYSICIAN: I agree. I think these three are peas from the same pod.

MERCHANT: *(Addressing the alchemist.)* Sir, do you ever take on apprentices?

ALCHEMIST: From time to time.

TALE MERCHANT: I see you don't have one right now. Are you...uh... looking for an assistant? *(he says in a hopeful and hinting tone)*

ALCHEMIST: Oh, I'm sorry, I don't have enough money right now to be able to hire an assistant.

TALE MERCHANT: Well, how about if I paid you, for the privilege of assisting you.

ALCHEMIST: Well.... I don't think your dear wife would want you traveling all over the countryside. For her sake, I'll have to refuse you offer.

WIFE: *(panicked at the thought of not getting the recipe)* I have an idea. How about a one-day apprenticeship for the both of us, in exchange for one hundred dollars?

ALCHEMIST: Hmmm.... I don't know. *(pauses and thinks)* You'd have to be incredibly fast learners. I doubt you could do it.

TALE MERCHANT: Just let us try!

ALCHEMIST: Well, since you are such decent folks, I'll give you a try. Do you have my salary?

TALE MERCHANT: Yes, here it is. *(hands the one hundred dollars over)*

ALCHEMIST: Now, watch very, very, carefully.

Alchemist proceeds to pantomime explaining the process to the merchant.

APPRENTICE: And so that rascal taught the greedy merchant and his wife how to boil and stir a bunch a batch of nasty-smelling, useless, chemical water that would certainly never boil into gold.

ALCHEMIST: No, no. It's not "Stir, blow, stir, blow." It's: "Blow, stir, blow, stir."

The merchant is furiously stirring and blowing.

APPRENTICE: And always, at the crucial moment, he would say:

ALCHEMIST: Now's the time to look and make sure no one else is watching!

APPRENTICE: And then he would slip his secret ingredient in while they weren't looking. By the end of two demonstrations the merchant and his wife were convinced they had mastered it. The alchemist congratulated them, sold them supplies he just happened to have in his box, then took his leave. *(alchemist exits)* The alchemist had made a hundred dollars and the apprentices had made... fools of themselves.

WIFE: Let's do it again, while it's fresh in our minds, just to make sure we don't forget how to blow and stir properly.

TALE MERCHANT: *(begins a new batch)* Add number 1, number 2, number 3, number 4, number 5. Now boil and stir.

WIFE: Remember to agitate it properly so it doesn't calcify before the albefaction. *(then, to her self)* My, don't I sound scientific!

TALE MERCHANT: The tricky part is blowing on the coals so that they reach the right temperature at the right time. It's blow, stir, blow, stir. *(does this)*

WIFE: Are you sure you are doing it right? Wasn't it stir, blow, stir, blow? I don't see anything solidifying at the bottom.

TALE MERCHANT: I'm sure I'm doing it just the way he taught me.

WIFE: We forgot to look! Remember, he always told us to look for spies right at the critical moment.

TALE MERCHANT: Yes, of course.

They both look away, just like they did with the alchemist, then they look expectantly into the crucible.

WIFE: Nothing!

TALE MERCHANT: No gold.

WIFE: Stir and boil some more! Blow harder!

Merchant stirs and boils some more. Then they both look expectantly into the crucible again.

TALE MERCHANT: Nothing!

WIFE: What are we doing wrong?

TALE MERCHANT: It's not what we're DOING wrong, it's what we DID wrong! We let a scoundrel get away with our money! Come on, there's never going to be gold in the pot. *(He and the wife quickly put the objects either in her apron or his pockets, or carry some of it, and they exit.)*

APPRENTICE: And thus would my mast- I mean the alchemist do, in every town he went to. Of course, he could never go back to a place he had already been.

SCENE 17

HARRY BAILEY: Well, we pilgrims all had a lesson from that tale, didn't we?

KNIGHT: And a fitting one, too, as we need to begin thinking less of this world and the things in it, and more of God and his blessed saints.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Yes, we are drawing near to our destination, and need to turn our minds toward holy things.

MILLER: But first, Harry, can we find out who won the contest?

HARRY: What contest? *(feigning forgetting)*

MILLER: The story contest, of course!

HARRY: Oh, bless me-- I almost forgot about the contest! Yes, I promised to declare a winner, didn't I?

LAWYER: I think we should take a vote.

HARRY: I'm the judge! My word is final. You all agreed to that.

KNIGHT: That we did.

REEVE: Yes, he's right.

HARRY: Well, I really don't need any time to think about it. The result of the contest is obvious.

MERCHANT: It is?

YEOMAN: Obviously, it's the knight's tale. It was the first and the best!

FRANKLIN (OR MERCHANT): No, it must be the miller's tale. It was hilarious!

NUN: But the story about the chickens was just as funny and it had a moral, as well. That makes it a better story.

HARRY: Well, I'm ready to render my decision. The winner is...

EVERYONE: Yes....??

HARRY: The winner is.....

EVERYONE: Yes....??

HARRY: It's a tie.

EVERYONE: A tie??!!

HARRY: A very large tie... In fact, you all tied for first place!

EVERYONE: What??!! *(They are a bit disappointed.)*

LAWYER: That's just good politics.

HARRY: I declare that we must have a tie-breaker round on the way home! Everyone will tell a second tale and then I'll decide the winner.

WIFE OF BATH: Well, why not, everyone? The homeward journey will be just as long as the outward journey.

PRIORESS EGLANTINE: Yes, I think that's marvelous. Another whole day of stories to look forward to!

(Set crew brings on cathedral doors if you have some.)

HARRY: And as you can see, we have now arrived at the holy martyr's shrine. The cathedral of Saint Thomas a Becket. He was killed by his king's men, right here in his own church. I'd like to call on our friar to say a blessing for us as we prepare to enter this holy martyr's church. Friar? Would you please?

FRIAR: Pilgrims, let us reflect on the seven deadly sins and pray to avoid them. Let us banish pride from our souls. Let envy be cut out and thrown away. Let us not be lewd. Let anger be quieted, and let us turn our backs on greed and covetousness. Let us make confession of our sins and be cleansed by God's grace. Amen.

(NOTE: In the original, it was actually the parson who gives this sermon, and it is a very long one.)

PILGRIMS: Amen!

HARRY: Thank you, friar. Pilgrims, let us enter the cathedral.

Pilgrims begin exiting, going through the cathedral doors.

(optional)* CHAUCER: *(to the audience, as the pilgrims are exiting)* Here ends the "Tales of Canterbury." I beg you all to take with you only that which has pleased you. If something has offended, leave it behind and forget it. Forgive us our faults, for everyone one of us is in need of mercy. May God bless you all, and we thank you for coming!

Chaucer waves, or bows, and exits.

** This last line represents Chaucer's "retraction" that appears at the end of the Canterbury Tales.*