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GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE MILLER'S TALE

THE PROLOGUE.

When that the Knight had thus his tale told
In all the rout was neither young nor old,
That he not said it was a noble story,
And worthy to be *drawen to memory*; *recorded*
And *namely the gentles* every one. *especially the gentlefolk*
Our Host then laugh'd and swore, "So may I gon,* *prosper
This goes aright; *unbuckled is the mail;* *the budget is opened*
Let see now who shall tell another tale:
For truely this game is well begun.
Now telleth ye, Sir Monk, if that ye conne*, *know
Somewhat, to quiten* with the Knighte's tale." *match
The Miller that fordrunken was all pale,
So that unnethes* upon his horse he sat, *with difficulty
He would avalen* neither hood nor hat, *uncover
Nor abide* no man for his courtesy, *give way to
But in Pilate's voice<1> he gan to cry,
And swore by armes, and by blood, and bones,
"I can a noble tale for the nones* *occasion,
With which I will now quite* the Knighte's tale." *match
Our Host saw well how drunk he was of ale,
And said; "Robin, abide, my leve* brother, *dear
Some better man shall tell us first another:
Abide, and let us worke thriftily."
By Godde's soul," quoth he, "that will not I,
For I will speak, or elles go my way!"
Our Host answer'd; "*Tell on a devil way*; *devil take you!*
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome."
"Now hearken," quoth the Miller, "all and some:
But first I make a protestatioun.
That I am drunk, I know it by my soun':
And therefore if that I misspeak or say,
Wite it the ale of Southwark, I you pray: *blame it on*<2>
For I will tell a legend and a life
Both of a carpenter and of his wife,
How that a clerk hath *set the wrighte's cap*." *fooled the carpenter*
The Reeve answer'd and saide, "*Stint thy clap*, *hold your tongue*
Let be thy lewed drunken harlotry.

It is a sin, and eke a great folly
To apeiren* any man, or him defame, *injure
And eke to bringe wives in evil name.
Thou may'st enough of other thinges sayn."
This drunken Miller spake full soon again,
And saide, "Leve brother Osewold,
Who hath no wife, he is no cuckold.
But I say not therefore that thou art one;
There be full goode wives many one.
Why art thou angry with my tale now?
I have a wife, pardie, as well as thou,
Yet *n'old I*, for the oxen in my plough, *I would not*
Taken upon me more than enough,
To deemen* of myself that I am one; *judge
I will believe well that I am none.
An husband should not be inquisitive
Of Godde's privity, nor of his wife.
So he may finde Godde's foison* there, *treasure
Of the remnant needeth not to enquere."
What should I more say, but that this Millere
He would his wordes for no man forbear,
But told his churlish* tale in his mannere; *boorish, rude
Me thinketh, that I shall rehearse it here.
And therefore every gentle wight I pray,
For Godde's love to deem not that I say
Of evil intent, but that I must rehearse
Their tales all, be they better or worse,
Or elles falsen* some of my mattere. *falsify
And therefore whoso list it not to hear,
Turn o'er the leaf, and choose another tale;
For he shall find enough, both great and smale,
Of storial* thing that toucheth gentiless, *historical, true
And eke morality and holiness.
Blame not me, if that ye choose amiss.
The Miller is a churl, ye know well this,
So was the Reeve, with many other mo',
And harlotry* they tolde bothe two. *ribald tales
Avise you now, and put me out of blame; *be warned*
And eke men should not make earnest of game*. *jest, fun

Notes to the Prologue to the Miller's Tale

1. Pilate, an unpopular personage in the mystery-plays of the middle ages, was probably represented as having a gruff, harsh voice.

2. Wite: blame; in Scotland, "to bear the wyte," is to bear the blame.

THE TALE.

Whilom there was dwelling in Oxenford
A riche gnof*, that *guestes held to board*, *miser *took in boarders*
And of his craft he was a carpenter.
With him there was dwelling a poor scholer,
Had learned art, but all his fantasy
Was turned for to learn astrology.
He coude* a certain of conclusions *knew
To deeme* by interrogations, *determine
If that men asked him in certain hours,
When that men should have drought or elles show'rs:
Or if men asked him what shoulde fall
Of everything, I may not reckon all.
This clerk was called Hendy* Nicholas; *gentle, handsome
Of derne* love he knew and of solace; *secret, earnest
And therewith he was sly and full privy,
And like a maiden meek for to see.
A chamber had he in that hostelry
Alone, withouten any company,
Full *fetisly y-dight* with herbes swoot*, *neatly decorated*
And he himself was sweet as is the root *sweet
Of liquorice, or any setewall*. *valerian
His Almagest,<1> and bookes great and small,
His astrolabe,<2> belonging to his art,
His augrim stones,<3> layed fair apart
On shelves couched* at his bedde's head, *laid, set
His press y-cover'd with a falding* red. *coarse cloth
And all above there lay a gay psalt'ry
On which he made at nightes melody,
So sweetely, that all the chamber rang:
And Angelus ad virginem<4> he sang.
And after that he sung the kinge's note;
Full often blessed was his merry throat.
And thus this sweete clerk his time spent
After *his friendes finding and his rent.* *Attending to his friends,
and providing for the
cost of his lodging*
This carpenter had wedded new a wife,
Which that he loved more than his life:
Of eighteen year, I guess, she was of age.
Jealous he was, and held her narr'w in cage,
For she was wild and young, and he was old,
And deemed himself belike* a cuckold. *perhaps
He knew not Cato,<5> for his wit was rude,
That bade a man wed his similitude.

Men shoulde wedden after their estate,
For youth and eld* are often at debate. *age
But since that he was fallen in the snare,
He must endure (as other folk) his care.
Fair was this younge wife, and therewithal
As any weasel her body gent* and small. *slim, neat
A seint* she weared, barred all of silk, *girdle
A barm-cloth* eke as white as morning milk *apron<6>
Upon her lendes*, full of many a gore**. *loins **plait
White was her smock*, and broider'd all before, *robe or gown
And eke behind, on her collar about
Of coal-black silk, within and eke without.
The tapes of her white volupere* *head-kerchief <7>
Were of the same suit of her collere;
Her fillet broad of silk, and set full high:
And sickerly* she had a likerous** eye. *certainly **lascivious
Full small y-pulled were her browes two,
And they were bent*, and black as any sloe. *arched
She was well more *blissful on to see* *pleasant to look upon*
Than is the newe perjenete* tree; *young pear-tree
And softer than the wool is of a wether.
And by her girdle hung a purse of leather,
Tassel'd with silk, and *pearled with latoun*. *set with brass pearls*
In all this world to seeken up and down
There is no man so wise, that coude thenche* *fancy, think of
So gay a popelot*, or such a wench. *puppet <8>
Full brighter was the shining of her hue,
Than in the Tower the noble* forged new. *a gold coin <9>
But of her song, it was as loud and yern*, *lively <10>
As any swallow chittering on a bern*. *barn
Thereto* she coulde skip, and *make a game* *also *romp*
As any kid or calf following his dame.
Her mouth was sweet as braket,<11> or as methe* *mead
Or hoard of apples, laid in hay or heath.
Wincing* she was as is a jolly colt, *skittish
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she bare upon her low collere,
As broad as is the boss of a bucklere.
Her shoon were laced on her legges high;
She was a primerole,* a piggesnie <12>, *primrose
For any lord t' have ligging* in his bed, *lying
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.
Now, sir, and eft* sir, so befell the case, *again
That on a day this Hendy Nicholas

Fell with this younge wife to rage* and play, *toy, play the rogue
While that her husband was at Oseney,<13>
As clerkes be full subtle and full quaint.
And privily he caught her by the queint,* *cunt
And said; "Y-wis,* but if I have my will, *assuredly
For *derne love of thee, leman, I spill."* *for earnest love of thee
And helde her fast by the haunche bones, my mistress, I perish*
And saide "Leman, love me well at once,
Or I will dien, all so God me save."
And she sprang as a colt doth in the trave<14>:
And with her head she writhed fast away,
And said; "I will not kiss thee, by my fay*. *faith
Why let be," quoth she, "let be, Nicholas,
Or I will cry out harow and alas!<15>
Do away your handes, for your courtesy."
This Nicholas gan mercy for to cry,
And spake so fair, and proffer'd him so fast,
That she her love him granted at the last,
And swore her oath by Saint Thomas of Kent,
That she would be at his commandement,
When that she may her leisure well espy.
"My husband is so full of jealousy,
That but* ye waite well, and be privy, *unless
I wot right well I am but dead," quoth she.
"Ye muste be full derne* as in this case." *secret
"Nay, thereof care thee nought," quoth Nicholas:
"A clerk had *litherly beset his while*, *ill spent his time*
But if he could a carpenter beguile." *unless
And thus they were accorded and y-sworn
To wait a time, as I have said beforn.
When Nicholas had done thus every deal*, *whit
And thwacked her about the lendes* well, *loins
He kiss'd her sweet, and taketh his psalt'ry
And playeth fast, and maketh melody.
Then fell it thus, that to the parish church,
Of Christe's owen workes for to wirch*, *work
This good wife went upon a holy day;
Her forehead shone as bright as any day,
So was it washen, when she left her werk.
Now was there of that church a parish clerk,
The which that was y-cleped Absolon.
Curl'd was his hair, and as the gold it shone,
And strutted* as a fanne large and broad; *stretched
Full straight and even lay his jolly shode*. *head of hair

His rode* was red, his eyen grey as goose, *complexion
With Paule's windows carven on his shoes <16>
In hosen red he went full fetisly*. *daintily, neatly
Y-clad he was full small and properly,
All in a kirtle* of a light waget*; *girdle **sky blue
Full fair and thicke be the pointes set,
And thereupon he had a gay surplice,
As white as is the blossom on the rise*. *twig <17>
A merry child he was, so God me save;
Well could he letten blood, and clip, and shave,
And make a charter of land, and a quittance.
In twenty manners could he trip and dance,
After the school of Oxenforde tho*,<18> *then
And with his legges caste to and fro;
And playen songes on a small ribible*; *fiddle
Thereto he sung sometimes a loud quinible* *treble
And as well could he play on a gitern.* *guitar
In all the town was brewhouse nor tavern,
That he not visited with his solas*, *mirth, sport
There as that any *garnard tapstere* was. *licentious barmaid*
But sooth to say he was somedeal squaimous* *squeamish
Of farting, and of speeche dangerous.
This Absolon, that jolly was and gay,
Went with a censer on the holy day,
Censing* the wives of the parish fast; *burning incense for
And many a lovely look he on them cast,
And namely* on this carpenter's wife: *especially
To look on her him thought a merry life.
She was so proper, and sweet, and likerous.
I dare well say, if she had been a mouse,
And he a cat, he would *her hent anon*. *have soon caught her*
This parish clerk, this jolly Absolon,
Hath in his hearte such a love-longing!
That of no wife took he none offering;
For courtesy he said he woulde none.
The moon at night full clear and brighte shone,
And Absolon his gitern hath y-taken,
For paramours he thoughte for to waken,
And forth he went, jolif* and amorous, *joyous
Till he came to the carpentere's house,
A little after the cock had y-crow,
And *dressed him* under a shot window <19>, *stationed himself.*
That was upon the carpentere's wall.
He singeth in his voice gentle and small;

"Now, dear lady, if thy will be,
I pray that ye will rue* on me;" *take pity
Full well accordant to his giterning.
This carpenter awoke, and heard him sing,
And spake unto his wife, and said anon,
What Alison, hear'st thou not Absolon,
That chanteth thus under our bower* wall?" *chamber
And she answer'd her husband therewithal;
"Yes, God wot, John, I hear him every deal."
This passeth forth; what will ye bet* than well? *better
From day to day this jolly Absolon
So wooeth her, that him is woebegone.
He waketh all the night, and all the day,
To comb his lockes broad, and make him gay.
He wooeth her *by means and by brocage*, *by presents and by agents*
And swore he woulde be her owen page.
He singeth brokking* as a nightingale. *quavering
He sent her piment <20>, mead, and spiced ale,
And wafers* piping hot out of the glede**: *cakes **coals
And, for she was of town, he proffer'd meed.<21>
For some folk will be wonnen for richess,
And some for strokes, and some with gentiless.
Sometimes, to show his lightness and mast'ry,
He playeth Herod <22> on a scaffold high.
But what availeth him as in this case?
So loveth she the Hendy Nicholas,
That Absolon may *blow the bucke's horn*: *"go whistle"*
He had for all his labour but a scorn.
And thus she maketh Absolon her ape,
And all his earnest turneth to a jape*. *jest
Full sooth is this proverb, it is no lie;
Men say right thus alway; the nighe sly
Maketh oft time the far lief to be loth. <23>
For though that Absolon be wood* or wroth *mad
Because that he far was from her sight,
This nigh Nicholas stood still in his light.
Now bear thee well, thou Hendy Nicholas,
For Absolon may wail and sing "Alas!"
And so befell, that on a Saturday
This carpenter was gone to Oseney,
And Hendy Nicholas and Alison
Accorded were to this conclusion,
That Nicholas shall *shape him a wile* *devise a stratagem*
The silly jealous husband to beguile;

And if so were the game went aright,
She shoulde sleepen in his arms all night;
For this was her desire and his also.
And right anon, withoute wordes mo',
This Nicholas no longer would he tarry,
But doth full soft unto his chamber carry
Both meat and drinke for a day or tway.
And to her husband bade her for to say,
If that he asked after Nicholas,
She shoulde say, "She wist* not where he was; *knew
Of all the day she saw him not with eye;
She trowed* he was in some malady, *believed
For no cry that her maiden could him call
He would answer, for nought that might befall."
Thus passed forth all thilke* Saturday, *that
That Nicholas still in his chamber lay,
And ate, and slept, and didde what him list
Till Sunday, that* the sunne went to rest. *when
This silly carpenter *had great marvaill* *wondered greatly*
Of Nicholas, or what thing might him ail,
And said; "I am adrad*, by Saint Thomas! *afraid, in dread
It standeth not aright with Nicholas:
God shielde that he died suddenly. *heaven forbid!*
This world is now full fickle sickerly*. *certainly
I saw to-day a corpse y-borne to chirch,
That now on Monday last I saw him wirch*. *work
"Go up," quod he unto his knave*, "anon; *servant.
Clepe* at his door, or knocke with a stone: *call
Look how it is, and tell me boldely."
This knave went him up full sturdily,
And, at the chamber door while that he stood,
He cried and knocked as that he were wood:* *mad
"What how? what do ye, Master Nicholay?
How may ye sleepen all the longe day?"
But all for nought, he hearde not a word.
An hole he found full low upon the board,
Where as the cat was wont in for to creep,
And at that hole he looked in full deep,
And at the last he had of him a sight.
This Nicholas sat ever gaping upright,
As he had kyked* on the newe moon. *looked <24>
Adown he went, and told his master soon,
In what array he saw this ilke* man. *same
This carpenter to *blissen him* began, *bless, cross himself*

And said: "Now help us, Sainte Frideswide.<25>
A man wot* little what shall him betide. *knows
This man is fall'n with his astronomy
Into some woodness* or some agony. *madness
I thought aye well how that it shoulde be.
Men should know nought of Godde's privity*. *secrets
Yea, blessed be alway a lewed* man, *unlearned
That *nought but only his believe can*. *knows no more
So far'd another clerk with astronomy: than his "credo."*
He walked in the fieldes for to *pry
Upon* the starres, what there should befall, *keep watch on*
Till he was in a marle pit y-fall.<26>
He saw not that. But yet, by Saint Thomas!
Me rueth sore of Hendy Nicholas: *I am very sorry for*
He shall be *rated of* his studying, *chidden for*
If that I may, by Jesus, heaven's king!
Get me a staff, that I may underspore* *lever up
While that thou, Robin, heavest off the door:
He shall out of his studying, as I guess."
And to the chamber door he gan him dress* *apply himself.
His knave was a strong carl for the nonce,
And by the hasp he heav'd it off at once;
Into the floor the door fell down anon.
This Nicholas sat aye as still as stone,
And ever he gap'd upward into the air.
The carpenter ween'd* he were in despair, *thought
And hent* him by the shoulders mightily, *caught
And shook him hard, and cried spitously;* *angrily
"What, Nicholas? what how, man? look adown:
Awake, and think on Christe's passioun.
I crouche thee<27> from elves, and from wights*. *witches
Therewith the night-spell said he anon rights*, *properly
On the four halves* of the house about, *corners
And on the threshold of the door without.
"Lord Jesus Christ, and Sainte Benedight,
Blesse this house from every wicked wight,
From the night mare, the white Pater-noster;
Where wonnest* thou now, Sainte Peter's sister?" *dwellest
And at the last this Hendy Nicholas
Gan for to sigh full sore, and said; "Alas!
Shall all time world be lost eftsoones* now?" *forthwith
This carpenter answer'd; "What sayest thou?
What? think on God, as we do, men that swink.*" *labour
This Nicholas answer'd; "Fetch me a drink;

And after will I speak in privity
Of certain thing that toucheth thee and me:
I will tell it no other man certain."
This carpenter went down, and came again,
And brought of mighty ale a large quart;
And when that each of them had drunk his part,
This Nicholas his chamber door fast shet*, *shut
And down the carpenter by him he set,
And saide; "John, mine host full lief* and dear, *loved
Thou shalt upon thy truthe swear me here,
That to no wight thou shalt my counsel wray*: *betray
For it is Christes counsel that I say,
And if thou tell it man, thou art forlore:* *lost<28>
For this vengeance thou shalt have therefor,
That if thou wraye* me, thou shalt be wood**." *betray **mad
"Nay, Christ forbid it for his holy blood!"
Quoth then this silly man; "I am no blab,* *talker
Nor, though I say it, am I *lief to gab*. *fond of speech*
Say what thou wilt, I shall it never tell
To child or wife, by him that harried Hell." <29>
"Now, John," quoth Nicholas, "I will not lie,
I have y-found in my astrology,
As I have looked in the moone bright,
That now on Monday next, at quarter night,
Shall fall a rain, and that so wild and wood*, *mad
That never half so great was Noe's flood.
This world," he said, "in less than half an hour
Shall all be dreint*, so hideous is the shower: *drowned
Thus shall mankinde drench*, and lose their life." *drown
This carpenter answer'd; "Alas, my wife!
And shall she drench? alas, mine Alisoun!"
For sorrow of this he fell almost adown,
And said; "Is there no remedy in this case?"
"Why, yes, for God," quoth Hendy Nicholas;
"If thou wilt worken after *lore and rede*; *learning and advice*
Thou may'st not worken after thine own head.
For thus saith Solomon, that was full true:
Work all by counsel, and thou shalt not rue*. *repent
And if thou worke wilt by good counseil,
I undertake, withoute mast or sail,
Yet shall I save her, and thee, and me.
Hast thou not heard how saved was Noe,
When that our Lord had warned him beforn,
That all the world with water *should be lorn*?" *should perish*

"Yes," quoth this carpenter," *full yore ago*." *long since*
"Hast thou not heard," quoth Nicholas, "also
The sorrow of Noe, with his fellowship,
That he had ere he got his wife to ship?<30>
*Him had been lever, I dare well undertake,
At thilke time, than all his wethers black,
That she had had a ship herself alone.* *see note <31>
And therefore know'st thou what is best to be done?
This asketh haste, and of an hasty thing
Men may not preach or make tarrying.
Anon go get us fast into this inn* *house
A kneading trough, or else a kemelin*, *brewing-tub
For each of us; but look that they be large,
In whiche we may swim* as in a barge: *float
And have therein vitaille suffisant
But for one day; fie on the remenant;
The water shall aslake* and go away *slacken, abate
Aboute prime* upon the nexte day. *early morning
But Robin may not know of this, thy knave*, *servant
Nor eke thy maiden Gill I may not save:
Ask me not why: for though thou aske me
I will not telle Godde's privity.
Sufficeth thee, *but if thy wit be mad*, *unless thou be
To have as great a grace as Noe had; out of thy wits*
Thy wife shall I well saven out of doubt.
Go now thy way, and speed thee hereabout.
But when thou hast for her, and thee, and me,
Y-gotten us these kneading tubbes three,
Then shalt thou hang them in the roof full high,
So that no man our purveyance* espy: *foresight, providence
And when thou hast done thus as I have said,
And hast our vitaille fair in them y-laid,
And eke an axe to smite the cord in two
When that the water comes, that we may go,
And break an hole on high upon the gable
Into the garden-ward, over the stable,
That we may freely passe forth our way,
When that the greate shower is gone away.
Then shalt thou swim as merry, I undertake,
As doth the white duck after her drake:
Then will I clepe,* 'How, Alison? How, John? *call
Be merry: for the flood will pass anon.'
And thou wilt say, 'Hail, Master Nicholay,
Good-morrow, I see thee well, for it is day.'

And then shall we be lordes all our life
Of all the world, as Noe and his wife.
But of one thing I warne thee full right,
Be well advised, on that ilke* night, *same
When we be enter'd into shippe's board,
That none of us not speak a single word,
Nor clepe nor cry, but be in his prayere,
For that is Godde's owen heste* dear. *command
Thy wife and thou must hangen far atween*, *asunder
For that betwixte you shall be no sin,
No more in looking than there shall in deed.
This ordinance is said: go, God thee speed
To-morrow night, when men be all asleep,
Into our kneading tubbes will we creep,
And sitte there, abiding Godde's grace.
Go now thy way, I have no longer space
To make of this no longer sermoning:
Men say thus: Send the wise, and say nothing:
Thou art so wise, it needeth thee nought teach.
Go, save our lives, and that I thee beseech."
This silly carpenter went forth his way,
Full oft he said, "Alas! and Well-a-day!,'
And to his wife he told his privity,
And she was ware, and better knew than he
What all this *quainte cast was for to say*. *strange contrivance
But natheless she fear'd as she would dey, meant*
And said: "Alas! go forth thy way anon.
Help us to scape, or we be dead each one.
I am thy true and very wedded wife;
Go, deare spouse, and help to save our life."
Lo, what a great thing is affection!
Men may die of imagination,
So deeply may impression be take.
This silly carpenter begins to quake:
He thinketh verily that he may see
This newe flood come weltering as the sea
To drenchen* Alison, his honey dear. *drown
He weepeth, waileth, maketh *sorry cheer*; *dismal countenance*
He sigheth, with full many a sorry sough.* *groan
He go'th, and getteth him a kneading trough,
And after that a tub, and a kemelin,
And privily he sent them to his inn:
And hung them in the roof full privily.
With his own hand then made he ladders three,

To climbe by *the ranges and the stalks* *the rungs and the uprights*
Unto the tubbes hanging in the balks*; *beams
And victualed them, kemelin, trough, and tub,
With bread and cheese, and good ale in a jub*, *jug
Sufficing right enough as for a day.
But ere that he had made all this array,
He sent his knave*, and eke his wench** also, *servant **maid
Upon his need* to London for to go. *business
And on the Monday, when it drew to night,
He shut his door withoute candle light,
And dressed* every thing as it should be. *prepared
And shortly up they climbed all the three.
They satte stille well *a furlong way*. *the time it would take
"Now, Pater noster, clum,"<32> said Nicholay, to walk a furlong*
And "clum," quoth John; and "clum," said Alison:
This carpenter said his devotion,
And still he sat and bidded his prayere,
Awaking on the rain, if he it hear.
The deade sleep, for weary business,
Fell on this carpenter, right as I guess,
About the curfew-time,<33> or little more,
For *travail of his ghost* he groaned sore, *anguish of spirit*
And eft he routed, for his head mislay. *and then he snored,
Adown the ladder stalked Nicholay; for his head lay awry*
And Alison full soft adown she sped.
Withoute wordes more they went to bed,
There as the carpenter was wont to lie: *where*
There was the revel, and the melody.
And thus lay Alison and Nicholas,
In business of mirth and in solace,
Until the bell of laudes* gan to ring, *morning service, at 3.a.m.
And friars in the chancel went to sing.
This parish clerk, this amorous Absolon,
That is for love alway so woebegone,
Upon the Monday was at Oseney
With company, him to disport and play;
And asked upon cas* a cloisterer** *occasion **monk
Full privily after John the carpenter;
And he drew him apart out of the church,
And said, "I n'ot;* I saw him not here wirch** *know not **work
Since Saturday; I trow that he be went
For timber, where our abbot hath him sent.
And dwellen at the Grange a day or two:
For he is wont for timber for to go,

Or else he is at his own house certain.
Where that he be, I cannot *soothly sayn.*" *say certainly*
This Absolon full jolly was and light,
And thought, "Now is the time to wake all night,
For sickerly* I saw him not stirring *certainly
About his door, since day began to spring.
So may I thrive, but I shall at cock crow
Full privily go knock at his window,
That stands full low upon his bower* wall: *chamber
To Alison then will I tellen all
My love-longing; for I shall not miss
That at the leaste way I shall her kiss.
Some manner comfort shall I have, parfay*, *by my faith
My mouth hath itched all this livelong day:
That is a sign of kissing at the least.
All night I mette* eke I was at a feast. *dreamt
Therefore I will go sleep an hour or tway,
And all the night then will I wake and play."
When that the first cock crowed had, anon
Up rose this jolly lover Absolon,
And him arrayed gay, *at point devise.* *with exact care*
But first he chewed grains<34> and liquorice,
To smelle sweet, ere he had combed his hair.
Under his tongue a true love <35> he bare,
For thereby thought he to be gracious.
Then came he to the carpentere's house,
And still he stood under the shot window;
Unto his breast it raught*, it was so low; *reached
And soft he coughed with a semisoun'.* *low tone
"What do ye, honeycomb, sweet Alisoun?
My faire bird, my sweet cinamome*, *cinnamon, sweet spice
Awaken, leman* mine, and speak to me. *mistress
Full little thinke ye upon my woe,
That for your love I sweat *there as* I go. *wherever
No wonder is that I do swelt* and sweat. *faint
I mourn as doth a lamb after the teat
Y-wis*, leman, I have such love-longing, *certainly
That like a turtle* true is my mourning. *turtle-dove
I may not eat, no more than a maid."
"Go from the window, thou jack fool," she said:
"As help me God, it will not be, 'come ba* me.' *kiss
I love another, else I were to blame",
Well better than thee, by Jesus, Absolon.
Go forth thy way, or I will cast a stone;

And let me sleep; *a twenty devil way*. *twenty devils take ye!*
"Alas!" quoth Absolon, "and well away!
That true love ever was so ill beset:
Then kiss me, since that it may be no bet*, *better
For Jesus' love, and for the love of me."
"Wilt thou then go thy way therewith?" , quoth she.
"Yea, certes, leman," quoth this Absolon.
"Then make thee ready," quoth she, "I come anon."
[And unto Nicholas she said *full still*: *in a low voice*
"Now peace, and thou shalt laugh anon thy fill."]<36>
This Absolon down set him on his knees,
And said; "I am a lord at all degrees:
For after this I hope there cometh more;
Leman, thy grace, and, sweete bird, thine ore.*" *favour
The window she undid, and that in haste.
"Have done," quoth she, "come off, and speed thee fast,
Lest that our neighebours should thee espy."
Then Absolon gan wipe his mouth full dry.
Dark was the night as pitch or as the coal,
And at the window she put out her hole,
And Absolon him fell ne bet ne werse,
But with his mouth he kiss'd her naked erse
Full savourly. When he was ware of this,
Aback he start, and thought it was amiss;
For well he wist a woman hath no beard.
He felt a thing all rough, and long y-hair'd,
And saide; "Fy, alas! what have I do?"
"Te he!" quoth she, and clapt the window to;
And Absolon went forth at sorry pace.
"A beard, a beard," said Hendy Nicholas;
"By God's corpus, this game went fair and well."
This silly Absolon heard every deal*, *word
And on his lip he gan for anger bite;
And to himself he said, "I shall thee quite*. *requite, be even with
Who rubbeth now, who frotteth* now his lips *rubs
With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,
But Absolon? that saith full oft, "Alas!
My soul betake I unto Sathanas,
But me were lever* than all this town," quoth he *rather
I this despite awroken* for to be. *revenged
Alas! alas! that I have been y-blent*." *deceived
His hote love is cold, and all y-quent.* *quenched
For from that time that he had kiss'd her erse,
Of paramours he *sette not a kers,* *cared not a rush*

For he was healed of his malady;
Full often paramours he gan defy,
And weep as doth a child that hath been beat.
A softe pace he went over the street
Unto a smith, men callen Dan* Gerveis, *master
That in his forge smithed plough-harness;
He sharped share and culter busily.
This Absolon knocked all easily,
And said; "Undo, Gerveis, and that anon."
"What, who art thou?" "It is I, Absolon."
"What? Absolon, what? Christe's sweete tree*, *cross
Why rise so rath*? hey! Benedicite, *early
What aileth you? some gay girl,<37> God it wote,
Hath brought you thus upon the viretote:<38>
By Saint Neot, ye wot well what I mean."
This Absolon he raughte* not a bean *recked, cared
Of all his play; no word again he gaf*, *spoke
For he had more tow on his distaff<39>
Than Gerveis knew, and saide; "Friend so dear,
That hote culter in the chimney here
Lend it to me, I have therewith to don*: *do
I will it bring again to thee full soon."
Gerveis answered; "Certes, were it gold,
Or in a poke* nobles all untold, *purse
Thou shouldst it have, as I am a true smith.
Hey! Christe's foot, what will ye do therewith?"
"Thereof," quoth Absolon, "be as be may;
I shall well tell it thee another day:"
And caught the culter by the colde stele*. *handle
Full soft out at the door he gan to steal,
And went unto the carpentere's wall
He coughed first, and knocked therewithal
Upon the window, light as he did ere*. *before <40>
This Alison answered; "Who is there
That knocketh so? I warrant him a thief."
"Nay, nay," quoth he, "God wot, my sweete lefe*, *love
I am thine Absolon, my own darling.
Of gold," quoth he, "I have thee brought a ring,
My mother gave it me, so God me save!
Full fine it is, and thereto well y-grave*: *engraved
This will I give to thee, if thou me kiss."
Now Nicholas was risen up to piss,
And thought he would *amenden all the jape*; *improve the joke*
He shoulde kiss his erse ere that he scape:

And up the window did he hastily,
And out his erse he put full privily
Over the buttock, to the haunche bone.
And therewith spake this clerk, this Absolon,
"Speak, sweete bird, I know not where thou art."
This Nicholas anon let fly a fart,
As great as it had been a thunder dent*; *peal, clap
That with the stroke he was well nigh y-blent*; *blinded
But he was ready with his iron hot,
And Nicholas amid the erse he smote.
Off went the skin an handbreadth all about.
The hote culter burned so his tout*, *breech
That for the smart he weened* he would die; *thought
As he were wood*, for woe he gan to cry, *mad
"Help! water, water, help for Godde's heart!"
This carpenter out of his slumber start,
And heard one cry "Water," as he were wood*, *mad
And thought, "Alas! now cometh Noe's flood."
He sat him up withoute wordes mo'
And with his axe he smote the cord in two;
And down went all; he found neither to sell
Nor bread nor ale, till he came to the sell*, *threshold <41>
Upon the floor, and there in swoon he lay.
Up started Alison and Nicholay,
And cried out an "harow!" <15> in the street.
The neighbours alle, bothe small and great
In ranne, for to gauren* on this man, *stare
That yet in swoone lay, both pale and wan:
For with the fall he broken had his arm.
But stand he must unto his owen harm,
For when he spake, he was anon borne down
With Hendy Nicholas and Alisoun.
They told to every man that he was wood*; *mad
He was aghaste* so of Noe's flood, *afraid
Through phantasy, that of his vanity
He had y-bought him kneading-tubbes three,
And had them hanged in the roof above;
And that he prayed them for Godde's love
To sitten in the roof for company.
The folk gan laughen at his phantasy.
Into the roof they kyken* and they gape, *peep, look.
And turned all his harm into a jape*. *jest
For whatsoe'er this carpenter answer'd,
It was for nought, no man his reason heard.

With oathes great he was so sworn adown,
That he was holden wood in all the town.
For every clerk anon right held with other;
They said, "The man was wood, my leve* brother;" *dear
And every wight gan laughen at his strife.
Thus swived* was the carpentere's wife, *enjoyed
For all his keeping* and his jealousy; *care
And Absolon hath kiss'd her nether eye;
And Nicholas is scalded in the tout.
This tale is done, and God save all the rout*. *company

Notes to the Miller's Tale

1. Almagest: The book of Ptolemy the astronomer, which formed the canon of astrological science in the middle ages.
2. Astrolabe: "Astrelagour," "astrelabore"; a mathematical instrument for taking the altitude of the sun or stars.
3. "Augrim" is a corruption of algorithm, the Arabian term for numeration; "augrim stones," therefore were probably marked with numerals, and used as counters.
4. Angelus ad virginem: The Angel's salutation to Mary; Luke i. 28. It was the "Ave Maria" of the Catholic Church service.
5. Cato: Though Chaucer may have referred to the famous Censor, more probably the reference is merely to the "Moral Distichs," which go under his name, though written after his time; and in a supplement to which the quoted passage may be found.
6. Barm-cloth: apron; from Anglo-Saxon "barme," bosom or lap.
7. Volupere: Head-gear, kerchief; from French, "envelopper," to wrap up.
8. Popelet: Puppet; but chiefly; young wench.
9. Noble: nobles were gold coins of especial purity and brightness; "Ex auro nobilissimi, unde nobilis vocatus," (made from the noblest (purest) gold, and therefore called nobles) says Vossius.
10. Yern: Shrill, lively; German, "gern," willingly, cheerfully.
11. Braket: bragget, a sweet drink made of honey, spices, &c. In some parts of the country, a drink made from honeycomb, after the honey is extracted, is still called "bragwort."
12. Piggesnie: a fond term, like "my duck;" from Anglo-Saxon, "piga," a young maid; but Tyrwhitt associates it with the Latin, "ocellus," little eye, a fondling term, and suggests that the "pigs- eye," which is very small, was applied in the same sense. Davenport and Butler both use the word pigsnie, the first for "darling," the second literally for "eye;" and Bishop Gardner, "On True Obedience," in his address to the reader, says: "How softly she was wont to chirpe him under the chin, and kiss him; how prettily she could talk to him (how doth my sweet heart, what saith now pig's-eye)."
13. Oseney: A once well-known abbey near Oxford.
14. Trave: travis; a frame in which unruly horses were shod.
15. Harow and Alas: Haro! was an old Norman cry for redress or aid. The "Clameur de Haro" was lately raised, under peculiar circumstances, as the prelude to a legal

protest, in Jersey.
16. His shoes were ornamented like the windows of St. Paul's, especially like the old rose-window.
17. Rise: Twig, bush; German, "Reis," a twig; "Reisig," a copse.
18. Chaucer satirises the dancing of Oxford as he did the French of Stratford at Bow.
19. Shot window: A projecting or bow window, whence it was possible shoot at any one approaching the door.
20. Piment: A drink made with wine, honey, and spices.
21. Because she was town-bred, he offered wealth, or money reward, for her love.
22. Parish-clerks, like Absolon, had leading parts in the mysteries or religious plays; Herod was one of these parts, which may have been an object of competition among the amateurs of the period.
23 ."The nighe sly maketh oft time the far lief to be loth": a proverb; the cunning one near at hand oft makes the loving one afar off to be odious.
24. Kyked: Looked; "keek" is still used in some parts in the sense of "peep."
25. Saint Frideswide was the patroness of a considerable priory at Oxford, and held there in high repute.
26. Plato, in his "Theatetus," tells this story of Thales; but it has since appeared in many other forms.
27. Crouche: protect by signing the sign of the cross.
28. Forlore: lost; german, "verloren."
29. Him that harried Hell: Christ who wasted or subdued hell: in the middle ages, some very active exploits against the prince of darkness and his powers were ascribed by the monkish tale- tellers to the saviour after he had "descended into hell."
30. According to the old mysteries, Noah's wife refused to come into the ark, and bade her husband row forth and get him a new wife, because he was leaving her gossips in the town to drown. Shem and his brothers got her shipped by main force; and Noah, coming forward to welcome her, was greeted with a box on the ear.
31. "Him had been lever, I dare well undertake, At thilke time, than all his wethers black, That she had had a ship herself alone." i.e. "At that time he would have given all his black wethers, if she had had an ark to herself."
32. "Clum," like "mum," a note of silence; but otherwise explained as the humming sound made in repeating prayers; from the Anglo-Saxon, "clumian," to mutter, speak in an under- tone, keep silence.
33. Curfew-time: Eight in the evening, when, by the law of William the Conqueror, all people were, on ringing of a bell, to extinguish fire and candle, and go to rest; hence the word curfew, from French, "couvre-feu," cover-fire.
34. Absolon chewed grains: these were grains of Paris, or Paradise; a favourite spice.
35. Under his tongue a true love he bare: some sweet herb; another reading, however, is "a true love-knot," which may have been of the nature of a charm.
36. The two lines within brackets are not in most of the editions: they are taken from Urry; whether he supplied them or not, they serve the purpose of a necessary explanation.
37. Gay girl: As applied to a young woman of light manners, this euphemistic phrase

has enjoyed a wonderful vitality.
38. Viretote: Urry reads "meritote," and explains it from Spelman as a game in which children made themselves giddy by whirling on ropes. In French, "virer" means to turn; and the explanation may, therefore, suit either reading. In modern slang parlance, Gerveis would probably have said, "on the rampage," or "on the swing" — not very far from Spelman's rendering.
39. He had more tow on his distaff: a proverbial saying: he was playing a deeper game, had more serious business on hand.
40. Ere: before; German, "eher."
41. Sell: sill of the door, threshold; French, "seuil," Latin, "solum," the ground.