

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE CLERK'S TALE

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1343-1400) - English poet, known as the most important writer of Middle English. His *Canterbury Tales* (~1380) are told by traveling pilgrims who meet at a tavern and have a storytelling contest to pass the time. Each tale is preceded by an introductory prologue. The Clerk's Tale - Griselda, a beautiful girl from a poor working family, is chosen by Marquis Walter to be his wife. The tale describes Walter's test of Griselda's devotion.

THE CLERK'S TALE

There is, in the west side of Italy,
Down at the foot of Mount Viso the cold,
A pleasant plain that yields abundantly,
Where many a tower and town one may behold,
That were there founded in the times of old.
With many another fair delightful sight;
Saluzzo is this noble region bright.

A marquis once was lord of all that land,
As were his noble ancestors before;
Obedient and ready to his hand
Were all his lieges, both the less and more.
Thus in delight he lived, and had of yore,
Beloved and feared, through favour of Fortune,
Both by his lords and by the common run.

Therewith he was, to speak of lineage,
Born of the noblest blood of Lombardy,
With person fair, and strong, and young of age,

And full of honour and of courtesy;
Discreet enough to lead his nation, he;
Save in some things wherein he was to blame,
And Walter was this young lord's Christian name.

I blame him thus, that he considered naught
Of what in coming time might him betide,
But on his present wish was all his thought,
As, he would hunt and hawk on every side;
Well-nigh all other cares would he let slide,
And would not, and this was the worst of all,
Marry a wife, for aught that might befall.

That point alone his people felt so sore
That in a flock one day to him they went,
And one of them, the wisest in all lore,
Or else because the lord would best consent
That he should tell him what the people meant,
Or else that he could make the matter clear,
He to the marquis spoke as you shall hear.

“O noble marquis, your humanity
Assures us, aye, and gives us hardiness
As often as there is necessity
That we to you may tell our heaviness.
Accept, lord, now of your great nobleness
That we with sincere hearts may here complain,
Nor let your ears my humble voice disdain.

“Though I have naught to do in this matter
More than another man has in this place,
Yet for as much as you, most honoured sir,
Have always showed me favour and much grace,
I dare the more to ask of you a space
Of audience, to set forth our request,
And you, my lord, will do as you like best.

“For truly, lord, so well do we like you
And all your works (and ever have), that we-
We could not, of ourselves, think what to do
To make us live in more felicity,

Save one thing, lord, and if your will it be,
That to be wedded man you hold it best,
Then were your people's hearts at utter rest.

“But bow your neck beneath that blessed yoke
Of sovereignty and not of hard service,
The which men call espousal or wedlock;
And pray think, lord, among your thoughts so wise,
How our days pass and each in different guise;
For though we sleep or wake or roam or ride,
Time flies, and for no man will it abide.

“And though your time of green youth flower as yet,
Age creeps in always, silent as a stone;
Death threatens every age, nor will forget
For any state, and there escapes him none:
And just as surely as we know, each one,
That we shall die, uncertain are we all
What day it is when death shall on us fall.

“Accept then of us, lord, the true intent,
That never yet refused you your behest,

And we will, lord, if you will give consent,
Choose you a wife without delay, at least,
Born of the noblest blood and the greatest
Of all this land, so that it ought to seem
Honour to God and you, as we shall deem.

“Deliver us from all our constant dread
And take yourself a wife, for High God’s sake;
For if it so befell, which God forbid,
That by your death your noble line should break
And that a strange successor should come take
Your heritage, woe that we were alive!
Wherefore we pray you speedily to wive.”

Their humble prayer and their so earnest cheer
Roused in the marquis’ heart great sympathy.
“You’d have me,” he replied, “my people dear,
Do what I’ve never yet thought necessary.
I have rejoiced in my fond liberty,
That men so seldom find in their marriage;
Where I was free, I must be in bondage.

“Nevertheless, I see your true intent,
And know there’s always sense in what you say;
Wherefore of my free will, will I consent
To wed a wife, as soon as ever I may.
But whereas you have offered here today
To choose a wife for me, I you release
From that, and pray that you thereof will cease.

“For God knows well that children oft retain
Naught of their worthy elders gone before;
Goodness comes all from God, not of the strain
Whereof they were engendered; furthermore
I trust in God’s great goodness, and therefore
My marriage and my state and all my ease
I leave to Him to do with as He please.

“Let me alone in choosing of my wife,
That burden on my own back I’ll endure;
But I pray you, and charge you on your life,
That what wife I may take, me you’ll assure

You'll honour her life's tenure,
In word and deed, both here and everywhere,
As if she were an emperor's daughter fair.

“And furthermore, this shall you swear, that you
Against my choice shall neither grieve nor strive;
Since I'm forgoing liberty, and woo
At your request, so may I ever thrive
As, where my heart is set, there will I wive;
And save you give consent in such manner,
I pray you speak no more of this matter.”

With hearty will they swore and gave assent
To all this, and no one of them said nay;
Praying him, of his grace, before they went,
That he would set for them a certain day
For his espousal, soon as might be; yea,
For still the people had a little dread
Lest that the marquis would no woman wed.

He granted them the day that pleased him best
Whereon he would be married, certainly,

And said he did all this at their request;
And they with humble hearts, obediently,
Kneeling upon their knees full reverently,
All thanked him there, and thus they made an end
Of their design and homeward did they wend.

And thereupon he to his officers
Ordered that for the fete they should provide,
And to his household gentlemen and squires,
Such charges gave as pleased him to decide;
And all obeyed him: let him praise or chide,
And each of them did all his diligence
To show unto the fete his reverence.

Explicit prima pars.
Incipit secunda pars.

Not far from that same honoured palace where
This marquis planned his marriage, at this tide,
There stood a hamlet, on a site most fair,
Wherein the poor folk of the countryside
Stabled their cattle and did all abide,

And where their labour gave them sustenance
After the earth had yielded abundance.

Amongst these humble folk there dwelt a man
Who was considered poorest of them all;
But the High God of Heaven sometimes can
Send His grace to a little ox's stall;
Janicula men did this poor man call.
A daughter had he, fair enough to sight;
Griselda was this young maid's name, the bright.

If one should speak of virtuous beauty,
Then was she of the fairest under sun;
Since fostered in dire poverty was she,
No lust luxurious in her heart had run;
More often from the well than from the tun
She drank, and since she would chaste virtue please,
She knew work well, but knew not idle ease.

But though this maiden tender was of age,
Yet in the breast of her virginity
There was enclosed a ripe and grave courage;

And in great reverence and charity
Her poor old father fed and fostered she;
A few sheep grazing in a field she kept,
For she would not be idle till she slept.

And when she homeward came, why she would bring
Roots and green herbs, full many times and oft,
The which she'd shred and boil for her living,
And made her bed a hard one and not soft;
Her father kept she in their humble croft
With what obedience and diligence
A child may do for father's reverence.

Upon Griselda, humble daughter pure,
The marquis oft had looked in passing by,
As he a-hunting rode at adventure;
And when it chanced that her he did espy,
Not with the glances of a wanton eye
He gazed at her, but all in sober guise,
And pondered on her deeply in this wise:

Commending to his heart her womanhood,
And virtue passing that of any wight,
Of so young age in face and habitude.
For though the people have no deep insight
In virtue, he considered all aright
Her goodness, and decided that he would
Wed only her, if ever wed he should.

The day of wedding came, but no one can
Tell who the woman is that bride shall be;
At which strange thing they wondered, many a man,
And they said, marvelling, in privacy:
"Will not our lord yet leave his vanity?
Will he not wed? Alas, alas, the while!
Why will he thus himself and us beguile?"

Nevertheless, this marquis has bade make,
Of jewels set in gold and in rich azure,
Brooches and rings, all for Griselda's sake,
And for her garments took he then the measure

By a young maiden of her form and stature,
And found all other ornaments as well
That for such wedding would be meet to tell.

The time of mid-morn of that very day
Approached when this lord's marriage was to be;
And all the palace was bedecked and gay,
Both hall and chambers, each in its degree;
With kitchens stuffed with food in great plenty,
There might one see the last and least dainty
That could be found in all of Italy.

This regal marquis, splendidly arrayed,
With lords and ladies in his company
(Who to attend the feasting had been prayed)
And of his retinue the bachelory,
With many a sound of sundry melody,
Unto the village whereof I have told,
In this array the nearest way did hold.

Griselda who, God knows, was innocent
That for her sake was all this fine array,

To fetch some water, to a fountain went,
Yet she returned soon, did this lovely may,
For she had heard it said that on this day
The marquis was to wed, and if she might,
She was full fain to see the glorious sight.

She thought: "With other maidens I will stand
(Who are my friends) within our door, and see
The marchioness, and therefore I'll turn hand
To do at home, as soon as it may be,
The household work that's waiting there for me;
And then I'll be at leisure to behold
Her, if they this way to the castle hold."

And as across her threshold she'd have gone,
The marquis came, and for her did he call;
And she set down her water jar anon
Beside the threshold, in an ox's stall,
And down upon her two knees did she fall
And, kneeling, with grave countenance, was still
Till she had heard what was his lordship's will.

This thoughtful marquis spoke unto this maid
Full soberly, and said in this manner:
“Griselda, where’s your father?” so he said.
And she, with reverence and with humble cheer,
Answered: “My lord, he is but inside here.”
And in she went without more tarrying
And to the marquis did her father bring.

He by the hand then took this ancient man
And said, when he had led him well aside:
“Janicula, I neither will nor can
Conceal my love, nor my heart’s longing hide.
If you but acquiesce, whate’er betide,
Your daughter will I take, before I wend,
To be my wife until her life’s dear end.

“You love me, and I know it well today,
And are my faithful liege, and were of yore;
And all that pleases me, I dare well say,
Pleases you too; especially therefore

Assure me on the point I made before-
Can we together in this compact draw,
And will you take me as your son-in-law?"

This sudden word the man astonished so
That red he grew, abashed, and all quaking
He stood; nor could he answer further, no,
Than but to say: "O Lord, I am willing
To do your will; but against your liking
I'll do no thing; you are my lord so dear
That what you wish governs this matter here."

"Then I will," said this marquis, quietly,
"That in your chamber you and I and she
Have consultation, and do you know why?
Because I'd ask her if her will it be
To be my wife and so be ruled by me;
And all this shall be done in your presence,
I will not speak without your audience."

And while in chamber they three were about
Their business, whereof you'll hereafter hear,

The people crowded through the house without
And wondered by what honest method there
So carefully she'd kept her father dear.
But more Griselda wondered, as she might,
For never before that saw she such a sight.

No wonder, though, astonishment she felt
At seeing so great a guest within that place;
With people of his sort she'd never dealt,
Wherefore she looked on with a pallid face.
But briefly through the matter now to race,
These are the very words the marquis said
To this most modest, truly constant maid.

"Griselda," said he, "You shall understand
It's pleasing to your father and to me
That I wed you, and even it may stand,
As I suppose, that you would have it be.
But these demands must I first make," said he,
"And since it shall be done in hasty wise,
Will you consent, or will you more advise?"

“I say this: Are you ready with good heart
To grant my wish, and that I freely may,
As I shall think best, make you laugh or smart,
And you to grumble never, night or day?
And too, when I say ‘yea’ you say not ‘nay’
By word or frown to what I have designed.
Swear this, and here I will our contract bind.”

Wondering upon this word, quaking for fear,
She said: “My lord, unsuited, unworthy
Am I to take the honour you give me here;
But what you’d have, that very thing would I.
And here I swear that never willingly,
In deed or thought, will I you disobey,
To save my life, and I love life, I say.”

“This is enough, Griselda mine,” cried he.
And forth he went then with full sober cheer
Out at the door, and after him came she,
And to the people who were waiting near,
“This is my wife,” he said, “who’s standing here.”

Honour her, all, and love her, all, I pray,
Who love me; and there is no more to say."

And so that nothing of her former gear
She should take with her to his house, he bade
That women strip her naked then and there;
Whereat these ladies were not over-glad
To handle clothes wherein she had been clad.
Nevertheless, this maiden bright of hue
From head to foot they clothed her all anew.

Her hair they combed and brushed, which fell untressed
All artlessly, and placed a coronal
With their small fingers on her head, and dressed
Her robes with many jewels great and small;
Of her array how shall I tell withal?
Scarcely the people knew her for fairness,
So transformed was she in her splendid dress.

This marquis her has married with a ring
Brought for the purpose there; and then has set
Upon a horse, snow-white and well ambling,

And to his palace, without longer let,
With happy following folk and more they met,
Convoied her home, and thus the day they spent
In revelry until the sun's descent.

And briefly forth throughout this tale to chase,
I say that unto this new marchioness
God has such favour sent her, of His grace,
It seemed in no way true, by likeliness,
That she was born and bred in humbleness,
As in a hovel or an ox's stall,
But rather nurtured in an emperor's hall.

To everyone she soon became so dear
And worshipful, that folk where she had dwelt
And from her birth had known her, year by year,
Although they could have sworn it, scarcely felt
That to Janicula, with whom I've dealt,
She really was a daughter, for she seemed
Another creature now, or so they deemed.

For though she ever had been virtuous,
She was augmented by such excellence
Of manners based on noble goodness thus,
And so discreet and wise of eloquence,
So gentle and so worthy reverence,
And she could so the people's hearts embrace,
That each her loved that looked upon her face.

Not only in Saluzzo, in the town,
Was published wide the goodness of her name,
But throughout many a land where she'd renown
If one said well, another said the same;
So widespread of her goodness was the fame
That men and women came; the young and old
Went to Saluzzo, her but to behold.

Thus Walter lowly, nay, but royally,
Wedded, by Fortune's grace, right honourably,
In the good peace of God lived easily
At home, and outward grace enough had he;

And since he saw that under low degree
Is virtue often hid, the people fairly
Held him a prudent man, and that's done rarely.

Not only this Griselda through her wit
Knew how with wifely arts her home to bless,
But also, when there was a need for it,
The people's wrongs she knew how to redress.
There was no discord, rancour, heaviness
In all that land that she could not appease,
And wisely bring them all to rest and ease.

Although her husband from the court were gone,
If gentlemen, or less, of her country
Were angered, she would bring them all at one;
So wise and so mature of speech was she,
And judgments gave of so great equity,
Men felt that God from Heaven her did send
People to save and every wrong to amend.

Not long Griselda had, it seems, been wed
Before a daughter to her lord she bore,

Though of a son she'd rather have gone to bed.
Glad were the marquis and the folk therefor;
For though a girl-child came thus all before,
She might well to a boy-child yet attain,
Since barren she was not, it now was plain.

Explicit secunda pars.
Incipit tertia pars.

It happened, as it has sometimes before,
That when this child had sucked a month or so,
This marquis in his heart such longing bore
To test his wife, her patience thus to know,
He could not in his heart the chance forgo
This marvelous desire his wife to try;
'Twas needless, God knows, thus to peek and pry

He had sufficiently tried her before
And found her ever good; what needed it
That he should test her ever more and more?
Though some men praise it for a subtle wit,
Yet I say that to him 'twas no credit

To try his wife when there was never need,
Putting her heart to anguish and to dread.

In doing which the marquis took this turn:
He came alone by night to where she lay
And with a troubled look and features stern
He said to her: "Griselda mine, that day
When I removed you from your poor array
And placed you in a state of nobleness-
You have not all forgotten that, I guess.

"I say, Griselda, this your dignity
Wherein I have so placed you, as I trow,
Has not made you forgetful now to be
That I raised you from poor estate and low
For any good you might then have or know.
Take heed of every word that now I say,
There's no one else shall hear it, by my fay.

"You know and well enough how you came here
Into this house, it is not long ago,
And though to me you are both lief and dear,

Unto my nobles you are not; and so
They say that unto them 'tis shame and woe
To be your subjects and compelled to serve
You who are village-born and naught deserve.

“And specially, since that girl-child you bore,
These things they've said- of this there is no doubt;
But I desire, as I have done before,
To live at peace with all the folk about;
I cannot in this matter leave them out.
I must do with your daughter what is best,
Not as I would, but under men's behest.

“And yet, God knows, the act is hard for me;
And only with your knowledge would I bring
The deed to pass, but this I would," said he,
“That you assent with me to this one thing.
Show now that patience in your life's dealing
You told me of and swore to in your village
The day that marked the making of our marriage.”

When she had heard all this, this she received
With never a word or change of countenance;
For, as it seemed, she was in no way grieved.
She said: "Lord, all lies at your own pleasance;
My child and I, with hearty obeisance,
Are all yours, and you may save us or kill
That which is yours; do you what thing you will.

"There is no thing, and so God my soul save,
That you may like displeasing unto me;
I do not wish a single thing to have,
Nor dread a thing to lose, save only ye;
This will is in my heart and aye shall be,
Nor length of time nor death may this deface,
Nor turn my passion to another place."

Glad was this marquis of her answering,
And yet he feigned as if he were not so;
All dreary were his face and his bearing
When it came time from chamber he should go.

Soon after this, a quarter-hour or so,
He privily told all of his intent
Unto a man, whom to his wife he sent.

A kind of sergeant was this serving man,
Who had proved often faithful, as he'd found,
In matters great, and such men often can
Do evil faithfully, as can a hound.
The lord knew this man loved him and was bound;
And when this sergeant learned his lordship's will
He stalked into the chamber, grim and still.

“Madam,” said he, “you must forgive it me,
Though I do that to which I am constrained;
You are so wise you know well, it may be,
That a lord's orders may not well be feigned;
They may be much lamented or complained,
But men must needs their every wish obey,
And thus will I; there is no more to say.

“This child I am commanded now to take”-
And spoke no more, but seized that innocent

Pitilessly, and did a gesture make
As if he would have slain it ere he went,
Griselda, she must suffer and consent;
And so, meek as a lamb, she sat there, still,
And let this cruel sergeant do his will.

Suspicious of repute was this same man,
Suspect his face, suspect his word also,
Suspect the time when this thing he began,
Alas! Her daughter that she had loved so,
She thought he'd slay it right there, whether or no.
Nevertheless, she neither wept nor sighed,
Doing the marquis' liking though she died.

At last she found her voice and thus began
And meekly to the sergeant then she prayed
That, as he was a worthy, gentle man,
She might kiss her child once before his blade;
And on her breast this little child she laid,
With sad face, and so kissed it and did press
And lulled it and at last began to bless.

And thus she said in her benignant voice:
“Farewell, my child that I no more shall see;
But now I’ve crossed you thus, I will rejoice
That of the Father blessed may you be,
Who died for us upon the bitter tree.
Your soul, my little child, to Him I give;
This night you die for my sake- though I live.”

I think that to a nurse in such a case
It had been hard this pitiful thing to see;
Well might a mother then have cried “Alas!”
But so steadfastly serious was she
That she endured all her adversity,
And to the sergeant she but meekly said:
“I give you now again your little maid.

“Go now,” said she, “and do my lord’s behest,
But one thing will I pray you, of your grace,
That, save my lord forbade you, at the least
Bury this little body in some place
Where beasts nor birds will tear its limbs and face.”

But no word to that purpose would he say,
But took the child and went upon his way.

This sergeant went unto his lord again
And of Griselda's words and of her cheer
He told him point by point, all short and plain,
And so presented him his daughter dear.
A little pity felt the marquis here;
Nevertheless, he held his purpose still,
As great lords do when they will have their will;

And bade the sergeant that he privily
Should softly swaddle the young child and wrap
With all the necessaries, tenderly,
And in a coffer or some garment lap;
But upon pain his head should meet mishap
No man should know the least of his intent,
Nor whence he came, nor whither that he went;

But to Bologna, to his sister dear
Who then was of Panago the countess,
He should take it, and tell of matters here,

Asking of her she do her busyness
This child to foster in all nobleness;
And whose the child was, that he bade her hide
From everyone, for aught that might betide.

The sergeant goes and has fulfilled this thing;
But to this marquis now return must we;
For soon he went to see her, wondering
If by his wife's demeanour he might see,
Or by her conversation learn that she
Were changed in aught; but her he could not find
Other than ever serious and kind.

As glad, as humble, as busy in service,
And even in love, as she was wont to be,
Was she to him at all times in each wise;
And of her daughter not a word spoke she.
No strange nor odd look of adversity
Was seen in her, and her dear daughter's name
She never named in earnest nor in game.

Explicit tertia pars.
Sequitur pars quarta.

In this way over them there passed four years
Ere she with child was; but as High God would,
A boy-child then she bore, as it appears,
By Walter, fair and pleasing to behold.
And when folk this word to the father told,
Not only he but all the people raised
Their joyous hymns to God and His grace praised.

When he was two years old and from the breast
Weaned by his nurse, it chanced upon a day
This marquis had another wish to test
And try his wife yet further, so they say.
Oh, needless her temptation in this way!
But wedded men no measure can observe
When they've a wife who's patient and will serve.

“Wife,” said this marquis, “you have heard before,
My people bear our marriage with ill-will;
Particularly since my son you bore

Now it is worse than ever, all this ill.
Their murmurs all my heart and courage kill,
For to my ears come words so aimed to smart
That they have well-nigh broken all my heart.

“Now they say this: ‘When Walter’s dead and gone.
Then shall Janicula’s base blood succeed
And be our lord, for other have we none!’
Such words my people say, ‘tis true, indeed!
Well ought I of such murmurs to take heed;
For truly do I fear the populace,
Though they say nothing plainly to my face.

“I would exist in peace, if that I might;
Wherefore I am determined utterly
That as his sister served I, and by night,
Just so will I serve him full secretly;
And thus I warn you, that not suddenly
Out of yourself for woe you start or stray;
Be patient in this sorrow, so I pray.”

“I have,” said she, I said thus, and ever shall:
I’ll have no thing, or not have, that’s certain,
Save as you wish; nothing grieves me at all,
Even though my daughter and my son are slain
At your command, and that, I think, is plain.
I have had no part in my children twain
But sickness first, and after, woe and pain.

“You are our master; do with your own thing
Just as you like; no counsel ask of me.
For, as I left at home all my clothing
When first I came to you, just so,” said she,
“Left will and all my liberty,
And took your clothing; wherefore do I pray
You’ll do your pleasure, I’ll your wish obey.

“For certainly, if I had prescience
Your will to know ere you your wish had told,
I would perform it without negligence;
But now I know the wish that you unfold,

To do your pleasure firmly will I hold;
For knew I that my death would give you ease,
Right gladly would I die, lord, you to please.

“For death can offer no loss that is known
Compared to your love’s loss.” And when, I say,
He saw his wife’s great constancy, then down
He cast his eyes, and wondered at the way
She would in patience all his will obey;
And forth he went with dreary countenance,
But in his heart he knew a great pleasance.

This ugly sergeant in the very wise
That he her daughter took away, so he
(Or worse, if worse than this men could devise)
Has taken her son, the child of such beauty.
And always yet so all-patient was she
That she no sign gave forth of heaviness,
But kissed her son and so began to bless;

Save this: She prayed him that, and if he might,
Her son he’d bury in an earthen grave,

His tender limbs, so delicate to sight,
From ravenous birds and from all beasts to save.
But she no answer out of him could have.
He went his way as if he cared nor thought,
But to Bologna tenderly 'twas brought.

This marquis wondered ever more and more
Upon her patience; and indeed if he
Had not known truly in her years before
That she had loved her children perfectly,
He would have thought that out of subtlety
And malice, or from some urge more savage
She suffered this with calm face and courage.

But well he knew that, next himself, 'twas plain
She loved her children best in every wise.
But now to ask of women I am fain,
Whether these trials should not the man suffice?
What could an obdurate husband more devise
To prove her wifehood and her faithfulness,
And he continuing in his stubbornness?

But there are folk to such condition grown
That, when they do a certain purpose take,
They cannot quit the intent they thus own,
But just as they were bound unto a stake
They will not from that first hard purpose shake.
Just so this marquis fully was purposed
To test his wife, as he was first disposed.

He watched her, if by word or countenance
She show a change toward him, or in courage;
But never could he find a variance.
She was aye one in heart and in visage;
And aye the farther that she went in age,
The more true, if such thing were possible,
She was in love, and painstaking, as well.

From which it seemed that, as between those two,
There was but one will, for, to Walter's quest,
The same thing was her sole desire also,
And- God be thanked!- all fell out for the best.

She showed well that, in all this world's unrest,
A wife, of her volition, nothing should
Will to be done, save as her husband would.

The scandal of this Walter widely spread,
That, of his cruel heart, he'd wickedly
(Because a humble woman he had wed)
Murdered his two young children secretly.
Such murmurs went among them commonly.
No wonder, either, for to people's ear
There came no word but they'd been murdered there.

For which, whereas the people theretofore
Had loved him, now the scandal of such shame
Caused them to hate where they had loved before;
To be a murderer brings a hateful name.
Nevertheless, in earnest nor in game
Would he from this his cruel plan be bent;
To test his wife was all his fixed intent.

Now when his daughter was twelve years of age,
He to the court of Rome (in subtle wise
Informed of his design) sent his message,
Commanding them such bulls they should devise
As for his cruel purpose would suffice,
How that the pope, for Walter's people's rest,
Bade him to wed another, and the best.

I say, he ordered they should counterfeit
A papal bull and set it forth therein
That he had leave his first wife now to quit,
By papal dispensation, with no sin,
To stop all such dissension as did win
Between his folk and him; thus said the bull,
The which thing they did publish to the full.

The ignorant people, as no wonder is,
Supposed of course that things were even so;
But when Griselda's ears caught word of this,
I judge that then her heart was filled with woe.

But she, for ever steadfast, still did show
Herself disposed, this humble meek creature,
The adversity of Fortune to endure.

Abiding ever his wish and pleasure still,
To whom she had been given, heart and all;
He was her worldly hope, for good or ill;
But to tell all this briefly, if I shall,
This marquis wrote, in letter personal,
The devious working of his whole intent
And secretly 'twas to Bologna sent.

Unto Panago's count, who had, we know,
Wedded his sister, prayed he specially
To bring him home again his children two,
In honourable estate, all openly.
But one more thing he prayed him, utterly,
That he to no one, whoso should inquire,
Would tell who was their mother or their sire,

But say: The maiden married was to be
Unto Saluzzo's marquis, and anon.

And as this count was asked, so then did he;
For on day set he on his way was gone
Toward Saluzzo, with lords many a one,
In rich array, this maiden there to guide,
With her young brother riding at her side.

So toward her marriage went this fresh young maid
Clad richly and bedecked with jewels clear;
Her brother with her, boyishly arrayed,
And all anew, was now in his eighth year.
And thus in great pomp and with merry cheer
Toward Saluzzo went they on their way,
And rode along together day by day.

Explicit quarta pars.
Sequitur pars quinta.

Meanwhile, according to his wicked way,
This marquis, still to test his wife once more,
Even to the final proof of her, I say,
Fully to have experience to the core
If she were yet as steadfast as before,

He on a day in open audience
Loudly said unto her this rude sentence:

“Truly, Griselda, I’d much joy, perchance,
When you I took for wife, for your goodness
And for your truth and your obedience,
Not for your lineage nor your wealth, I guess;
But now I know, in utter certainness,
That in great lordship, if I well advise,
There is great servitude in sundry wise.

“I may not act as every plowman may;
My people have constrained me that I take
‘Another wife, and this they ask each day;
And now the pope, hot rancour thus to slake,
Consents, I dare the thing to undertake;
And truly now this much to you I’ll say,
My new wife journeys hither on her way.

“Be strong of heart and leave at once her place,
And that same dower that you brought to me,
Take it again, I grant it of my grace;

Return you to your father's house," said he;
"No man may always have prosperity;
With a calm heart I urge you to endure
The stroke of Fortune or of adventure."

And she replied again, of her patience:
"My lord," said she, "I know, and knew alway,
How that between your own magnificence
And my poor state, no person can or may
Make a comparison in an equal way.
I never held me worthy or of grade
To be your wife, no, nor your chambermaid.

"And in this house, where lady you made me
(The High God do I take now to witness,
And as He truly may my soul's joy be),
I never held me lady nor mistress,
But only servant to your worthiness;
And ever shall, while my life may endure,
Beyond all worldly beings, that is sure.

“That you so long, of your benignity,
Have held me here in honour in this way,
Where I was never worthy, once, to be,
For that, thank God and you- to God I pray
He will reward you. There’s no more to say.
Unto my father gladly will I wend
And dwell with him until my life shall end.

“Where I was fostered when an infant small,
There will I lead my life till I be dead,
A widow, clean in body, heart, and all.
For, since I gave to you my maidenhead,
And am your true and lawful wife, wedded,
May God forbid such a lord’s wife to take
Another man for husband or love’s sake.

“And of your new wife, may God of His grace
Grant you but joy and all prosperity:
For I will gladly yield to her my place,
Wherein so happy I was wont to be,

For since it pleases you, my lord," said she,
Who have been all my heart's ease and its rest,
That I shall go, I'll go when you request.

"But whereas now you proffer me such dower
As first I brought to you, it's in my mind
That 'twas my wretched clothes and nothing fair.
The which to me were hard now for to find.
O my good God! How noble and how kind
You seemed then, in your speech and in your face.
The day we married in that humble place.

"But truth is said- at least I find it true
For actually its proof is seen in me-
Old love is not the same as when it's new.
But truly, lord, for no adversity,
Though I should die of all this, shall it be
That ever in word or deed I shall repent
That I gave you my heart in whole intent.

"My lord, you know that, in my father's place,
You stripped from me my poor and humble weed

And clothed me richly, of your noble grace.
I brought you nothing else at all indeed,
Than faith and nakedness and maidenhead.
And here again my clothing I restore,
And, too, my wedding-ring, for evermore.

“The rest of all your jewels, they will be
Within your chamber, as I dare maintain;
Naked out of my father’s house," said she,
“I came, and naked I return again.
To follow aye your pleasure I am fain,
But yet I hope it is not your intent
That smockless from your palace I be sent.

“You could not do so base and shameful thing
That the same womb in which your children lay
Should, before all the folk, in my walking,
Be seen all bare; and therefore do I pray
Let me not like a worm go on my way.
Remember that, my own lord, always dear,
I was your wife, though I unworthy were.

“Wherefore, as guerdon for my maidenhead,
The which I brought, but shall not with me bear,
Let them but give me, for my only meed,
Such a poor smock as I was wont to wear,
That I therewith may hide the womb of her
Who was your wife; and here I take my leave
Of you, my own dear lord, lest you should grieve.

“The smock,” said he, “that you have on your back,
Let it stay there and wear it forth,” said he.
But firmness in so saying the man did lack;
But went his way for ruth and for pity.
Before the folk her body then stripped she
And in her smock, with head and feet all bare,
Toward her father’s hovel did she fare.

The folk they followed, weeping and with cries,
And Fortune did they curse as they passed on;
But she with weeping did not wet her eyes,
And all this while of words she said not one.

Her father, who had heard this news anon,
Cursed then the day and hour when from the earth,
A living creature, nature gave him birth.

For, beyond any doubt, this poor old man
Had always feared the marquis soon would tire,
And doubted since the marriage first began,
If when the lord had satisfied desire,
He would not think a wife of station higher,
For one of his degree, had been more right,
And send her thence as soon as ever he might.

To meet his daughter hastily went he,
For he, by noise of folk, knew her coming;
And with her old coat, such as it might be,
He covered her, full sorrowfully weeping;
But the coat over her he could not bring,
For poor the cloth, and many days had passed
Since on her marriage day she wore it last.

Thus with her father, for a certain space,
Did dwell this flower of wifely meek patience,

Who neither by her words nor in her face,
Before the people nor in their absence,
Showed that she thought to her was done offense;
Nor of her high estate a remembrance
Had she, to judge by her calm countenance.

No wonder, though, for while in high estate,
Her soul kept ever full humility;
No mouth complaining, no heart delicate,
No pomp, no look of haughty royalty,
But full of patience and benignity,
Discreet and prideless, always honourable,
And to her husband meek and firm as well.

Men speak of Job and of his humbleness,
As clerks, when they so please, right well can write
Concerning men, but truth is, nevertheless,
Though clerks' praise of all women is but slight,
No man acquits himself in meekness quite
As women can, nor can be half so true
As women are, save this be something new.

Explicit quinta pars.
Sequitur pars sexta.

Now from Bologna is Panago come,
Whereof the word spread unto great and less,
And in the ears of people, all and some,
It was told, too, that a new marchioness
Came with him, in such pomp and such richness
That never had been seen with human eye
So noble array in all West Lombardy.

The marquis, who had planned and knew all this,
Before this count was come, a message sent
To poor Griselda, who had lost her bliss;
With humble heart and features glad she went
And on her knees before her lord she bent.
No pride of thought did her devotion dim;
She wisely and with reverence greeted him.

He said, "Griselda, hear what I shall say:
This maiden, who'll be wedded unto me,
Shall be received with splendour of array

As royally as in my house may be,
And, too, that everyone in his degree
Have his due rank in seating and service,
And high pleasance, as I can best devise.

“I have not serving women adequate
To set the rooms in order as I would.
And so I wish you here to regulate
All matters of the sort as mistress should.
You know of old the ways I think are good,
And though you’re clothed in such a slattern’s way,
Go do at least your duty as you may.”

“Not only am I glad, my lord,” said she,
“To do your wish, but I desire also
To serve you and to please in my degree;
This without wearying I’ll always do.
And ever, lord, in happiness or woe,
The soul within my heart shall not forgo
To love you best with true intent, I know.”

Then she began to put the house aright,
To set the tables and the beds to make;
And was at pains to do all that she might,
Praying the chambermaids, for good God's sake,
To make all haste and sweep hard and to shake;
And she, who was most serviceable of all,
Did every room array, and his wide hall.

About mid-morning did this count alight,
Who brought with him these noble children twain,
Whereat the people ran to see the sight
Of their array, so rich was all the train;
And for the first time did they not complain,
But said that Walter was no fool, at least,
To change his wife, for it was for the best.

For she was fairer far, so thought they all,
Than was Griselda, and of younger age,
And fairer fruit betwixt the two should fall,
And pleasing more, for her high lineage;

Her brother, too, so fair was of visage,
That, seeing them, the people all were glad,
Commending now the sense the marquis had.

“O storm-torn people! Unstable and untrue!
Aye indiscreet, and changing as a vane,
Delighting ever in rumour that is new,
For like the moon aye do you wax and wane;
Full of all chatter, dear at even a Jane;
Your judgment’s false, your constancy deceives,
A full great fool is he that you believes!”

Thus said the sober folk of that city,
Seeing the people staring up and down,
For they were glad, just for the novelty,
To have a young new lady of their town.
No more of this I’ll mention or make known;
But to Griselda I’ll myself address
To tell her constancy and busyness.

Full busy Griselda was in everything
That to the marquis’ feast was pertinent;

Nothing was she confused by her clothing,
Though rude it was and somewhat badly rent
But with a glad face to the gate she went,
With other folk, to greet the marchioness,
And afterward she did her busyness.

With so glad face his guests she did receive,
And with such tact, each one in his degree,
That no fault in it could a man perceive;
But all they wondered much who she might be
That in so poor array, as they could see,
Yet knew so much of rank and reverence;
And worthily they praised her high prudence.

In all this while she never once did cease
The maiden and her brother to commend
With kindness of a heart that was at peace,
So well that no man could her praise amend.
But at the last, when all these lords did wend
To seat themselves to dine, then did he call
Griselda, who was busy in his hall.

“Griselda,” said he, as it were in play,
“How like you my new wife and her beauty?”
“Right well,” said she, “my lord, for by my fay
A fairer saw I never than is she.
I pray that God give her prosperity;
And so I hope that to you both He’ll send
Great happiness until your lives shall end.

“One thing I beg, my lord, and warn also,
That you prick not, with any tormenting,
This tender maid, as you’ve hurt others so;
For she’s been nurtured in her up-bringing
More tenderly, and, to my own thinking,
She could not such adversity endure
As could one reared in circumstances poor.”

And when this Walter thought of her patience,
Her glad face, with no malice there at all,
And how so oft he’d done to her offence,
And she aye firm and constant as a wall,

Remaining ever blameless through it all,
This cruel marquis did his heart address
To pity for her wifely steadfastness.

“This is enough, Griselda mine!” cried he,
“Be now no more ill pleased nor more afraid;
I have your faith and your benignity,
As straitly as ever woman’s was, assayed
In high place and in poverty arrayed.
Now know I well, dear wife, your steadfastness.”
And he began to kiss her and to press.

And she, for wonder, took of this no keep;
She heard not what the thing was he had cried;
She fared as if she’d started out of sleep,
Till from bewilderment she roused her pride.
“Griselda,” said he, “by our God Who died,
You are my wife, no other one I have,
Nor ever had, as God my soul may save!

“This is your daughter, whom you have supposed
Should be my wife; the other child truly

Shall be my heir, as I have aye purposed;
You bore him in your body faithfully.
I've kept them at Bologna secretly;
Take them again, for now you cannot say
That you have lost your children twain for aye.

“And folk that otherwise have said of me,
I warn them well that I have done this deed
Neither for malice nor for cruelty,
But to make trial in you of virtue hid,
And not to slay my children, God forbid!
But just to keep them privily and still
Till I your purpose knew and all your will.”

When she heard this, she swooned and down did fall
For pitiful joy, and after her swooning
Both her young children to her did she call,
And in her arms, full piteously weeping,
Embraced them, and ail tenderly kissing,
As any mother would, with many a tear
She bathed their faces and their sunny hair.

Oh, what a pitiful thing it was to see
Her swooning, and her humble voice to hear!
“Thanks, lord, that I may thank you now,” said she,
“That you have saved to me my children dear!
Now I am ready for death right here;
Since I stand in your love and in your grace,
Death matters not, nor what my soul may face!

“O young, O dear, O tender children mine,
Your woeful mother thought for long, truly,
That cruel hounds, or birds, or fowl vermin
Had eaten you; but God, of His mercy,
And your good father, all so tenderly,
Have kept you safely.” And in swoon profound
Suddenly there she fell upon the ground.

And in her swoon so forcefully held she
Her children two, whom she’d had in embrace,
That it was hard from her to set them free,
Her arms about them gently to unlace.

Oh, many a tear on many a pitying face
Ran down, of those were standing there beside;
Scarcely, for sympathy, could they abide.

But Walter cheered her till her sorrow fled;
And she rose up, abashed, out of her trance;
All praised her now, and joyous words they said,
Till she regained her wonted countenance.
Walter so honoured her by word and glance
That it was pleasing to observe the cheer
Between them, now again together here.

These ladies, when they found a tactful way,
Withdrew her and to her own room were gone,
And stripped her out of her so rude array,
And in a cloth of gold that brightly shone,
Crowned with a crown of many a precious stone
Upon her head, once more to hall they brought
Her, where they honoured her as all they ought.

Thus had this heavy day a happy end,
For everyone did everything he might

The day in mirth and revelry to spend
Till in the heavens shone the stars' fair light.
For far more grand in every person's sight
This feast was, and of greater cost, 'twas said,
Than were the revels when they two were wed.

Full many a year in high prosperity
They lived, these two, in harmony and rest,
And splendidly his daughter married he
Unto a lord, one of the worthiest
In Italy; and then in peace, as best
His wife's old father at his court he kept
Until the soul out of his body crept.

His son succeeded to his heritage
In rest and peace, after the marquis' day,
And wedded happily at proper age,
Albeit he tried his wife not, so they say.
This world is not so harsh, deny who may,
As in old times that now are long since gone,
And hearken what this author says thereon.

This story's told here, not that all wives should
Follow Griselda in humility,
For this would be unbearable, though they would,
But just that everyone, in his degree,
Should be as constant in adversity
As was Griselda; for that Petrarch wrote
This tale, and in a high style, as you'll note.

For since a woman once was so patient
Before a mortal man, well more we ought
Receive in good part that which God has sent;
For cause he has to prove what He has wrought.
But He tempts no man that His blood has bought,
As James says, if you his epistle read;
Yet does He prove folk at all times, indeed,

And suffers us, for our good exercise,
With the sharp scourges of adversity
To be well beaten oft, in sundry wise;

Not just to learn our will; for truly He,
Ere we were born, did all our frailty see;
But for our good is all that He doth give.
So then in virtuous patience let us live.

But one word, masters, hearken ere I go:
One hardly can discover nowadays,
In all a town, Griseldas three or two;
For, if they should be put to such assays,
Their gold's so badly alloyed, in such ways,
With brass, that though the coin delight the eye,
'Twill rather break in two than bend, say I.

But now, for love of the good wife of Bath,
Whose life and all whose sex may God maintain
In mastery high, or else it were but scathe,
I will with joyous spirit fresh and green
Sing you a song to gladden you, I ween;
From all such serious matters let's be gone;
Hearken my song, which runs in this way on:

ENVOY OF CHAUCER

Griselda's dead, and dead is her patience,
In Italy both lie buried, says the tale;
For which I cry in open audience,
That no man be so hardy as to assail
His own wife's patience, in a hope to find
Griselda, for 'tis certain he shall fail!

O noble wives, full of a high prudence,
Let not humility your free tongue nail,
Nor let some clerk have cause for diligence
To write of you, so marvelous detail
As of Griselda, patient and so kind;
Lest Chichevache swallow you in her entrail!

Nay, follow Echo, that holds no silence,
But answers always like a countervail;
Be not befooled, for all your innocence,
But take the upper hand and you'll prevail.
And well impress this lesson on your mind,
For common profit, since it may avail.

Strong-minded women, stand at your defence,
Since you are strong as camel and don't ail,
Suffer no man to do to you offence;
And slender women in a contest frail,
Be savage as a tiger there in Ind;
Clatter like mill, say I, to beat the male.

Nay, fear them not, nor do them reverence;
For though your husband be all armed in mail,
The arrows of your shrewish eloquence
Shall pierce his breast and pierce his aventail.
In jealousy I counsel that you bind,
And you shall make him cower as does a quail.

If you are fair to see, in folks' presence,
Show them your face and with your clothes regale;
If you are foul, be lavish of expense,
To gain friends never cease to do travail;
Be lightsome as a linden leaf in wind,
And let him worry, weep and wring and wail!

HERE ENDS THE CLERK OF OXFORD'S TALE