**The Miller’s Prologue**

Now when the knight had thus his story told,

In all the rout there was nor young nor old

But said it was a noble story, well

Worthy to be kept in mind to tell;

And specially the gentle folk, each one. *5*

Our host, he laughed and swore, So may I run,

But this goes well; unbuckled is the mail;

Let's see now who can tell another tale:

For certainly the game is well begun.

Now shall you tell, sir monk, if't can be done, *10*

Something with which to pay for the knight's tale.

The miller, who with drinking was all pale,

So that unsteadily on his horse he sat,

He would not take off either hood or hat,

Nor wait for any man, in courtesy, *15*

But all in Pilate's voice began to cry,

And by the Arms and Blood and Bones he swore,

I have a noble story in my store,

With which I will requite the good knight's tale.

Our host saw, then, that he was drunk with ale, *20*

And said to him: Wait, Robin, my dear brother,

Some better man shall tell us first another:

Submit and let us work on profitably.

Now by God's soul, cried he, that will not I!

For I will speak, or else I'll go my way. *25*

Our host replied: Tell on, then, till doomsday!

You are a fool, your wit is overcome.

Now hear me, said the miller, all and some!

But first I make a protestation round

That I'm quite drunk, I know it by my sound: *30*

And therefore, if I slander or mis-say,

Blame it on ale of Southwark, so I pray;

For I will tell a legend and a life

Both of a carpenter and of his wife,

And how a scholar set the good wright's cap. *35*

The reeve replied and said: Oh, shut your trap,

Let be your ignorant drunken ribaldry!

It is a sin, and further, great folly

To asperse any man, or him defame,

And, too, to bring upon a man's wife shame. *40*

There are enough of other things to say.

This drunken miller spoke on in his way,

And said: Oh, but my dear brother Oswald,

The man who has no wife is no cuckold.

But I say not, thereby, that you are one: *45*

Many good wives there are, as women run,

And ever a thousand good to one that's bad,

As well you know yourself, unless you're mad.

Why are you angry with my story's cue?

I have a wife, begad, as well as you, *50*

Yet I'd not, for the oxen of my plow,

Take on my shoulders more than is enow,

By judging of myself that I am one;

I will believe full well that I am none.

A husband must not be inquisitive *55*

Of God, nor of his wife, while she's alive.

So long as he may find God's plenty there,

For all the rest he need not greatly care.

What should I say, except this miller rare

He would forgo his talk for no man there, *60*

But told his churlish tale in his own way:

I think I'll here re-tell it, if I may.

And therefore, every gentle soul, I pray

That for God's love you'll hold not what I say

Evilly meant, but that I must rehearse, *65*

All of their tales, the better and the worse,

Or else prove false to some of my design.

Therefore, who likes not this, let him, in fine,

Turn over page and choose another tale:

For he shall find enough, both great and small, *70*

Of stories touching on gentility,

And holiness, and on morality;

And blame not me if you do choose amiss.

The miller was a churl, you well know this;

So was the reeve, and many another more, *75*

And ribaldry they told from plenteous store.

Be then advised, and hold me free from blame;

Men should not be too serious at a game.

**The Miller’s Tale**

1 Once on a time was dwelling in Oxford

2 A wealthy lout who took in guests to board,

3 And of his craft he was a carpenter.

4 A poor scholar was lodging with him there,

5 Who'd learned the arts, but all his phantasy

6 Was turned to study of astrology;

7 And knew a certain set of theorems

8 And could find out by various stratagems,

9 If men but asked of him in certain hours

10 When they should have a drought or else have showers,

11 Or if men asked of him what should befall

12 To anything- I cannot reckon them all.

13 This clerk was called the clever Nicholas;

14 Of secret loves he knew and their solace;

15 And he kept counsel, too, for he was sly

16 And meek as any maiden passing by.

17 He had a chamber in that hostelry,

18 And lived alone there, without company,

19 All garnished with sweet herbs of good repute;

20 And he himself sweet-smelling as the root

21 Of licorice, valerian, or setwall.

22 His Almagest, and books both great and small,

23 His astrolabe, belonging to his art,

24 His algorism stones- all laid apart

25 On shelves that ranged beside his lone bed's head;

26 His press was covered with a cloth of red.

27 And over all there lay a psaltery

28 Whereon he made an evening's melody,

29 Playing so sweetly that the chamber rang;

30 And Angelus ad virginem he sang;

31 And after that he warbled the King's Note:

32 Often in good voice was his merry throat.

33 And thus this gentle clerk his leisure spends

34 Supported by some income and his friends.

35 This carpenter had lately wed a wife

36 Whom lie loved better than he loved his life;

37 And she was come to eighteen years of age.

38 Jealous he was and held her close in cage.

39 For she was wild and young, and he was old,

40 And deemed himself as like to be cuckold.

41 He knew not Cato, for his lore was rude:

42 That vulgar man should wed similitude.

43 A man should wed according to estate,

44 For youth and age are often in debate.

45 But now, since he had fallen in the snare,

46 He must endure, like other folk, his care.

47 Fair was this youthful wife, and therewithal

48 As weasel's was her body slim and small.

49 A girdle wore she, barred and striped, of silk.

50 An apron, too, as white as morning milk

51 About her loins, and full of many a gore;

52 White was her smock, embroidered all before

53 And even behind, her collar round about,

54 Of coal-black silk, on both sides, in and out;

55 The strings of the white cap upon her head

56 Were, like her collar, black silk worked with thread,

57 Her fillet was of wide silk worn full high:

58 And certainly she had a lickerish eye.

59 She'd thinned out carefully her eyebrows two,

60 And they were arched and black as any sloe.

61 She was a far more pleasant thing to see

62 Than is the newly budded young pear-tree;

63 And softer than the wool is on a wether.

64 Down from her girdle hung a purse of leather,

65 Tasselled with silk, with latten beading sown.

66 In all this world, searching it up and down,

67 So gay a little doll, I well believe,

68 Or such a wench, there's no man can conceive.

69 Far brighter was the brilliance of her hue

70 Than in the Tower the gold coins minted new.

71 And songs came shrilling from her pretty head

72 As from a swallow's sitting on a shed.

73 Therewith she'd dance too, and could play and sham

74 Like any kid or calf about its dam.

75 Her mouth was sweet as bragget or as mead

76 Or hoard of apples laid in hay or weed.

77 Skittish she was as is a pretty colt,

78 Tall as a staff and straight as cross-bow bolt.

79 A brooch she wore upon her collar low,

80 As broad as boss of buckler did it show;

81 Her shoes laced up to where a girl's legs thicken.

82 She was a primrose, and a tender chicken

83 For any lord to lay upon his bed,

84 Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.

85 Now, sir, and then, sir, go befell the case,

86 That on a day this clever Nicholas

87 Fell in with this young wife to toy and play,

88 The while her husband was down Osney way,

89 Clerks being as crafty as the best of us;

90 And unperceived he caught her by the puss,

91 Saying: Indeed, unless I have my will,

92 For secret love of you, sweetheart, I'll spill.

93 And held her hard about the hips, and how!

94 And said: O darling, love me, love me now,

95 Or I shall die, and pray you God may save!

96 And she leaped as a colt does in the trave,

97 And with her head she twisted fast away,

98 And said: I will not kiss you, by my fay!

99 Why, let go, cried she, let go, Nicholas!

100 Or I will call for help and cry 'alas!'

101 Do take your hands away, for courtesy!

102 This Nicholas for mercy then did cry,

103 And spoke so well, importuned her so fast

104 That she her love did grant him at the last,

105 And swore her oath, by Saint Thomas of Kent,

106 That she would be at his command, content,

107 As soon as opportunity she could spy.

108 My husband is so full of jealousy,

109 Unless you will await me secretly,

110 I know I'm just as good as dead, said she.

111 You must keep all quite hidden in this case.

112 Nay, thereof worry not, said Nicholas,

113 A clerk has lazily employed his while

114 If he cannot a carpenter beguile.

115 And thus they were agreed, and then they swore

116 To wait a while, as I have said before.

117 When Nicholas had done thus every whit

118 And patted her about the loins a bit,

119 He kissed her sweetly, took his psaltery,

120 And played it fast and made a melody.

121 Then fell it thus, that to the parish kirk,

122 The Lord Christ Jesus' own works for to work,

123 This good wife went, upon a holy day;

124 Her forehead shone as bright as does the May,

125 So well she'd washed it when she left off work.

126 Now there was of that church a parish clerk

127 Whose name was (as folk called him) Absalom.

128 Curled was his hair, shining like gold, and from

129 His head spread fanwise in a thick bright mop;

130 'Twas parted straight and even on the top;

131 His cheek was red, his eyes grey as a goose;

132 With Saint Paul's windows cut upon his shoes,

133 He stood in red hose fitting famously.

134 And he was clothed full well and properly

135 All in a coat of blue, in which were let

136 Holes for the lacings, which were fairly set.

137 And over all he wore a fine surplice

138 As white as ever hawthorn spray, and nice.

139 A merry lad he was, so God me save,

140 And well could he let blood, cut hair, and shave,

141 And draw a deed or quitclaim, as might chance.

142 In twenty manners could he trip and dance,

143 After the school that reigned in Oxford, though,

144 And with his two legs swinging to and fro;

145 And he could play upon a violin;

146 Thereto he sang in treble voice and thin;

147 And as well could he play on his guitar.

148 In all the town no inn was, and no bar,

149 That he'd not visited to make good cheer,

150 Especially were lively barmaids there.

151 But, truth to tell, he was a bit squeamish

152 Of farting and of language haughtyish.

153 This Absalom, who was so light and gay,

154 Went with a censer on the holy day,

155 Censing the wives like an enthusiast;

156 And on them many a loving look he cast,

157 Especially on this carpenter's goodwife.

158 To look at her he thought a merry life,

159 She was so pretty, sweet, and lickerous.

160 I dare well say, if she had been a mouse

161 And he a cat, he would have mauled her some.

162 This parish clerk, this lively Absalom

163 Had in his heart, now, such a love-longing

164 That from no wife took he an offering;

165 For courtesy, he said, he would take none.

166 The moon, when it was night, full brightly shone,

167 And his guitar did Absalom then take,

168 For in love-watching he'd intent to wake.

169 And forth he went, jolly and amorous,

170 Until he came unto the carpenter's house

171 A little after cocks began to crow;

172 And took his stand beneath a shot-window

173 That was let into the good wood-wright's wall.

174 He sang then, in his pleasant voice and small,

175 Oh now, dear lady, if your will it be,

176 I pray that you will have some ruth on me,

177 The words in harmony with his string-plucking.

178 This carpenter awoke and heard him sing,

179 And called unto his wife and said, in sum:

180 What, Alison! Do you hear Absalom,

181 Who plays and sings beneath our bedroom wall?

182 And she said to her husband, therewithal:

183 Yes, God knows, John, I hear it, truth to tell.

184 So this went on; what is there better than well?

185 From day to day this pretty Absalom

186 So wooed her he was woebegone therefrom.

187 He lay awake all night and all the day;

188 He combed his spreading hair and dressed him gay;

189 By go-betweens and agents, too, wooed he,

190 And swore her loyal page he'd ever be.

191 He sang as tremulously as nightingale;

192 He sent her sweetened wine and well-spiced ale

193 And waffles piping hot out of the fire,

194 And, she being town-bred, mead for her desire.

195 For some are won by means of money spent,

196 And some by tricks, and some by long descent.

197 Once, to display his versatility,

198 He acted Herod on a scaffold high.

199 But what availed it him in any case?

200 She was enamoured so of Nicholas

201 That Absalom might go and blow his horn;

202 He got naught for his labour but her scorn.

203 And thus she made of Absalom her ape,

204 And all his earnestness she made a jape.

205 For truth is in this proverb, and no lie,

206 Men say well thus: It's always he that's nigh

207 That makes the absent lover seem a sloth.

208 For now, though Absalom be wildly wroth,

209 Because he is so far out of her sight,

210 This handy Nicholas stands in his light.

211 Now bear you well, you clever Nicholas!

212 For Absalom may wail and sing Alas!

213 And so it chanced that on a Saturday

214 This carpenter departed to. Osney;

215 And clever Nicholas and Alison

216 Were well agreed to this effect: anon

217 This Nicholas should put in play a wile

218 The simple, jealous husband to beguile;

219 And if it chanced the game should go a-right,

220 She was to sleep within his arms all night,

221 For this was his desire, and hers also.

222 Presently then, and without more ado,

223 This Nicholas, no longer did he tarry,

224 But softly to his chamber did he carry

225 Both food and drink to last at least a day,

226 Saying that to her husband she should say-

227 If he should come to ask for Nicholas-

228 Why, she should say she knew not where he was,

229 For all day she'd not seen him, far or nigh;

230 She thought he must have got some malady,

231 Because in vain her maid would knock and call;

232 He'd answer not, whatever might befall.

233 And so it was that all that Saturday

234 This Nicholas quietly in chamber lay,

235 And ate and slept, or did what pleased him best,

236 Till Sunday when the sun had gone to rest.

237 This simple man with wonder heard the tale,

238 And marvelled what their Nicholas might ail,

239 And said: I am afraid, by Saint Thomas,

240 That everything's not well with Nicholas.

241 God send he be not dead so suddenly!

242 This world is most unstable, certainly;

243 I saw, today, the corpse being borne to kirk

244 Of one who, but last Monday, was at work.

245 Go up, said he unto his boy anon,

246 Call at his door, or knock there with a stone,

247 Learn how it is and boldly come tell me.

248 The servant went up, then, right sturdily,

249 And at the chamber door, the while he stood,

250 He cried and knocked as any madman would-

251 What! How! What do you, Master Nicholay?

252 How can you sleep through all the livelong day?

253 But all for naught, he never heard a word;

254 A hole he found, low down upon a board,

255 Through which the house cat had been wont to creep;

256 And to that hole he stooped, and through did peep,

257 And finally he ranged him in his sight.

258 This Nicholas sat gaping there, upright,

259 As if he'd looked too long at the new moon.

260 Downstairs he went and told his master soon

261 In what array he'd found this self-same man.

262 This carpenter to cross himself began,

263 And said: Now help us, holy Frideswide!

264 Little a man can know what shall betide.

265 This man is fallen, with his astromy,

266 Into some madness or some agony;

267 I always feared that somehow this would be!

268 Men should not meddle in God's privity.

269 Aye, blessed always be the ignorant man,

270 Whose creed is, all he ever has to scan!

271 So fared another clerk with astromy;

272 He walked into the meadows for to pry

273 Into the stars, to learn what should befall,

274 Until into a clay-pit he did fall;

275 He saw not that. But yet, by Saint Thomas,

276 I'm sorry for this clever Nicholas.

277 He shall be scolded for his studying,

278 If not too late, by Jesus, Heaven's King!

279 Get me a staff, that I may pry before,

280 The while you, Robin, heave against the door.

281 We'll take him from this studying, I guess.

282 And on the chamber door, then, he did press.

283 His servant was a stout lad, if a dunce,

284 And by the hasp he heaved it up at once;

285 Upon the floor that portal fell anon.

286 This Nicholas sat there as still as stone,

287 Gazing, with gaping mouth, straight up in air.

288 This carpenter thought he was in despair,

289 And took him by the shoulders, mightily,

290 And shook him hard, and cried out, vehemently:

291 What! Nicholay! Why how now! Come, look down!

292 Awake, and think on Jesus' death and crown!

293 I cross you from all elves and magic wights!

294 And then the night-spell said he out, by rights,

295 At the four corners of the house about,

296 And at the threshold of the door, without:-

297 O Jesus Christ and good Saint Benedict,

298 Protect this house from all that may afflict,

299 For the night hag the white Paternoster!-

300 Where hast thou gone, Saint Peter's sister?

301 And at the last this clever Nicholas

302 Began to sigh full sore, and said: Alas!

303 Shall all the world be lost so soon again?

304 This carpenter replied: What say you, then?

305 What! Think on God, as we do, men that swink.

306 This Nicholas replied: Go fetch me drink;

307 And afterward I'll tell you privately

308 A certain thing concerning you and me;

309 I'll tell it to no other man or men.

310 This carpenter went down and came again,

311 And brought of potent ale a brimming quart;

312 And when each one of them had drunk his part,

313 Nicholas shut the door fast, and with that

314 He drew a seat and near the carpenter sat.

315 He said: Now, John, my good host, lief and dear,

316 You must upon your true faith swear, right here,

317 That to no man will you this word betray;

318 For it is Christ's own word that I will say,

319 And if you tell a man, you're ruined quite;

320 This punishment shall come to you, of right,

321 That if you're traitor you'll go mad- and should!

322 Nay, Christ forbid it, for His holy blood!

323 Said then this simple man: I am no blab,

324 Nor, though I say it, am I fond of gab.

325 Say what you will, I never will it tell

326 To child or wife, by Him that harried Hell!

327 Now, John, said Nicholas, I will not lie;

328 But I've found out, from my astrology,

329 As I have looked upon the moon so bright,

330 That now, come Monday next, at nine of night,

331 Shall fall a rain so wildly mad as would

332 Have been, by half, greater than Noah's flood.

333 This world, he said, in less time than an hour,

334 Shall all be drowned, so terrible is this shower;

335 Thus shall all mankind drown and lose all life.

336 This carpenter replied: Alas, my wife!

337 And shall she drown? Alas, my Alison!

338 For grief of this he almost fell. Anon

339 He said: Is there no remedy in this case?

340 Why yes, good luck, said clever Nicholas,

341 If you will work by counsel of the wise;

342 You must not act on what your wits advise.

343 For so says Solomon, and it's all true,

344 'Work by advice and thou shalt never rue.'

345 And if you'll act as counselled and not fail,

346 I undertake, without a mast or sail,

347 To save us all, aye you and her and me.

348 Haven't you heard of, Noah, how saved was he,

349 Because Our Lord had warned him how to keep

350 Out of the flood that covered earth so deep?

351 Yes, said this carpenter, long years ago.

352 Have you not heard, asked Nicholas, also

353 The sorrows of Noah and his fellowship

354 In getting his wife to go aboard the ship?

355 He would have rather, I dare undertake,

356 At that time, and for all the weather black,

357 That she had one ship for herself alone.

358 Therefore, do you know what would best be done?

359 This thing needs haste, and of a hasty thing

360 Men must not preach nor do long tarrying.

361 Presently go, and fetch here to this inn

362 A kneading-tub, or brewing vat, and win

363 One each for us, but see that they are large,

364 Wherein we may swim out as in a barge,

365 And have therein sufficient food and drink

366 For one day only; that's enough, I think.

367 The water will dry up and flow away

368 About the prime of the succeeding day.

369 But Robin must not know of this, your knave,

370 And even Jill, your maid, I may not save;

371 Ask me not why, for though you do ask me,

372 I will not tell you of God's privity.

373 Suffice you, then, unless your wits are mad,

374 To have as great a grace as Noah had.

375 Your wife I shall not lose, there is no doubt,

376 Go, now, your way, and speedily about,

377 But when you have, for you and her and me,

378 Procured these kneading-tubs, or beer-vats, three,

379 Then you shall hang them near the roof-tree high,

380 That no man our purveyance may espy.

381 And when you thus have done, as I have said,

382 And have put in our drink and meat and bread,

383 Also an axe to cut the ropes in two

384 When the flood comes, that we may float and go,

385 And cut a hole, high up, upon the gable,

386 Upon the garden side, over the stable,

387 That we may freely pass forth on our way

388 When the great rain and flood are gone that day-

389 Then shall you float as merrily, I'll stake,

390 As does the white duck after the white drake.

391 Then I will call, 'Ho, Alison! Ho, John!

392 Be cheery, for the flood will pass anon.'

393 And you will say, 'Hail. Master Nicholay!

394 Good morrow, I see you well, for it is day!'

395 And then shall we be barons all our life

396 Of all the world, like Noah and his wife.

397 But of one thing I warn you now, outright.

398 Be well advised, that on that very night

399 When we have reached our ships and got aboard,

400 Not one of us must speak or whisper word,

401 Nor call, nor cry, but sit in silent prayer;

402 For this is God's own bidding, hence- don't dare!

403 Your wife and you must hang apart, that in

404 The night shall come no chance for you to sin

405 Either in looking or in carnal deed.

406 These orders I have told you, go, God speed!

407 Tomorrow night, when all men are asleep,

408 Into our kneading-tubs will we three creep

409 And sit there, still, awaiting God's high grace.

410 Go, now, your way, I have no longer space

411 Of time to make a longer sermoning.

412 Men say thus: 'Send the wise and say no thing.'

413 You are so wise it needs not that I teach;

414 Go, save our lives, and that I do beseech.

415 This silly carpenter went on his way.

416 Often he cried Alas! and Welaway!

417 And to his wife he told all, privately;

418 But she was better taught thereof than he

419 How all this rigmarole was to apply.

420 Nevertheless she acted as she'd die,

421 And said: Alas! Go on your way anon,

422 Help us escape, or we are lost, each one;

423 I am your true and lawfully wedded wife;

424 Go, my dear spouse, and help to save our life.

425 Lo, what a great thing is affection found!

426 Men die of imagination, I'll be bound,

427 So deep an imprint may the spirit take.

428 This hapless carpenter began to quake;

429 He thought now, verily, that he could see

430 Old Noah's flood come wallowing like the sea

431 To drown his Alison, his honey dear.

432 He wept, he wailed, he made but sorry cheer,

433 He sighed and made full many a sob and sough.

434 He went and got himself a kneading-trough

435 And, after that, two tubs he somewhere found

436 And to his dwelling privately sent round,

437 And hung them near the roof, all secretly.

438 With his own hand, then, made he ladders three,

439 To climb up by the rungs thereof, it seems,

440 And reach the tubs left hanging to the beams;

441 And those he victualled, tubs and kneading-trough,

442 With bread and cheese and good jugged ale, enough

443 To satisfy the needs of one full day.

444 But ere he'd put all this in such array,

445 He sent his servants, boy and maid, right down

446 Upon some errand into London town.

447 And on the Monday, when it came on night,

448 He shut his door, without a candle-light,

449 And ordered everything as it should be.

450 And shortly after up they climbed, all three;

451 They sat while one might plow a furlong-way.

452 Now, by Our Father, hush! said Nicholay,

453 And Hush! said John, and Hush! said Alison.

454 This carpenter, his loud devotions done,

455 Sat silent, saying mentally a prayer,

456 And waiting for the rain, to hear it there.

457 The deathlike sleep of utter weariness

458 Fell on this wood-wright even. (as I guess)

459 About the curfew time, or little more;

460 For travail of his spirit he groaned sore,

461 And soon he snored, for badly his head lay.

462 Down by the ladder crept this Nicholay,

463 And Alison, right softly down she sped.

464 Without more words they went and got in bed

465 Even where the carpenter was wont to lie.

466 There was the revel and the melody!

467 And thus lie Alison and Nicholas,

468 In joy that goes by many an alias,

469 Until the bells for lauds began to ring

470 And friars to the chancel went to sing.

471 This parish clerk, this amorous Absalom,

472 Whom love has made so woebegone and dumb,

473 Upon the Monday was down Osney way,

474 With company, to find some sport and play;

475 And there he chanced to ask a cloisterer,

476 Privately, after John the carpenter.

477 This monk drew him apart, out of the kirk,

478 And said: I have not seen him here at work.

479 Since Saturday; I think well that he went

480 For timber, that the abbot has him sent;

481 For he is wont for timber thus to go,

482 Remaining at the grange a day or so;

483 Or else he's surely at his house today;

484 But which it is I cannot truly say.

485 This Absalom right happy was and light,

486 And thought: Now is the time to wake all night;

487 For certainly I saw him not stirring

488 About his door since day began to spring.

489 So may I thrive, as I shall, at cock's crow,

490 Knock cautiously upon that window low

491 Which is so placed upon his bedroom wall.

492 To Alison then will I tell of all

493 My love-longing, and thus I shall not miss

494 That at the least I'll have her lips to kiss.

495 Some sort of comfort shall I have, I say,

496 My mouth's been itching all this livelong day;

497 That is a sign of kissing at the least.

498 All night I dreamed, too, I was at a feast.

499 Therefore I'll go and sleep two hours away

500 And all this night then will I wake and play.

501 And so when time of first cock-crow was come,

502 Up rose this merry lover, Absalom,

503 And dressed him gay and all at point-device,

504 But first he chewed some licorice and spice

505 So he'd smell sweet, ere he had combed his hair.

506 Under his tongue some bits of true-love rare,

507 For thereby thought he to be more gracious.

508 He went, then, to the carpenter's dark house.

509 And silent stood beneath the shot-window;

510 Unto his breast it reached, it was so low;

511 And he coughed softly, in a low half tone:

512 What do you, honeycomb, sweet Alison?

513 My cinnamon, my fair bird, my sweetie,

514 Awake, O darling mine, and speak to me!

515 It's little thought you give me and my woe,

516 Who for your love do sweat where'er I go.

517 Yet it's no wonder that I faint and sweat;

518 I long as does the lamb for mother's teat.

519 Truly, sweetheart, I have such love-longing

520 That like a turtle-dove's my true yearning;

521 And I can eat no more than can a maid.

522 Go from the window, Jack-a-napes, she said,

523 For, s'help me God, it is not 'come kiss me.'

524 I love another, or to blame I'd be,

525 Better than you, by Jesus, Absalom!

526 Go on your way, or I'll stone you therefrom,

527 And let me sleep, the fiends take you away!

528 Alas, quoth Absalom, and welaway!

529 That true love ever was so ill beset!

530 But kiss me, since you'll do no more, my pet,

531 For Jesus' love and for the love of me.

532 And will you go, then, on your way? asked she,

533 Yes truly, darling, said this Absalom.

534 Then make you ready, said she, and I'll come!

535 And unto Nicholas said she, low and still:

536 Be silent now, and you shall laugh your fill.

537 This Absalom plumped down upon his knees,

538 And said: I am a lord in all degrees;

539 For after this there may be better still

540 Darling, my sweetest bird, I wait your will.

541 The window she unbarred, and that in haste.

542 Have done, said she, come on, and do it fast,

543 Before we're seen by any neighbour's eye.

544 This Absalom did wipe his mouth all dry;

545 Dark was the night as pitch, aye dark as coal,

546 And through the window she put out her hole.

547 And Absalom no better felt nor worse,

548 But with his mouth he kissed her naked arse

549 Right greedily, before he knew of this.

550 Aback he leapt- it seemed somehow amiss,

551 For well he knew a woman has no beard;

552 He'd felt a thing all rough and longish haired,

553 And said, Oh fie, alas! What did I do?

554 Teehee! she laughed, and clapped the, window to;

555 And Absalom went forth a sorry pace.

556 A beard! A beard! cried clever Nicholas,

557 Now by God's corpus, this goes fair and well!

558 This hapless Absalom, he heard that yell,

559 And on his lip, for anger, he did bite;

560 And to himself he said, I will requite!

561 Who vigorously rubbed and scrubbed his lips

562 With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,

563 But Absalom, and often cried Alas!

564 My soul I give now unto Sathanas,

565 For rather far than own this town, said he,

566 For this despite, it's well revenged I'd be.

567 Alas, said he, from her I never blenched!

568 His hot love was grown cold, aye and all quenched;

569 For, from the moment that he'd kissed her arse,

570 For paramours he didn't care a curse,

571 For he was healed of all his malady;

572 Indeed all paramours he did defy,

573 And wept as does a child that has been beat.

574 With silent step he went across the street

575 Unto a smith whom men called Dan Jarvis,

576 Who in his smithy forged plow parts, that is

577 He sharpened shares and coulters busily.

578 This Absalom he knocked all easily,

579 And said: Unbar here, Jarvis, for I come.

580 What! Who are you? It's I, it's Absalom.

581 What! Absalom! For Jesus Christ's sweet tree,

582 Why are you up so early? Ben'cite!

583 What ails you now, man? Some gay girl, God knows,

584 Has brought you on the jump to my bellows;

585 By Saint Neot, you know well what I mean.

586 This Absalom cared not a single bean

587 For all this play, nor one word back he gave;

588 He'd more tow on his distaff, had this knave,

589 Than Jarvis knew, and said he: Friend so dear,

590 This red-hot coulter in the fireplace here,

591 Lend it to me, I have a need for it,

592 And I'll return it after just a bit.

593 Jarvis replied: Certainly, were it gold

594 Or a purse filled with yellow coins untold,

595 Yet should you have it, as I am true smith;

596 But eh, Christ's foe! What will you do therewith?

597 Let that, said Absalom, be as it may;

598 I'll tell you all tomorrow, when it's day-

599 And caught the coulter then by the cold steel

600 And softly from the smithy door did steal

601 And went again up to the wood-wright's wall.

602 He coughed at first, and then he knocked withal

603 Upon the window, as before, with care.

604 This Alison replied: Now who is there?

605 And who knocks so? I'll warrant it's a thief.

606 Why no, quoth he, God knows, my sweet roseleaf,

607 I am your Absalom, my own darling!

608 Of gold, quoth he, I have brought you a ring;

609 My mother gave it me, as I'll be saved;

610 Fine gold it is, and it is well engraved;

611 This will I give you for another kiss.

612 This Nicholas had risen for a piss,

613 And thought that it would carry on the jape

614 To have his arse kissed by this jack-a-nape.

615 And so he opened window hastily,

616 And put his arse out thereat, quietly,

617 Over the buttocks, showing the whole bum;

618 And thereto said this clerk, this Absalom,

619 O speak, sweet bird, I know not where thou art.

620 This Nicholas just then let fly a fart

621 As loud as it had been a thunder-clap,

622 And well-nigh blinded Absalom, poor chap;

623 But he was ready with his iron hot

624 And Nicholas right in the arse he got.

625 Off went the skin a hand's-breadth broad, about,

626 The coulter burned his bottom so, throughout,

627 That for the pain he thought that he should die.

628 And like one mad he started in to cry,

629 Help! Water! Water! For God's dear heart!

630 This carpenter out of his sleep did start,

631 Hearing that Water! cried as madman would,

632 And thought, Alas, now comes down Noel's flood!

633 He struggled up without another word

634 And with his axe he cut in two the cord,

635 And down went all; he did not stop to trade

636 In bread or ale till he'd the journey made,

637 And there upon the floor he swooning lay.

638 Up started Alison and Nicholay

639 And shouted Help! and Hello! down the street.

640 The neighbours, great and small, with hastening feet

641 Swarmed in the house to stare upon this man,

642 Who lay yet swooning, and all pale and wan;

643 For in the falling he had smashed his arm.

644 He had to suffer, too, another harm,

645 For when he spoke he was at once borne down

646 By clever Nicholas and Alison.

647 For they told everyone that he was odd;

648 He was so much afraid of Noel's flood,

649 Through fantasy, that out of vanity

650 He'd gone and bought these kneading-tubs, all three,

651 And that he'd hung them near the roof above;

652 And that he had prayed them, for God's dear love,

653 To sit with him and bear him company.

654 The people laughed at all this fantasy;

655 Up to the roof they looked, and there did gape,

656 And so turned all his injury to a jape.

657 For when this carpenter got in a word,

658 'Twas all in vain, no man his reasons heard;

659 With oaths imprenive he was so sworn down,

660 That he was held for mad by all the town;

661 For every clerk did side with every other.

662 They said: The man is crazy, my dear brother.

663 And everyone did laugh at all this strife.

664 Thus futtered was the carpenter's goodwife,

665 For all his watching and his jealousy;

666 And Absalom has kissed her nether eye;

667 And Nicholas is branded on the butt.

668 This tale is done, and God save all the rout!