



Written by  
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## “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

From *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer

*Loosely Adapted by Cora Alley  
For the Christmas Madrigal Dinner*

**Scripture:** Philippians 2: 3, 4

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

**Dramatic Category:** Christmas Madrigal Dinner Theater

### What is a “Madrigal Dinner”?

A "Madrigal Dinner" is a trip back in time. Twelve singers dress in 16<sup>th</sup> century, English costumes and herald in the Christmas season with a harmonious concert of traditional, acappella carols. The ten members of the royal court join the King and Queen as they sit on stage in a semi-circle that opens to the audience.

The guests are seated at festively decorated tables ready to enjoy a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings: the Wassail (hot apple cider), the "boar's head" (prime rib), and Figgie Pudding (bread pudding). The King's Jester serves as the "Master of Ceremonies" for the evening, as he delights and surprises the audience with toasts, jokes, and comic asides.

A troupe of the "King's players" join the Court and present a traditional play that dates back to the time of classic European literature. The scenes of the play are woven among the courses of the meal and set up the sweet message of the Christmas carols. The audience comes away from the evening having enjoyed a delicious holiday feast, laughed and cried at the players, and marveled at the vocal talent of the ensemble.

### NOTE:

See the “Madrigal Checklist,” at the end of the script, to assist you in producing the wonderful evening of celebration.

**Topic:** True love is mutual submission.

**Performance Time:** 1 hour program + the concert and the meal = 2 hours total

**Number of Players:** 2 players, 12 singers, (with an option of 15+ entertainers)

**Objective:**

To present a picture of love by submitting one's own desires and elevating the value of another.

**Synopsis:**

This evening's story is loosely adapted from Geoffrey Chaucer's 12<sup>th</sup> century classic, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," contained in the larger work, The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer compiled the tales told by the faithful pilgrims each evening as they gathered around the warm fire on their way to the church at Canterbury.

A most outstanding tale was told by a woman who hailed from the town of Bath. Having had five husbands, she glibly called herself the "Wife of Bath." Considering herself an authority on men and women, the Wife of Bath relates a desperate tale of a knight in King Arthur's court who betrays a maiden. In lieu of removing his head for his crime against womanhood, the Queen gives him an impossible task: discover what it is that women want most, and bring the answer to the ladies of the court.

If all the ladies in the court agree, the knight lives, but if only one of the fairer sex disagrees with the knight's answer, "Off with his head!" What adventure awaits our knight this night? Will he find an answer with which all women agree? Eat up, dear guests, relax and see!

**Cast:**

**The Royal Players:**

**The Jester:** *A fun-loving, clownish fellow who conducts the fun*

**Wife of Bath:** *An old "hag" who transforms into a lovely lady.*

**Note:** It's easier to "hag up" a beauty than beautify a hag, so look for a pretty girl to play this part!

**The Madrigal Singers:**

**The King:** *A commanding champion who wants the knight beheaded*

**The Queen:** *A sensitive woman who gives the knight his sentence*

**The Knight:** *A member of the royal court who left his lady at the altar (Lord 1)*

**The Lady Scorned:** *The King's daughter and a member of the royal court (Lady 5)*

**Ladies 1, 2, 3, 4:** *Royal female members of the court*

**Lords 2, 3, 4, 5:** *Royal male members of the court*

**Note:**

These 12 singers, dressed in Renaissance costumes, make up the king's court. They are an acappella singing cast, which also presents a concert of Christmas carols during the program. Mix the vocal parts as you see fit. The parts sung do not have any bearing on the parts spoken.

**Additional Cast (optional):**

*(The play does not require these people, but they add a wonderful dimension to the program)*

<b>1 Juggler:</b>	<i>entertains at mealtime</i>
<b>3 Mimes:</b>	<i>perform antics during mealtime</i>
<b>4 Minstrels:</b>	<i>serenade with instruments at mealtime, at the tables</i>
<b>Trumpeter(s):</b>	<i>signal events with fanfare</i>
<b>2 Beefeaters:</b>	<i>armored knights who stand guard at the door</i>
<b>2 Announcers:</b>	<i>announce guests by name, at the door</i>
<b>Serving girls:</b>	<i>dressed as peasants, to wait on each table (as many as you need)</i>
<b>2 Litter bearers:</b>	<i>carry in the courses of the meal</i>
<b>1 Magician:</b>	<i>entertains guests during mealtime, at their tables</i>
<b>4 Troubadours:</b>	<i>sing to guests during mealtime, at their tables</i>

**Dancers:** *They add festivity to the evening. They perform a dance number dressed as “Merry Maids” with flowing dresses and flowers in their hair; like in the days of “Robin Hood.”*

**Orphan children:** *This is an opportunity for your “children’s choir” to get involved. They sing a song to the audience during the show. Dress these elementary-aged children in rags, dirty their faces, and give them bowls to beg at the tables. Then, put chocolate “gold coins” on each table and let the people give them to the children when they come by.*

**Disgruntled Serving Girls:** *An ensemble of six women who work up a few songs that are off-pitch, and silly in nature. They are generally irritated that their voices are not good enough to be one of those “uppity Madrigal Singers.” After all, “We clean up real nice, too!”*

**Costumes:**

Dress in Renaissance and medieval costumes. See specific cast descriptions above, for costuming suggestions.

**Props:**

Set the King’s table for a traditional Renaissance Christmas feast  
Gold-wrapped, chocolate coins (for “Orphan Chorus” option)

**Lights:**

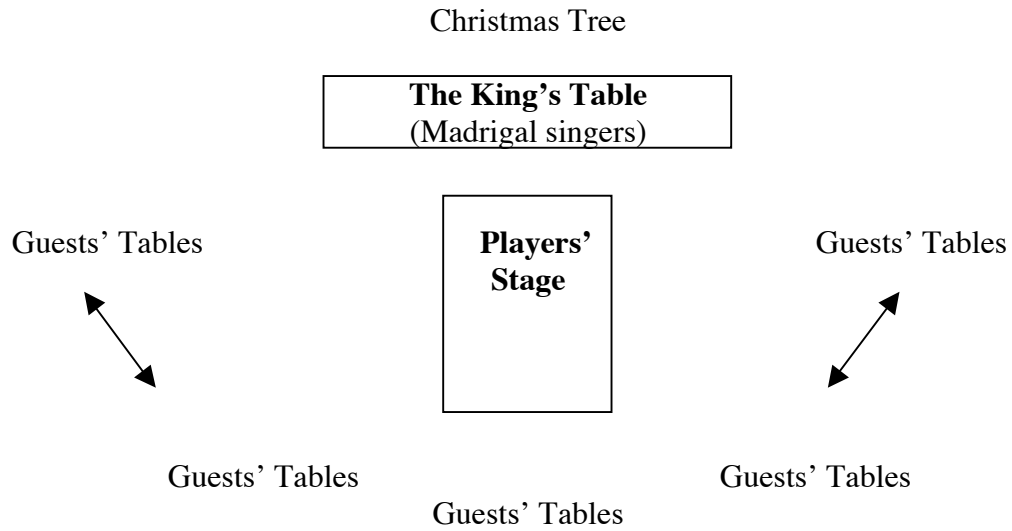
Design the lighting in such a way that the players and King’s Court are highlighted according to their dominance in the program.

**Sound:**

Microphones for the singers, at the table  
Wireless mics for the actors with lines, who aren’t at the table

**Staging:**

If you can “transform” your room into a “castle hall” with “theater-in-the-round” seating, it will enhance the “ambience” of the evening. Here is a suggested diagram:



## A Guide to 16th Century English Christmas Customs

**Wassail** - The festive holiday drink from the Anglo-Saxon, “Wes-hal,” means “be whole.” The old wassail bowls, usually of silver or pewter, were immense. It was the custom of the stewards upon entering the banquet hall to call out, “Wassail, Wassail,” and this was answered by the host and the guests alike with song or carol. A forerunner was “lamb’s wool,” a mixture of hot ale, sugar, spices, eggs, and roasted apples. Thick cream was sometimes added. It was served in the wassail bowl with pieces of toast floating on top. Hence, the origin of the drinking toast.

**Boar’s Head** - Traditionally, this is the heart of the Christmas feast. Its mouth propped open with an apple, the head was brought in on a silver dish, to a fanfare and a special carol. Its origin comes from Psalm 80, in which Satan is the “boar out of the wood.” The head of the slain boar, paraded about the Great Hall, showed the defeat of Satan by the newborn Christ child. The master of the house would take an oath upon it to perform some charitable deed, and often the other gentlemen seated at the table would follow suit.

**Flaming Plum Pudding** - Everyone in the household stirred the plum pudding and made a wish. If a trinket were found in the piece one ate, the wish would come true; consequently, it became known as “Figgie Pudding.”

**The Twelve Days of Christmas** - Known liturgically as Epiphany, representing the traditional time of the journey of the Magi to worship the Christ child. The twelve days were a time of great feasting, celebration, singing of Madrigals and carols, plays and general merry making.

**Madrigals** - A vocal music idiom from the 14th and 15th century in Italy, the Madrigals developed chiefly in the 16th century in England. The word has its origin in either Mandrialis (pastoral song), or matricials (in the mother tongue). English Madrigals were variously called songs, sonnets, canzonets, and ayres.

### **Instruction for the beginning:**

Do a cheery job of decorating the set like an old English castle. Use coats of arms, banners, swords, thrones, drapes of rich tapestry, etc. The Christmas tree should be magnificent, the wreaths and centerpieces should be studded with decorations and lights, and the entire mood should be magical.

Set all the tables with china and good glassware. No paper plates. Outfit each table with rolls and fill the water glasses. People want something to eat and drink the minute they arrive. Hungry people are generally grumpy!

Light the candles, dim the lights and instruct the minstrels to roam the house playing their instruments while the guests enter. The “announcers,” welcome each guest and shout out his/her name (i.e. “The Lord and Lady Parker”). Servers wait inside the hall near the door, with their guest list for their table in hand. When they hear a name called that is assigned to their table, they come to the door and escort them to their table. Mimes and the magician can entertain the guests.

### **Caution:**

Assign the mimes, the musician, and the juggler, various parts of the house at various times, so they do not wear out their welcome by frequenting the same part of the house all night.

## The Script:

### Fanfare 1

*(The trumpeters enter and march around the hall. They meet at the front of the King's table.)*

### (Prologue)

#### Jester:

*(Enters the house with exuberance)*

Alas, dear guests, you've come again,  
To escape life's sorrow, strife, and pain!

So gaily clad in handsome dress,  
*(aside)* No doubt this royal mob you'll impress.

Unstick thy mind from present day,  
Let it come with us, let it fly away,

This room is now a castle hall,  
And we are players; one and all.

Turn back the clock a thousand years,  
To knights and ladies, toasts and cheers!

Good King Arthur rules these days,  
With a code of honor, all knights praise!

Save one, who let his honor falter  
He left his lady alone at the altar.

He spent her dowry on lecherous living,  
And needless to say, she's not too forgiving.

Tonight you will see his story unfold,  
Justice to him! Or, so I am told...

*(changing the mood)*

Well, let's be on with it, I pray,  
For all too soon comes 'morrow's day.

Hear me now guests, and don't forget,  
My simple rules of etiquette!

*(Unfurls his scroll)*

Please be cordial, never rude,  
And do not steal your neighbor's food.

Eating with fingers will make a mess,  
So, wipe them on your lady's dress.

And if you feel the need to spit;  
Please wait until the singers quit.

Do all you are told by the King and his Queen  
Don't cross him, just don't... If you know what I mean.

There, of rules, there are no more,  
But if you break them, you're out the door

Speaking of door, our evening begins!  
Our Madrigals enter; enjoy them, my friends.

*(As the Madrigals strike their opening chord, the Jester rushes back in and informs the audience with terror in his voice.)*

Oh merciful Heaven!  
They're both here, tonight, so gaily adorned!  
The lecherous knight, and the lady he scorned!

*(He runs out as the Madrigals enter.)*

*(The Knight is in the last couple to enter.)*

**Processional:**

*(The madrigal singers enter as they sing a Christmas carol. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is a favorite. They line up at opposite doors as they enter, weave through the audience as they sing, meet at the front, curtsy and bow to each other, and finally the Ladies are escorted to their seats by the Lords.)*

**King:** *(All Madrigals remain standing; The king opens his arms wide as he welcomes his guests)*

Welcome guests from far and wide,  
From hill, and vale, and countryside,

My bounty is yours' eat, drink, and be merry!  
With jests and fine song this party will tarry!

The feast before us is beyond all compare,  
Let us bow to our maker in most humble prayer.

**Opening Prayer:**

*(This could be a prayer that is sung. All Madrigals remain standing.)*

**Song: “The Blessing”**

*(This is any song of a prayer-like nature)*

**Scene 1: “Crime & Punishment”**

*(The Madrigals assume their positions, and the Lady Scorned sees her betrothed scoundrel, gives a slight scream, and promptly faints. The Madrigals do their best to prop her back up. The Knight sees the Lady Scorned and tries to hide behind the floral arrangements, napkins, etc.)*

**Queen:** What is it?  
*(hurries over to the Lady’s side)*  
Perhaps the excitement has made her grow pale,  
I fear what she needs, is a glass of wassail!

**Jester:** *(jumping to attention and motioning to the litter-bearers who carry the wassail)*  
Come quickly wassail; I fear for her life!  
Bring ale, for the King, his guests, and his wife!

**SONG: Wassail Song**

“Wassail, Wassail all over the town...”

*(A bowl of apple-colored gelatin that “looks like cider, but isn’t” is carried by the pages on a litter. It is paraded around the house and stops at the king’s table for approval. The King rises, survey’s the cider and nods. He waves the pages on, and they exit.)*

**WASSAIL SERVED:**

*(The hot apple cider brought out by the servers.)*

**Fanfare 2**

*(The Lady Scorned revives and tells those around her what the Knight has done. He squirms and sinks in his chair. The whispers and commotion ripple throughout the ladies at the table.)*

**Toasts:**

**King:** A toast, a toast! Raise your glasses high!  
To a season of cheer! Here’s mud in your eye!

*(The King and his court raise their glasses to drink, but the Queen stops them.)*

**Queen:** *(Returning to her place beside the king after reviving the Lady Scorned.)*  
Thy toast, dear husband, was really quite plain,  
I pray thee, my love, try it again.

**King:** Plain? Again? Ah, my throat is too dry,  
If it’s wit that you want, ask the Jester to try.



**Queen:** *(She looks around for the Jester, claps her hands, but he does not appear.)*  
Good husband, the prankster, so known for his chiding,  
is absent tonight, I fear he is hiding.

**King:** *(standing up and looking around for the Jester)*  
If our fool is absent, his head I will sever,  
I want him here now, just as clever as ever!

**Jester:** *(bounds into the room and bows before the King)*  
Your pardon, my king, I'll conduct your fun.  
We'll bandy some toasts that are second to none!

**King:** On with it then, the Queen wants some jests!

**Queen:** With wit and with rhyme,  
make some toasts for our guests.

**Jester:**  
*(The jester walks in among the audience and begins to chat with them. He runs quickly to several couples.)*

Our first toast will go, I am afraid,  
To the cad who brought the youngest maid!

*(He searches in the audience and asks who is the youngest woman. He eliminates them until she finds her. To her escort he scolds:)*

Confess, you rogue; you've stolen a child!  
Pray her father won't find you; he's apt to go wild.

**Jester:** A toast to these children!

*(The court and the audience raise their glasses and quickly confer on the first line of the toast)*

**The Court:** May the Lord pour his blessings on all that you do,  
*(They motion in unison to the Jester to complete the rhyme.)*

**Jester:** *(hesitating and giving himself time to think)*  
May your children be many, and your problems be few!

*(cheers from the court and requests for more)*

Who has weathered life's storms,  
and emerged yet the boldest,  
At which table tonight,  
sits the man who is oldest?

*(He repeats the search for the oldest man. When He finds him, the jester informs the court.)*

Here sits the man who is gifted with age!  
His wisdom awards him the title of, "Sage."

**The Court:** *(after conferring briefly and raising their glasses again)*  
May you stay in good health, and your years yet be many.  
*(again they motion to the Jester)*

**Jester:** *(after thinking briefly)* And your wealth in this world,  
come to more than a penny!

*(The court cheers and motions to the jester to go on.)*

Now which couple among you has been the most dutiful,  
And raised a large brood, thus being quite "fruitful"!

*(again he searches for the couple who has the most children)*

I have found the couple, your grace,  
Who has populated half of our race!

**The Court:** *(After their conference, they raise their glasses and say:)*

May your children bring you honor and never an ill,  
*(They motion to the Jester again.)*

**Jester:** Clean up after themselves, and not stick you with the bill!

*(The court cheers.)*

**King:** So, my wife, have these toasts been sufficient?

**Queen:** In toasting, our Jester is once more proficient!

**King:** Well done, good Jester, you have reason to boast,  
But my belly's not filled by a series of toasts.  
If you really want us to think you quite good,  
Get those servers in order, and bring out the food!

*(The Madrigals all toast each other.)*

**Lord 5:** Good King! A moment of your time?  
I pray, first deal with this heinous crime!  
*(The lord points to the Knight.)*

**King:** A crime? Who dares dishonor my table?  
Speak dear lady. I trust that you're able?  
*(He casts a suspicious look at the Knight.)*

**Lady Scorned:** He spent all the dowry my father could pay.  
Then, I stood all alone on our wedding day!  
*(She sobs hysterically.)*

**Lord 4:** Alas, this act of betrayal sir,  
Must be avenged to honor her!

**Lord 2:** But one recourse, good king, I dread,  
This bawdy knight, must loose his head!

*(More shocked responses from the court; the ladies especially react with pity. The King is very shocked.)*

**Lord 3:** He's broken our code of honor, my King!  
Surely, you cannot abide such a thing!

*(The king rises after conferring with the court. He motions to the Knight to stand.)*

**King:** The law of the land speaks clear on this matter,  
She'll have your head on a silver platter!

*(The women are outraged! The queen is encouraged to speak up by her maidens.)*

**Queen:** My lord and liege, my sovereign, my King,  
I beg you grant me but this one thing.

I see his brash and youthful face,  
And I beg my King to show his grace.

Tho' nought would I 'ere set him free,  
Pray, leave his sentence up to me!

**King:** *(after conferring with his knights)*  
Since womanhood must bear this shame,  
This foul Knight's sentence you may name!

**Queen:** *(after conferring with her ladies)*  
Good Knight, approach the judgment seat,  
And pray that mercy here you'll meet.

*(The Knight approaches the Queen and kneels before her; she stands to deliver his sentence.)*

Sir, your position is precarious still,  
As I pronounce our corporate will.

You're on the edge of an abyss.  
Yet you shall live if you can tell me this.

What is the thing that women most desire?  
Beware the ax, and say as I require.

If you cannot answer on the moment, though,  
I will concede you this: You are to go

This very night only, to conduct your quest,  
And answer what it is we women want the best.

Now heed this warning, I charge to thee,  
With your answer, Knight, we must all agree!

If one among us finds your answer not so,  
Then dear, dear Knight, off your head will go!

*(Ladies twitter, men are disgusted, Knight exits to the far side of the table, and begins to conduct his interviews with the lady seated beside him. He chats conspicuously with her during the next speech.)*

**King:** *(to the Jester)*  
Our guests need not suffer this domestic squabble,  
Serve up the salad, fool, on the double!

**Jester:** *(exiting in the direction of the kitchen)*  
The salad, the salad, to tickle the pallet!

**SALAD IS SERVED:**  
*(Play some Old English harpsichord-type music)*

**Option: The “Disgruntled Servers” Perform a Song.**  
*(The reactions of the Madrigal singers are shock and distaste.)*

### **Fanfare 3**

### **Scene 2: “The Opinion of the Court”**

**Jester:** Alas, our good Knight is having a very bad night!  
*(He laughs at his own joke!)*

Sad was the Knight and sorrowfully sighed,  
But what option had he; he'd been tried!

He asked each fair maid who graced our host,  
What could it be that women wanted most?

Yet no matter with whom the chat may be,  
He could find no two women who would agree!

**Knight:** Pray, tell me, 'lest they free my ghost,  
What is it women truly want the most?

**Lady 1:** *(Shy and giggling)*  
I'll answer your riddle; it's wealth and treasure,  
Fine clothes and jewels will give us pleasure!

*(The Knight eagerly writes down what she says and moves from lady to lady along the court.)*

**Lady 2:** To be widowed and remarried; then ever flattered,  
That is all, for me, that has ever mattered.

**Lady 3:** Why, liberty is a woman's real passion,  
To behave as she will, in whatever fashion

Might please her best, and not be corrected,  
But told she's wise, encouraged, and respected.

*(The Knight is getting discouraged, and moves on to the next lady after making a wide circle to avoid his fiancée.)*

**Lady 4:** I say, 'Tis this that women treasure:  
To be thought dependable beyond measure.  
Steadfast in keeping secrets from the jealous,  
Not prone to blab the things men may tell us!

*(The knight returns to his seat and heaves a heavy sigh. Enter the Jester.)*

**Jester:** Poor Knight! He's traveled all about,  
And perceived he never would find out,  
  
What it could be that women loved the best,  
Faint was the soul within his sorrowful breast.

Alas! Cheer up! It's not your head  
That's on the platter;

It's the boar's head;  
So what does it matter?

Now comes the feast beyond belief,  
Scones, spiced tea, and roasted beef;

A feast befitting king or peasant,  
In company so cheery and pleasant!

The cow we eat, I sadly tell  
Died strangely. It was not well.

'Twas struck by a wildly driven chariot,  
And, we'd rather eat it than simply bury it!

**SONG: The Boar's Head**

*(A pig's head, carried by the litter-bearers on a litter, is paraded around the house and stops at the King's table for approval. The King rises, survey's the head and nods. He waves the pages on, and they exit.)*

**Option: "Orphan Chorus"** (sung by the "orphan children")

*(The children perform their song, then stroll among the audience singing for three tables at a time. The people seated at the tables give the children gold foil-wrapped candy in the shape of money which was laid on the tables beforehand.)*

**THE MEAL IS SERVED:**

*(During dinner, the Knight asks the women in the audience what they would like best, the magician does tricks, the minstrel(s) play, jugglers stroll among the audience and the musicians play. When the meal is finished, the trumpeters enter.)*

**Fanfare 4**

**Jester:** Ah! Have we not a merry night?  
*(He glances at the Knight, then at the audience.)*

No, not that Knight, I mean this night!  
*(He motions to the audience.)*

I see our friend is out of luck,  
It seems his queries have run amuck!

But we have food, and drink, and cheer,  
I think he'd best get out of here!

*(The Knight takes the Jester's advice and begins to sneak out of the room in hopes of escaping, but an old Hag, dressed in rags stands between the Knight and the exit. She is pushing a broom and looks much like a cleaning lady. She is very ugly, and speaks in a crone-like voice. She stops the Knight in his flight out of the room.)*

### Scene 3: “The Deal”

**Hag:** Sir Knight, there’s no way out from here,  
Tell me, what are you looking for, my dear?

Is some foul demon chasing you?  
We old, old women know a thing or two.

**Knight:** *(cautiously looking around)*  
Dear mother, ‘alack the day.  
I am as good as dead if I cannot say,  
  
What thing it is that women most desire;  
If you could tell me, I would pay your hire.

**Hag:** Give me your hand, and swear to do,  
Whatever I shall next require of you,  
  
If so, to do should lie within your might,  
And you shall know the answer this very night!

**Knight:** *(thrilled)* Upon my honor, I agree!

**Hag:** Your life is safe: I shall make good my claim.  
Upon my oath, the Queen will say the same.  
  
There will be not one who in her speech,  
Will argue with what I have to teach.

*(The Hag and the Knight creep off to the side as she tells him the answer. The Knight is amazed, then thrilled to have saved his life. They approach the court: the Knight leading the Hag, as the Jester narrates.)*

### Scene 4: “The Pardon”

**Jester:** They came to the court; the Knight with Hag beside him.  
He knew there was not one to chide him.

He had kept his word; had his answer ready,  
There sat the noble matrons, smug and heady!

And there the Queen, herself, was throned to hear,  
And judge his answer; the Knight drew near  
And silence was commanded throughout the hall.

*(The Queen rises, waves her hand, and all is silent. The Knight approaches her and kneels. The Hag sits in the front row of the audience and watches eagerly.)*

**Queen:** I summon you, Knight, come, stay your post;  
Pray, tell us, what is it women want most?

**Knight:** My liege and lady, please hear me,  
Women desire... sovereignty.

Over husbands as husbands have had 'or their wives,  
And would be the masters, all their lives!

That is your greatest wish; now spare or kill  
Me as you please; I stand here at your will.  
*(The Knight bows his head, and the Hag looks satisfied.)*

*(There is silence in the entire hall as the ladies eye each other. No one disagrees with the claims of the Knight.)*

**Queen:** *(in disbelief)* It seems we agree, be she maid or wife!  
Alas, good Knight, you have saved your life!

**King:** Be pardoned, Knight, you wretched flirt;  
Jester, bring in the dessert!

*(The jester runs out of the hall; the Knight hurries to the Hag. He is about to kiss her, she gets excited, then he reconsiders when he sees how ugly she is. Instead, he shakes her hand vigorously. He hurries to rejoin the company, and sings the song with them.)*

**SONG: “We Wish You A Merry Christmas”**

*(A bowl of bread pudding with “sterno” cans that have been lit, creates a blazing Figgie Pudding look as it is carried by the litter-bearers on a litter. It is paraded around the house and stops at the King’s table for approval. The King rises; survey’s the cider and nods. He waves the pages on, and they exit.)*

**DESSERT IS SERVED:**

**Option: “Disgruntled Servers” Song 2**

*(A song about friends who let you down would be an option here.)*

**Fanfare 5**

*(The Knight eagerly eats his dessert. The Hag approaches him. Her ugliness embarrasses him. He quickly gives her a dessert, and returns her to the table where she was seated. After the fanfare, she begins to pound with her dishes, makes a scene, and approaches the Queen.)*

**Scene 5: “The Chastisement”**



**Hag:** *(to the Queen)* Your mercy, sovereign lady,  
Before the court disperses, do me right!  
'Twas I who taught this answer to the Knight.

For which he swore, and pledged his honor to it,  
That whatever I asked, in payment, he'd do it

*(The Knight cowers as the Queen gives him a stern look.)*

*(to the Knight)* I know this lies within your might,  
So before this court I ask you, sir Knight,

To keep your word, and take me for your wife,  
For well you know that I have saved your life.

*(very cocky)* If this be false, deny it on your sword!

**Knight:** *(shocked and repulsed)* Alas, old lady, by the Lord,  
I know indeed that such was my behest,  
But for God's love, think of a new request!

*(The Hag is immovable.)*

Take all my goods, but leave my body free!

**Hag:** Curse on you if I agree!

I may be foul; I may be poor and old,  
Yet will not choose to be, for all the gold

That's bedded in the earth or lies above,  
Less than your wife, nay, than your very love!

**Knight:** *(coming down from the table and trying to reason with her)*  
My love? By heaven!

Alas, that any of my race and station,  
Should ever make so foul a misalliance!

**Hag:** *(apologetic)*  
You're carrying on as if you were half-witted;  
Say, for God's love, what sin have I committed?

I'll put things right, if you'll show me how.

**Knight:** *(hopelessly)*  
Put right? That never can be now!

Nothing can ever be put right again.  
You're old and so abominably plain.

So poor to start with, so lowbred to follow;  
It's little wonder that I twist and wallow!

God, that my heart would burst within my breast.

**Hag:** *(apologetically)*  
Is that the cause of your unrest?

**Knight:** *(angrily)*  
Yes, certainly, and can you wonder?  
For a gentleman, this would be a heinous blunder!

**Hag:** *(preaching)*  
A gentleman? Fie!  
Of gentle birth?  
Such as descends from ancient wealth and worth.

Christ wills we take our gentleness from Him;  
Take Him to be the greatest gentleman.

You are no gentleman, though duke or earl;  
Vice and bad manners make you a churl.

May God on high, and I hope He will,  
Grant me grace to live in virtue still,

A gentlewoman only when beginning,  
To live in virtue and shrink from sinning.

**Knight:** *(defeated)*  
But you've been poor all your life,  
I cannot take you as my wife.

**Hag:** *(righteously)*  
As for my poverty, which you reprove,  
Almighty God Himself in whom we move,  
Believe and have our being, chose a life of poverty.

But truly poor are they who whine and fret,  
And covet what they cannot hope to get.

Poverty gives knowledge of oneself and even lends,  
A glass by which to see one's truest friends.

And since it is no offense, let me be plain,

Do not rebuke my poverty again!

**Knight:** *(kneeling)*  
But your age could make you twice my mother!  
I beg you; let me wed another!

**Hag:** *(matronly)*  
Filth and old age, I'm sure you'll agree,  
Are powerful wardens upon chastity.  
Nevertheless, well-knowing your delights,  
I shall fulfill your worldly appetites.

**Knight:** *(getting up from his knees and turning his back on her)*  
I pray you, woman, stop your tease!  
Your words slay me to my knees!  
You mock my appetite at last,  
My life must henceforth be a fast!

*(The Hag leaves in a huff, and the Knight turns to see that she is gone. He thinks he has won the conflict and joyfully returns to his seat at the table. The members of the court do not welcome him, but look at him in disgust.)*

**Queen:** Though your life is spared, and your sentence deferred,  
I fear you've not heard her last word.

**King:** Jousting, fencing, and fighting for your life,  
Pale to battles between a man and his wife!

**Queen:** *(insulted)*  
That's not what our evening's about, my love,  
We're here to sing of God's gift from above,  
  
To remember what Christ's coming means,  
How His birth in that stable all mankind redeems.

May your soul find refreshment, and your spirit rejoice,  
As we Madrigals hail him in harmonious voice.

### **THE CONCERT:**

*(This is 6-8 old-English Christmas carols arranged for 12 acappella voices. The standard favorite in this set is "The Twelve Days of Christmas," with hand-motions. A really funny gag, is to have one of the Lords try in vain to lay a golden egg each time his turn comes in the song. At the very end, he produces a golden egg, and the court applauds his efforts.)*

### **Scene 6: "The Choice"**

*(The Hag reappears having made her make-up and costume change, but she still keeps the veil over her face and the rag-like robe securely fastened around her. She is able to make the transformation within an instant. She approaches the Knight, who is very surprised to see her. The rest of the court motions him to go down and meet her, and keep his word.)*

**Hag:** *(seductively)*  
You have two choices: Which one will you try?  
To have me old and ugly till I die,  
  
But still a loyal, true and humble wife,  
That never will displease you all her life.  
  
Or would you rather I were young and pretty,  
And take your chance what happens in the city.  
  
Where friends will visit you because of me,  
Yes, and in other places, too, maybe?  
  
Which will you have, the choice is all your own.

**Knight:** *(disbelieving her.)*  
My lady, and my love, my dearest one,  
  
I leave the matter to your wise decision.  
You make the choice yourself, for the provision  
  
Of what may be agreeable and rich  
In honor to us both, I don't care which;  
  
Whatever pleases you suffices me.

**Hag:** *(triumphantly)*  
Then, have I won the mastery?  
  
Since I am to choose and rule as I see fit?

**Knight:** *(resigned and turning his back to her)*  
Certainly, wife. That's it!

*(The Hag removes the veil, and the rag-like cloak in a single motion, then reveals the gorgeous woman that she is!)*

**Hag:** Kiss me! No quarrels on my oath!  
And word of honor, you shall find me both.  
That is fair and faithful as a wife,  
Lovely, yet true all the days of my life.

*(The Knight is overjoyed as he leads her back to sit near where he is. He resumes his seat at the table for the rest of the concert.)*

**King:** *(standing)*  
Dear guests, you have seen tonight,  
Our man has won this perilous fight.

A fair, yet loyal wife he's gained,  
And we have all been entertained.

The moral is quite clear to me,  
A man must save his dignity!

**Queen:** *(rising to counter his conclusion)*  
My Lord, you are gracious and elegant in song,  
But your moral, my love, is just dead wrong.

A man will not be happy in this life,  
'Till he is mastered by his wife.

*(The two stare at each other in a sort of a standoff; the jester enters quickly to make peace between them.)*

**Jester:** Hear ye, hear ye, one and all,  
The feast has been a joy to all!

Let's not bring on a cloud or show,  
By battling over which sex has more power!

For God rules both from His throne above,  
And the greatest power is the power of love.

Ah, to love: what a marvelous choice;  
Of that we sing... in angelic voice!

### **CONCERT CONCLUSION:**

*(One more song from the court)*

### **THE BENEDICTION:**

**Queen:** Our evening, dear friends has come to an end,  
And all of you I heartily commend.

Your warmth and your humor have been our delight,  
And we wish you God's speed as you homeward tonight.

**King:** I'll echo my Queen as she commends your grace.  
Your Christian charity shines on each face.

Please join us now in this most beloved carol,  
"Silent Night" as the yuletide we herald.

**THE RECESSIONAL:**

*(The court exits in much the same way as they entered. They stand in among the audience as they sing "Silent Night.")*

**The End**

**NOTE:**

The following "Cheat Script" is a handy tool to put at the King's table for the singers; also, place this at all the entrances and exits for the players. This sequence of events can get confusing for even the most seasoned performers, and the last thing you want is for fine talent, dressed in their Elizabethan finery, to suffer from a brain vacation.

# “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

- *Ye Old Cheat Sheet* -

## Fanfare 1

### (Prologue)

**Jester:** Alas, dear guests, you’ve come again...

## Processional

**King:** Welcome guests from far and wide,

## Opening Prayer

### Scene 1: “Crime & Punishment”

**Queen:** What is it? (*The Queen hurries over to her*)  
Perhaps the excitement has made her grow pale...

**Jester:** Come quickly wassail...

## Serve The Wassail

## Fanfare 2

## Toasts

**King:** A toast, a toast! Raise your glasses high!

**Queen:** Thy toast, dear husband, was really quite plain...

**King:** Plain? Again? Ah, my throat is too dry...

**Queen:** Good husband, the prankster, so known for his chiding...

**King:** If our fool is absent, his head I will sever...

**Jester:** Your pardon, my king, I’ll conduct your fun...

**King:** On with it then, the queen wants some jests...

**Queen:** With wit and with rhyme...

**The Court:** May the Lord pour His blessings on all that you do...

**The Court:** May you stay in good health, and your years yet be many...

**The Court:** May your children bring you honor and never an ill...

**King:** So, my wife, have these toasts been sufficient?

**Queen:** In toasting, our Jester is once more proficient!

**King:** Well done, good Jester, you have reason to boast...

**Lord 5:** Good King! A moment of your time?

**King:** A crime? Who dares dishonor my table?  
**Lady Scorned:** He spent all the dowry my father could pay....  
**Lord 4:** Alas, this act of betrayal sir...  
**Lord 2:** But one recourse, good King, I dread...  
**Lord 3:** He's broken our code of honor, my King!  
**King:** The law of the land speaks clear on this matter...  
**Queen:** My lord and liege, my sovereign, my King...  
**King:** Since womanhood must bear this shame,  
**Queen:** Good Knight, approach the judgment seat...  
**King:** Our guests need not suffer this domestic squabble...  
**Jester:** The salad, the salad, to tickle the pallet!

### **Serve The Salad**

**Option: "Disgruntled Servers" Song**

### **Fanfare 3**

#### **Scene 2: "The Opinion of the Court"**

**Jester:** Alas, our good Knight is having a very bad night!  
**Knight:** Pray, tell me, 'lest they free my ghost...  
**Lady 1:** I'll answer your riddle; it's wealth and treasure...  
**Lady 2:** To be widowed and remarried; then ever flattered...  
**Lady 3:** Why, liberty is a woman's real passion...  
**Lady 4:** I say, 'Tis this that women treasure...  
**Jester:** Poor Knight... he's traveled all about...

### **Boar's Head Song**

**Option: "Orphan Chorus"**

### **Serve The Meal**

### **Fanfare 4**

**Jester:** Ah! Have we not a merry night?

#### **Scene 3: "The Deal"**

**Hag:** Sir Knight, there's no way out from here...  
**Knight:** Upon my honor, I agree!

#### **Scene 4: "The Pardon"**

**Jester:** They came to the court; the Knight with Hag beside him...



**Queen:** I summon you, Knight, come, stay your post...  
**Knight:** My liege and lady, please hear me...  
**Queen:** It seems we agree, be she maid or wife!  
**King:** Be pardoned, Knight, you wretched flirt...

### **Serve The Dessert**

### **Option: “Disgruntled Servers” Song 2 Fanfare 5**

#### **Scene 5: “The Chastisement”**

**Hag:** Your mercy sovereign lady...  
**Queen:** Though your life is spared, and your sentence deferred...  
**King:** Jousting, fencing, and fighting for your life...  
**Queen:** That’s not what our evening’s about, my love...

### **Concert**

#### **Scene 6: “The Choice”**

**Hag:** You have two choices: Which one will you try?  
**Knight:** My lady, and my love, my dearest one...  
**King:** Dear guests, you have seen tonight...  
**Queen:** My Lord, you are gracious and elegant in song...  
**Jester:** Hear ye, hear ye, one and all...

### **Concert Conclusion**

### **The Benediction**

**Queen:** Our evening, dear friends has come to an end...  
**King:** I’ll echo my Queen as she commends your grace...

### **The Recessional**

**The End**

# Madrigal Checklist

## Costumes

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Beefeaters*                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Serving girls*    | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Troubadours* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Minstrels*                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Mimes*          | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Jester       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Magician*                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 Singers        | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Juggler*     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Announcers*                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Litter-bearers* | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpeter(s)*  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dancers*                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Orphan children*  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hag            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wife of Bath (transformation) |  |   |

\* **Optional cast members**

## Publicity

- |                                       |  |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers   | <input type="checkbox"/> Church paper  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Town marquee | <input type="checkbox"/> Flyers        | <input type="checkbox"/> Posters  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tickets made | <input type="checkbox"/> Tickets sales | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs |

## Rehearsals & Performances

- Production Calendar

## Technical

- |                                   |                                 |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sound    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lights | <input type="checkbox"/> Tables |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Props  | <input type="checkbox"/> Set    |

## Decorations

- |                                 |   |                                   |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Madrigal table | <input type="checkbox"/> House    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foyer  | <input type="checkbox"/> Guest tables   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean-up |

## Entertainment

- |                                    |                                      |                                  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minstrels | <input type="checkbox"/> Troubadours | <input type="checkbox"/> Mimes   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Magician  | <input type="checkbox"/> Jester      | <input type="checkbox"/> Callers |

## Food Service

- |                               |                                   |                                    |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Menu | <input type="checkbox"/> Caterers | <input type="checkbox"/> Cast/Crew |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|