

I holde a mouses herte not worth a leek
 That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
 And if that faille, thanne is all ydo.^o
 575 [I bar him on honde he hadde enchanted me —
 My dame taughte me that soutiltee —
 And eek I seyde I mette of him all night,
 He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
 And all my bed was ful of verray blood.
 580 But yet I hope that he shall do me good,
 For blood bitokeneth gold,^o as me was taught.
 And all was fals. I dremed of it right naught,
 But as I folwed ay my dames loore,
 As well of this as of othere thinges moore.]^o
 585 But now, sire, lat me see, what I shall sayn?
 A ha! By God, I have my tale ageyn.
 “Whan that my fourthe housbonde was a-beere,
 I weep algate and made sory cheere,
 As wives mooten, for it is usage,
 590 And with my coverchief covered my visage.
 But for that I was purveyed of a make,
 I wepte but small, and that I undertake.
 “To chirche was mine housbonde born a-morwe
 With neighebores that for him maden sorwe.
 595 And Janekynoure clerk was oon of tho.
 As help me God, whan that I saugh him go
 After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire

*not worth an onion
 jump to
 all is finished
 I persuaded
 mother / subtle trick
 And also I said I dreamt
 (In the dream) he tried to*

*clean and lovely
 gave over to him
 I think
 the spirit of a colt*

well dispositioned, happy

genitalia that might be

*(dead) on his bier
 wept constantly
 must / customary
 my face
 provided with (another) mate
 guarantee
 carried the next day
 grieved
 one of the mourners*

always my mother's advice

*As God is my salvation
 according to reason*

the coffin, it seemed to me

572-74. **I holde . . . ydo:** Compare *Roman de la Rose*, lines 13150-52.

581. **blood bitokeneth gold:** Gold was often described as “red,” so the association of the red color of blood with the color of gold may be referred to here. Keep in mind, however, that Alisoun is addressing a prospective future husband, and that the whole account of the dream of his trying to kill her is a fiction. The reference to gold may be a kind of come-on to a young man who might not otherwise be attracted to the older Alisoun. If this passage was not by Chaucer, however, then the question is moot. See next note.

575-84. **I bar . . . moore:** I bracket these ten lines because there is some question about their authenticity. They do not appear in some of the oldest manuscripts. We cannot be certain whether they are late additions by Chaucer himself or the work of an unusually skillful editor or scribe. Because the matter will not likely be settled for some time — if ever — it seems best to present these lines in their “proper” place, but to call attention to their problematic authorship. There are also questions about the authenticity of lines 609-12, 619-26, and 717-20. One theory is that, since many of these lines appear to be antifeminist, they may be the work not of Chaucer but of a clerk annoyed at what the Wife of Bath has to say about her clerkly fifth husband. In MS Cambridge Dd, the earliest manuscript in which they appear, there are a number of antifeminist marginal comments, possibly made by the same person who added the lines in question. Still, the dominant view is that the lines are Chaucer's own. I have glossed “dame” as “mother,” but the reference is probably to “dame Alys,” her godmother.

Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
 That all mine herte I yaf unto his hoold.
 600 “He was, I trowe, a twenty winter oold,
 And I was fourty, if I shall seye sooth.
 But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.
 Gat-tothed^o I was, and that bicam me weel.
 I hadde the prente of Seinte Venus seel.^o
 605 As help me God, I was a lusty oon,
 And faire and riche and yong and well bigon.
 And trewely, as mine housbondes tolde me,
 I hadde the beste quoniam mighte be.
 [For certes, I am all Venerien
 610 In feelinge, and mine herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse.]^o
 Mine ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.^o
 Allas, allas, that evere love was sinne!
 615 I folwed ay mine inclinacioun
 By vertu of my constellacioun
 That made me I koude noight withdrawe
 My chambre of Venus^o from a goode felawe.
 [Yet have I Martes mark^o upon my face,
 620 And also in another privee place.
 For God so wis be my savacioun,
 I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,
 But evere folwede mine appetit,
 All were he short, or long, or blak, or whit.^o
 625 I took no kepe, so that he liked me,

*As God is my salvation
 according to reason*

did not care, so long as

603. **Gat-tothed:** See line A468 in the General Prologue, and my note to it.

604. **Seinte Venus seel:** A birthmark, probably in some concealed place on her body.

609-12. **For certes . . . hardinesse:** See note to lines 575-84. In these lines of questionable authorship the Wife of Bath explains that she gets her warm and loving feelings from Venus but her tough combativeness from Mars. She is portrayed in this section as the medieval equivalent to a schizophrenic, pulled in two ways at once, a woman “venerian” enough to attract husbands in the game of courtship, but “martial” enough to hold her own on the battleground of marriage.

613. **Mine ascendent . . . therinne:** The Wife of Bath is explaining her character by describing the astrological situation at her birth: Mars was in Taurus, one of the “houses” of Venus. This planetary association would have made her extraordinarily amorous.

618. **chambre of Venus:** To judge from a parallel phrase in the *Roman de la Rose* (line 13336), this “chamber” is her genitalia, but it may also refer to her heart.

619. **Martes mark:** The mark of Mars, apparently another birthmark. See line 604.

622-24. **I ne . . . whit:** I always followed my impulsive appetites, whether the man were short or tall, black-haired or blond.