

- But now kan no man seen none elves mo,
 865 For now the grete charitee and prayers
 Of limitours^o and othere hooly freres,
 That serchen every lond and every stream
 As thikke as motes^o in the sonne-beem,
 Blessinge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
 870 Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
 Thropes, bernes, shipnes, daieries.
 This maketh that there been no fairyes.^o
 For there as wont to walken was an elf
 There walketh now the limitour himself,
 875 In undermeles and in morweninges,
 And seyth his matins and his hooly thinges
 As he gooth in his limitacioun.
 Wommen may go now saufly up and down.
 In every bussh or under every tree
 880 There is noon oother incubus^o but he,
 And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
 And so bifel that this king Arthour
 Hadde in his hous a lusty bachiler
 That on a day came riding fro river,
 885 And happed that, allone as he was born,
 He saugh a maide walkinge him biforn,
 Of whiche maide anon, maugree her hed,
 By verray force he rafte her maidenhed.
 For which oppressioun was swich clamour
 890 And swich pursuite unto the king Arthour,
 That dampned was this knight for to be deed,
 By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed —
 Paraventure swich was the statut tho —
 But that the queene and othere ladies mo
 895 So longe preyeden the king of grace
- any elves anymore*
- kitchens, ladies' chambers
boroughs / towers
villages, barns, stables, dairies*
- accustomed to walk*
- afternoons / mornings
morning prayers / services
area where he can beg
safely walk around*
- will merely dishonor them
it so happened
lustful young knight
from (hawking by) the river
it chanced
walking before him
despite her efforts
took her maidenhead
rape / such an outcry
such an appeal
condemned to death*
- It happened that / then
Except that / more
begged the king for clemency*

866. limitours: Friars who are allowed to preach within a certain geographical jurisdiction or "limit."

868. thikke as motes: As thick as dust particles in a sunbeam. One of the standard anticlerical complaints of Chaucer's time was that there were too many friars in the land sticking their noses into matters of no concern to them.

872. This maketh . . . fairyes: In other words, because of all the friars poking around and blessing everything, there are no more fairies in the "modern" world — modern to the Wife of Bath, that is.

880. incubus: An incubus was a demon who made love to women while they were sleeping. The union could result in pregnancy and demonic offspring. Alisoun's point is that the only "incubi" these days are friars, who, having driven off the real ones, give women dishonor rather than offspring or adventure. It is not entirely clear whether the Wife is expressing nostalgia for the good old days or relief that women now need fear only the less dangerous friars.

- Til he his lif him graunted in the place,
 And yaf him to the queene, all at her wille,
 To chese wheither she wolde him save or spille.
 The queene thanketh the king with all her might,
 900 And after this thus spak she to the knight,
 Whan that she saugh her time upon a day:
 "Thou standest yet," quod she, "in swich array
 That of thy lif yet hastow no suretee.
 I graunte thee lif if thou kanst tellen me
 905 What thing is it that wommen moost desiren.
 Be war and keep thy nekke-boon from iren.
 And if thou kanst not tellen me anon,
 Yet shall I yeve thee leve for to gon
 A twelf-month and a day to seche and lere
 910 An answeere suffisant in this matere.
 And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
 Thy body for to yelden in this place."^o
 Wo was this knight and sorwefully he siketh.
 But what? He may not do all as him liketh.
 915 And atte laste he chees him for to wende
 And come again right at the yeres ende
 With swich answeere as God wolde him purveye,
 And taketh his leve and wendeth forth his weye.
 He seketh every hous and every place
 920 Where as he hopeth for to finde grace
 To lerne what thing wommen love moost,
 But he ne koude arriven in no coost
 Wher as he mighte finde in this matere
 Two creatures acordinge in-fere.
 925 Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,
 Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,
 Somme seyde riche array, somme lust a-bedde,
 And ofte time to be widwe and wedde.
 Somme seyde that oure herte is moost esed
 930 Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.
 He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol not lye.
 A man shall winne us best with flaterye,
 And with attendance and with bisynesse
 Been we ylimed, bothe moore and lesse.
 935 And somme sayn that we loven best
 For to be free and do right as us lest,
- to do with as she wanted
slay*
- in such a situation
have you no security*
- from (the executioner's) iron
right now
freedom to go
seek and learn*
- Woeful / sighs
So what? / all that he wants
chooses to go*
- as God will provide him
goes upon*
- help
at any coast (region)*
- agreeing together
wealth
jollity
fine clothes
widowed and wedded
satisfied*
- flattered and attended to*
- constant attention
caught (as a bird with lime)*
- as we like*

911-12. And suretee . . . place: Before you leave I must have security (presumably a pledge or promise) that you will return and yield up your body to judgment.