

And that no man reprove us of oure vice,
 But seye that we be wise and nothing nyce.
 For trewely there is noon of us alle,
 940 If any wight wol claw us on the galle,
 That we nil kike for hē seith us sooth.^o
 Assay, and he shall finde it that so dooth,
 For be we never so vicious withinne
 We wol been holden wise and cleine of sinne.
 945 And somme sayn that greet delit han we
 For to been holden stable, and eek secree,
 And in o purpōs stedefastly to dwelle,
 And not biwreye thing that men us telle.
 But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.
 950 Pardee, we wommen konne no thing hele.
 Witnesse on Myda.^o Wol ye heere the tale?
 Ovide, amonges othere things smale,
 Seyde Myda hadde under his longe heres
 Growinge upon his heed two asses eres,
 955 The which vice he hidde as he best mighte
 Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,
 That save his wif there wiste of it namo.
 He loved her moost and trusted her also.
 He preyde her that to no creature
 960 She sholde tellen of his disfigure.
 She swoor him nay. For all this world to winne,
 She nolde do that vileynye or syn
 To make her housbonde han so foul a name.
 She nolde not telle it for her owene shame.
 965 But, nathelees, her thoughte that she dyde
 That she so longe sholde a conseil hide.^o
 Her thoughte it swal so soore aboute her herte
 That nedely some word her moste asterte.
 And sith she dorste not telle it to no man,
 970 Doun to a maris faste by she ran.
 Til she cam there her herte was afire.

*criticize us for our vices
 not at all foolish*

*kick / truth
 Test it out / happens thus
 full of vices
 held to be
 we take great pleasure
 in being thought reliable
 hold to one purpose
 betray, reveal
 opinion / rake handle
 hide, keep to ourselves*

*anecdotes
 hair
 head two ass's ears
 flaw
 subtly, slyly
 So that / no one knew of it*

*disfigurement
 For all the world
 She would not
 To give her husband*

*It seemed to swell
 of necessity / must escape her
 since she dare
 marsh close by
 burning*

939–41. For trewely . . . sooth: Truly, there is not a one of us women who, if someone scratched us on a sore place, would not kick him for telling the truth.

951. Myda: Midas. In Book II of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid tells the story of Midas's ears. Midas's barber is the only person who knows that Midas has the ears of an ass under his long hair. He tries to keep the secret but cannot contain himself. He digs a small hole in the ground and whispers the secret there, but the winds blowing over the reeds growing about the hole reveal the secret. Alisoun's version of the story is somewhat different.

965–66. But, nathelees . . . hide: But, nevertheless, it seemed to her that she would die to have to keep the secret for so long.

And as a bitore bombleth in the mire,
 She leyde her mouth unto the water doun:
 "Biwreye me not, thou water, with thy soun,"
 975 Quod she. "To thee I telle it and namo.
 Mine housbonde hath longe asses eres two.
 Now is mine herte all hool, now it is oute.
 I mighte no lenger kepe it, out of doute."
 Heere may ye see, thogh we a time abide,
 980 Yet out it moot. We kan no conseil hide.
 The remenant of the tale, if ye wol heere,
 Redeth Ovide and there ye may it leere.
 This knight, of which my tale is specially,
 Whan that he saugh he mighte not come therby —
 985 This is to seye, what wommen loven moost —
 Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.
 But hom he gooth, he mighte not sojourne.^o
 The day was come that homward moste he tourne.
 And in his wey it happed him to ride
 990 In all this care under a forest side^o
 Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go
 Of ladies foure and twenty and yet mo.^o
 Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,
 In hope that some wisdom sholde he lerne.
 995 But certainly, er he came fully there,
 Vanished was this daunce, he nyste where.
 Ne creature saugh he that bar lif
 Save on the grene he saugh sittinge a wif.^o
 A fouler wight there may no man devise.
 1000 Agayn the knight this olde wif gan rise,

heron bellows in the mud

*Don't betray me
 no more (no one else)*

*could / unquestionably
 can abide for a while
 must / secrets*

learn

spirit

*Where he saw dancing
 and still more
 drew very eagerly*

*he knew not whereto
 saw / was alive*

*uglier person / imagine
 In front of / stood up*

987. he mighte not sojourne: Could not stay away any longer (because his year was nearly up).

990. under a forest side: At the edge of a forest — a place known for supernatural events. See Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*, D1380, where a summoner meets up with a demon at the "forest side."

991–92. a daunce . . . mo: Who these dancers are and why there are over twenty-four of them remains a mystery, but of course it was supposed to be something of a mystery. One clue may be a reference at the very start of the tale's being set in a time when the elf-queen and her "joly compaignye/Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede" (860–61).

998. a wif: See note to A445. When used with the indefinite article, "wif" could mean simply "woman." When used with one of the possessive pronouns ("his," "thy," "my") it meant "wife." Who this woman is and how she gets there, of course, are among the pleasing mysteries of Chaucer's version of the story. Alisoun has prepared for her presence by telling us earlier that the story takes place back in the days before friars had cast out elves and fairies. Is it possible that we are to imagine that the raped maiden has managed to transform herself into this old woman?