

- And seyde, "Sire knight, heer forth ne lith no wey.
Tel me what that ye seken, by your fey.
Paraventure it may the bettre be.
These olde folk kan muchel thing," quod she.
1005 "My leeve mooder," quod this knight, "certeyn
I nam but deed but if that I kan sayn
What thing it is that wommen moost desire.
Koude ye me wisse, I wolde well quite your hire."
"Plight me thy trouthe heere in mine hand," quod she.
1010 "The nexte thing that I requere thee
Thou shalt it do, if it lic in thy might,
And I wol telle it you er it be night."
"Have heer my trouthe," quod the knight, "I grante."
"Thanne," quod she, "I dar me well avante
1015 Thy lif is sauf. For I wol stonde therby
Upon my lif. The queene wol seye as I.
Lat see which is the proudeste of hem alle
That wereth on a coverchief or a calle
That dar seye nay of that I shall thee teche.
1020 Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche."
Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere^o
And bad him to be glad and have no fere.
Whan they be comen to the court, this knight
Seyde he had holde his day as he hadde hight,
1025 And redy was his answer, as he sayde.
Ful many a noble wif, and many a maide,
And many a widwe — for that they been wise —
The queene herself sittinge as justise,
Assembled been, his answer for to here.
1030 And afterward this knight was bode appere.
To every wight comanded was silence,
And that the knight sholde telle in audience
What thing that worldly wommen loven best.
This knight ne stood not stille as doth a best,
- the path ends here
what you seek, by your faith
Perhaps it may get better
old folks know a lot*
- I shall die unless / say*
- repay you*
- ask of you
if you can
before nightfall
I grant it
say, boast
saved
agree with what I say*
- Let's go find out*
- bade / no fear
the (queen's) court
kept the day / promised*
- because they are wise
judge
hear
bidden to come forth
person
(commanded) to tell*
- beast (dumb animal)*

1005. **My leeve mooder:** My dear woman. "Mother" could be a sign of respect for an older woman and need not indicate blood kinship.

1008. **Koude ye . . . hire:** If you tell me, I will make it worth your while.

1009. **Plight me . . . hand:** Promise me, shake hands on it. "Plight me your troth" had not yet come to mean "Marry me."

1017–19. **Lat see . . . teche:** We'll see whether even the proudest of those ladies, whether they wear a handkerchief or a fancy netted headdress, will dare to contradict what I teach you.

1021. **Tho rowned . . . ere:** Then she whispered an epistle (message) in his ear.

- 1035 But to his questioun anon answerde
With manly vois that all the court it herde:
"My lige lady, generally," quod he,
"Wommen desire to have sovereynetee^o
As well over her housbond as her love,^o
1040 And for to been in maistrie^o him above.
This is your mooste desire — thogh ye me kille.^o
Dooth as you list. I am heer at your wille."
In all the court ne was there wif, ne maide,
Ne widwe that contraried that he sayde,
1045 But seyden he was worthy han his lif.
And with that word up stirte the olde wif
Which that the knight saugh sitting on the grene.
"Mercy," quod she, "my sovereyn lady queene!
Er that your court departe, do me right.
1050 I taughte this answeere unto the knight,
For which he plighte me his trouthe there:
The firste thing I wolde him requere
He wolde it do, if it lay in his might.
Before the court thanne preye I thee, sir knight,"
1055 Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wif,
For well thou woost that I have kept thy lif.
If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey."
This knight answerde, "Allas and weylawey!
I woot right well that swich was my biheste.
1060 For Goddes love as chees a newe requeste.
Taak all my good and lat my body go."
"Nay, thanne," quod she, "I shrewe us bothe two!
For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore,
I nolde for all the metal ne for oore
1065 That under erthe is grave or lith above,
- immediately*
- liege, noble*
- contradicted
to have his life
jumped*
- let me have justice*
- gave me his promise
require (ask) of him*
- to be your wife
you know well / saved
say so, on your faith
woe is me
know / promise
choose something else
worldly goods
curse us both*
- would not / precious metal or ore
beneath or above ground*

1038. **sovereynetee:** Sovereignty. The key concept in sovereignty is power, the ability to control not only one's own destiny but the destiny of others. The concept may be related to the notion of courtly love, in which the man serves at the pleasure of his "sovereign lady."

1039. **As well . . . love:** The line is usually translated to mean that women desire to have sovereign power over both their husbands and their lovers. Perhaps a better reading is that women desire to have over their husbands the same power they have over lovers. Lovers, of course, eagerly serve their women; husbands often do not.

1040. **maistrie:** Mastery. "Mastery" is almost a synonym for "sovereignty," but "sovereignty" suggests wider power, if only because a sovereign is a king or queen. One might have mastery over a household or a family, but sovereignty over a nation.

1041. **This is . . . kille:** This is your greatest desire, even though you may kill me for saying it.