

- 385 Ful gilteles, by Goddes sweete pyne!
 "For as an hors I koude bite and whine.
 I koude pleyne — and I were in the gilt —
 Or elles often time hadde I been spilt.
 Whoso that first to mille comth, first grint.
 390 I pleynd first, so was oure werre ystint.
 They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive
 Of thing of which they nevere agilte hir live.
 "Of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde,
 Whan that for sik they mighte unnethes stonde.^o
 395 Yet tikled it his herte, for that he
 Wende that I hadde of him so greet chiertee.^o
 I swoor that all my walking out by nighte
 Was for t'espye wenches that he dighte.
 Under that colour hadde I many a mirthe.
 400 For all swich wit is yiven us in oure birthe.
 Deceite, weping, spinning God hath yeve
 To wommen kindly whil they may live.
 And thus of o thing I avaunte me,
 At ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,
 405 By sleighte or force, or by some maner thing,
 As by continuel murmur or grucching.
 "Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce.
 There wolde I chide and do hem no plesaunce.
 I wolde no lenger in the bed abide.
 410 If that I felte his arm over my side
 Til he had maad his raunceon unto me.
 Thanne wolde I suffre him do his nicetee.
 And therfore every man this tale I telle:
 Win whoso may, for all is for to selle.
 415 With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
 For winning wolde I all his lust endure
 And make me a feyned appetit.
 And yet in bacon^o hadde I nevere delit.
 That made me that evere I wolde hem chide.
 420 For though the pope hadde seten hem beside,

393–94. *Of wenches . . . stonde*: I accused them of whoring around when they were so sick they could scarcely stand. The Wife of Bath's accusation, of course, is meant to be a form of flattery.

395–96. *for that . . . chiertee*: Because he thought that I had such great affection for him.

418. *bacon*: Apparently a euphemism for penis or sexual intercourse, though it may simply mean "dried up meat" or old men. Alisoun seems to be saying that, at least with her three old husbands, sex was more a bartering tool than a source of delight for her.

*though they were innocent
 like a horse
 complain / guilty
 caught, defeated
 grinds
 battle stopped
 ask forgiveness quickly
 never were guilty of*

*to spy out / slept with
 by that trick
 us women at birth
 spinning lies
 by nature
 one thing I boast
 At the end / in every way
 trick
 whining or grumbling
 Especially / misfortune
 give them no fun*

*paid a ransom
 have sex with me*

*lure hawks
 To achieve victory
 faked desire*

- I wolde not spare hem at hir owene bord.^o
 "For, by my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word. *repaid*
 As helpe me verray God omnipotent,
 Though I right now sholde make my testament, *will*
 425 I ne owe hem not a word that it nis quit.^o *every word has been paid back*
 I broghte it so aboute by my wit
 That they moste yeve it up as for the beste,^o
 Or elles hadde we nevere been in reste. *at peace*
 For thogh he looked as a wood leoun,
 430 Yet sholde he faille of his conclusioun. *like a mad lion*
 "Thanne wolde I seye, 'Goode lief, taak keep,
 How mekely looketh Wilkyn, oure sheep.^o *goals*
 Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke. *My good husband*
 Ye sholden been all pacient and meke, *kiss your cheek*
 435 And han a sweete-spiced conscience. *tender demeanor*
 Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience,^o
 Suffreth alwey, syn ye so well kan preche.
 And but ye do, certein we shall you teche
 That it is fair to have a wif in pees. *it is best*
 440 Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,
 And sith a man is moore resonable *yield, undoubtedly*
 Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.
 What eyleth you to grucche thus and grone?
 Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone? *the one to suffer*
 445 Why, taak it al! Lo, have it, every deel!
 Peter, I shrewe you, but ye love it weel. *my genitalia all to yourself*
 For if I wolde selle my bele chose, *every bit of it*
 I koude walke as fressh as is a rose. *By Saint Peter, I declare*
 But I wol kepe it for your owene tooth. *lovely thing*
 450 Ye be to blame, by God, I sey you sooth.^o *your private use*
 "Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.
 Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.
 "My fourthe housbonde was a revelour — *riotous man*
 This is to sayn, he hadde a paramour — *a mistress*
 455 And I was yong and ful of ragerye, *passion*

420–21. *For thogh . . . bord*: Even though the pope himself sat beside them at their own dinner tables, I still would not spare them my chiding.

425. *I ne . . . quit*: Every nasty word I owed them I have paid back.

426–27. *I broghte . . . beste*: By my own cleverness, I arranged things in such a way that they had to call it quits.

432. *How mekely . . . sheep*: How crestfallen looks my little sheep Willikin. Imagine the line to be said in a kind of condescending baby talk.

436. *Jobes pacience*: Job's patience was proverbial. The reference, of course, is to the biblical Job, who was tested by God with almost every imaginable affliction.