

As far as reason asketh, hardily:*
I will you tell a tale, which that I
Learn'd at Padova of a worthy clerk,
As proved by his wordes and his werk.
He is now dead, and nailed in his chest,
I pray to God to give his soul good rest.
Francis Petrarc', the laureate poet,<2>
Highte* this clerk, whose rhetoric so sweet
Illumin'd all Itale of poetry,
As Linian <3> did of philosophy,
Or law, or other art particulere:
But death, that will not suffer us dwell here
But as it were a twinkling of an eye,
Them both hath slain, and alle we shall die.

*boldly, truly

*was called

"But forth to tellen of this worthy man,
That taughte me this tale, as I began,
I say that first he with high style inditeth
(Ere he the body of his tale writeth)
A proem, in the which describeth he
Piedmont, and of Saluces <4> the country,
And speaketh of the Pennine hilles high,
That be the bounds of all West Lombardy:
And of Mount Vesulus in special,
Where as the Po out of a welle small
Taketh his firste springing and his source,
That eastward aye increaseth in his course
T'Emilia-ward, <5> to Ferraro, and Venice,
The which a long thing were to devise.*
And truly, as to my judgement,
Me thinketh it a thing impertinent,*
Save that he would conveye his mattere:
But this is the tale, which that ye shall hear."

*narrate

*irrelevant

Notes to the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale

1. Under your yerd: under your rod; as the emblem of government or direction.

2. Francesco Petrarca, born 1304, died 1374; for his Latin epic poem on the career of Scipio, called "Africa," he was solemnly crowned with the poetic laurel in the Capitol of Rome, on Easter-day of 1341.

3. Lincian: An eminent jurist and philosopher, now almost forgotten, who died four or five years after Petrarch.

4. Saluces: Saluzzo, a district of Savoy; its marquises were celebrated during the Middle Ages.

5. Emilia: The region called Aemilia, across which ran the Via Aemilia -- made by M. Aemilius Lepidus, who was consul at Rome B.C. 187. It continued the Flaminian Way from Ariminum (Rimini) across the Po at Placentia (Piacenza) to Mediolanum (Milan), traversing Cisalpine Gaul.

THE TALE.<1>

Pars Prima.

First Part

There is, right at the west side of Itale,
Down at the root of Vesulus<2> the cold,
A lusty* plain, abundant of vitaille;* *pleasant **victuals
There many a town and tow'r thou may'st behold,
That founded were in time of fathers old,
And many another delectable sight;
And Saluces this noble country hight.

A marquis whilom lord was of that land,
As were his worthy elders* him before, *ancestors
And obedient, aye ready to his hand,
Were all his lieges, bothe less and more:
Thus in delight he liv'd, and had done yore,* *long
Belov'd and drad,* through favour of fortune, *held in reverence
Both of his lordes and of his commune.* *commonalty

Therewith he was, to speak of lineage,
The gentilest y-born of Lombardy,
A fair person, and strong, and young of age,
And full of honour and of courtesy:
Discreet enough his country for to gie,*
Saving in some things that he was to blame;
And Walter was this younge lordes name.

*guide, rule

I blame him thus, that he consider'd not
In time coming what might him betide,
But on his present lust* was all his thought,
And for to hawk and hunt on every side;
Well nigh all other cares let he slide,
And eke he would (that was the worst of all)
Wedde no wife for aught that might befall.

*pleasure

Only that point his people bare so sore,
That flockmel* on a day to him they went,
And one of them, that wisest was of lore
(Or elles that the lord would best assent
That he should tell him what the people meant,
Or elles could he well shew such mattere),
He to the marquis said as ye shall hear.

*in a body

"O noble Marquis! your humanity
Assureth us and gives us hardiness,
As oft as time is of necessity,
That we to you may tell our heaviness:
Accepte, Lord, now of your gentleness,
What we with piteous heart unto you plain,*
And let your ears my voice not disdain.

*complain of

"All* have I nought to do in this mattere
More than another man hath in this place,
Yet forasmuch as ye, my Lord so dear,
Have always shewed me favour and grace,
I dare the better ask of you a space
Of audience, to shewen our request,
And ye, my Lord, to do right *as you lest.*

*although

as pleaseth you

"For certes, Lord, so well us like you
And all your work, and ev'r have done, that we
Ne coulde not ourselves devise how
We mighte live in more felicity:
Save one thing, Lord, if that your will it be,
That for to be a wedded man you lest;
Then were your people *in sovereign hearte's rest.* *completely

"Bowe your neck under the blissful yoke
Of sovereignty, and not of service,
Which that men call espousal or wedlock:
And thinke, Lord, among your thoughtes wise,
How that our dayes pass in sundry wise;
For though we sleep, or wake, or roam, or ride,
Aye fleeth time, it will no man abide.

"And though your greene youthe flow'r as yet,
In creepeth age always as still as stone,
And death menaceth every age, and smiteth *smiteth
In each estate, for there escapeth none:
And all so certain as we know each one
That we shall die, as uncertain we all
Be of that day when death shall on us fall.

"Accepte then of us the true intent,* *mind, desire
That never yet refused youre hest,* *command
And we will, Lord, if that ye will assent,
Choose you a wife, in short time at the lest,* *least
Born of the gentilest and of the best
Of all this land, so that it ought to seem
Honour to God and you, as we can deem.

"Deliver us out of all this busy dread,* *doubt
And take a wife, for highe Godde's sake:
For if it so befell, as God forbid,
That through your death your lineage should slake,* *become extinct
And that a strange successor shoulde take
Your heritage, oh! woe were us on live:* *alive
Wherefore we pray you hastily to wive."

Their meeke prayer and their piteous cheer
Made the marquis for to have pity.
"Ye will," quoth he, "mine owen people dear,
To that I ne'er ere* thought constraine me.
I me rejoiced of my liberty,
That seldom time is found in rnarriage;
Where I was free, I must be in servage!*

*before

*servitude

"But natheless I see your true intent,
And trust upon your wit, and have done aye:
Wherefore of my free will I will assent
To wedde me, as soon as e'er I may.
But whereas ye have proffer'd me to-day
To choose me a wife, I you release
That choice, and pray you of that proffer cease.

"For God it wot, that children often been
Unlike their worthy elders them before,
Bounte* comes all of God, not of the strene**
Of which they be engender'd and y-bore:
I trust in Godde's bounte, and therefore
My marriage, and mine estate and rest,
I *him betake;* he may do as him lest.

*goodness

**stock, race

*commend to him

"Let me alone in choosing of my wife;
That charge upon my back I will endure:
But I you pray, and charge upon your life,
That what wife that I take, ye me assure
To worship* her, while that her life may dure,
In word and work both here and elleswhere,
As she an emperore's daughter were.

*honour

"And farthermore this shall ye swear, that ye
Against my choice shall never grudge* nor strive.
For since I shall forego my liberty
At your request, as ever may I thrive,
Where as mine heart is set, there will I live
And but* ye will assent in such mannere,
I pray you speak no more of this mattere."

*murmur

*unless

With heartly will they sworn and assent
To all this thing, there said not one wight nay:
Beseeching him of grace, ere that they went,
That he would grante them a certain day
Of his espousal, soon as e'er he rmay,
For yet always the people somewhat dread*
Lest that the marquis woulde no wife wed.

*were in fear or doubt

He granted them a day, such as him lest,
On which he would be wedded sickerly,*
And said he did all this at their request;
And they with humble heart full buxomly,*
Kneeling upon their knees full reverently,
Him thanked all; and thus they have an end
Of their intent, and home again they wend.

*certainly

*obediently <3>

And hereupon he to his officers
Commanded for the feaste to purvey.*
And to his privy knightes and squiers
Such charge he gave, as him list on them lay:
And they to his commandement obey,
And each of them doth all his diligence
To do unto the feast all reverence.

*provide

Pars Secunda

Second Part

Not far from thilke* palace honourable,
Where as this marquis shope* his marriage,
There stood a thorp,* of sighte delectable,
In which the poore folk of that village
Hadde their beastes and their harbourage,*
And of their labour took their sustenance,
After the earthe gave them abundance.

*that

*prepared; resolved on

*hamlet

*dwelling

Among this poore folk there dwelt a man
Which that was holden poorest of them all;
But highe God sometimes sende can
His grace unto a little ox's stall;

Janicola men of that thorp him call.
A daughter had he, fair enough to sight,
And Griseldis this younge maiden hight.

But for to speak of virtuous beauty,
Then was she one the fairest under sun:
Full poorely y-foster'd up was she;
No *likerosus lust* was in her heart y-run; *luxurious pleasure*
Well offer of the well than of the tun
She drank, <4> and, for* she woulde virtue please *because
She knew well labour, but no idle ease.

But though this maiden tender were of age;
Yet in the breast of her virginity
There was inclos'd a *sad and ripe corage;* *steadfast and mature
And in great reverence and charity spirit*
Her olde poore father foster'd she.
A few sheep, spinning, on the field she kept,
She woulde not be idle till she slept.

And when she homeward came, she would bring
Wortes,* and other herbes, times oft, *plants, cabbages
The which she shred and seeth'd for her living,
And made her bed full hard, and nothing soft:
And aye she kept her father's life on loft* *up, aloft
With ev'ry obeisance and diligence,
That child may do to father's reverence.

Upon Griselda, this poor creature,
Full often sithes* this marquis set his eye, *times
As he on hunting rode, paraventure:* *by chance
And when it fell that he might her espy,
He not with wanton looking of folly
His eyen cast on her, but in sad* wise *serious
Upon her cheer* he would him oft advise,** *countenance **consider

Commending in his heart her womanhead,
And eke her virtue, passing any wight
Of so young age, as well in cheer as deed.
For though the people have no great insight

In virtue, he considered full right
Her bounte,* and disposed that he would
Wed only her, if ever wed he should.

*goodness

The day of wedding came, but no wight can
Telle what woman that it shoulde be;
For which marvail wonder'd many a man,
And saide, when they were in privity,
"Will not our lord yet leave his vanity?
Will he not wed? Alas, alas the while!
Why will he thus himself and us beguile?"

But natheless this marquis had *done make*
Of gemmes, set in gold and in azure,
Brooches and ringes, for Griselda's sake,
And of her clothing took he the measure
Of a maiden like unto her stature,
And eke of other ornamentes all
That unto such a wedding shoulde fall.*

caused to be made

*befit

The time of undern* of the same day
Approached, that this wedding shoulde be,
And all the palace put was in array,
Both hall and chamber, each in its degree,
Houses of office stuffed with plenty
There may'st thou see of dainteous vitaille,*
That may be found, as far as lasts Itale.

*evening <5>

*victuals, provisions

This royal marquis, richely array'd,
Lords and ladies in his company,
The which unto the feaste were pray'd,
And of his retinue the bach'lery,
With many a sound of sundry melody,
Unto the village, of the which I told,
In this array the right way did they hold.

Griseld' of this (God wot) full innocent,
That for her shapen* was all this array,
To fetche water at a well is went,
And home she came as soon as e'er she may.

*prepared

For well she had heard say, that on that day
The marquis shoulde wed, and, if she might,
She fain would have seen somewhat of that sight.

She thought, "I will with other maidens stand,
That be my fellows, in our door, and see
The marchioness; and therefore will I fand* *strive
To do at home, as soon as it may be,
The labour which belongeth unto me,
And then I may at leisure her behold,
If she this way unto the castle hold."

And as she would over the threshold gon,
The marquis came and gan for her to call,
And she set down her water-pot anon
Beside the threshold, in an ox's stall,
And down upon her knees she gan to fall,
And with sad* countenance kneeled still, *steady
Till she had heard what was the lorde's will.

The thoughtful marquis spake unto the maid
Full soberly, and said in this mannere:
"Where is your father, Griseldis?" he said.
And she with reverence, *in humble cheer,* *with humble air*
Answered, "Lord, he is all ready here."
And in she went withoute longer let* *delay
And to the marquis she her father fet.* *fetched

He by the hand then took the poore man,
And saide thus, when he him had aside:
"Janicola, I neither may nor can
Longer the pleasance of mine hearte hide;
If that thou vouchesafe, whatso betide,
Thy daughter will I take, ere that I wend,* *go
As for my wife, unto her life's end.

"Thou lovest me, that know I well certain,
And art my faithful liegeman y-bore,* *born
And all that liketh me, I dare well sayn
It liketh thee; and specially therefore

Tell me that point, that I have said before, --
If that thou wilt unto this purpose draw,
To take me as for thy son-in-law."

This sudden case* the man astonied so,
That red he wax'd, abash'd,* and all quaking
He stood; unnethes* said he wordes mo',
But only thus; "Lord," quoth he, "my willing
Is as ye will, nor against your liking
I will no thing, mine owen lord so dear;
Right as you list governe this mattere."

*event
*amazed
*scarcely

"Then will I," quoth the marquis softly,
"That in thy chamber I, and thou, and she,
Have a collation;* and know'st thou why?
For I will ask her, if her will it be
To be my wife, and rule her after me:
And all this shall be done in thy presence,
I will not speak out of thine audience."*

*conference

*hearing

And in the chamber while they were about
The treaty, which ye shall hereafter hear,
The people came into the house without,
And wonder'd them in how honest mannere
And tenderly she kept her father dear;
But utterly Griseldis wonder might,
For never erst* ne saw she such a sight.

*before

No wonder is though that she be astoned,*
To see so great a guest come in that place,
She never was to no such gwestes woned;*
For which she looked with full pale face.
But shortly forth this matter for to chase,*
These are the wordes that the marquis said
To this benigne, very,* faithful maid.

*astonished
*accustomed, wont
*push on, pursue
*true <6>

"Griseld'," he said, "ye shall well understand,
It liketh to your father and to me
That I you wed, and eke it may so stand,
As I suppose ye will that it so be:

But these demandes ask I first," quoth he,
"Since that it shall be done in hasty wise;
Will ye assent, or elles you advise?*

*consider

"I say this, be ye ready with good heart
To all my lust,* and that I freely may,
As me best thinketh, *do you* laugh or smart,
And never ye to grudge,* night nor day,
And eke when I say Yea, ye say not Nay,
Neither by word, nor frowning countenance?
Swear this, and here I swear our alliance."

*pleasure
cause you to
*murmur

Wond'ring upon this word, quaking for dread,
She saide; "Lord, indigne and unworthy
Am I to this honour that ye me bede,*
But as ye will yourself, right so will I:
And here I swear, that never willingly
In word or thought I will you disobey,
For to be dead; though me were loth to dey."*

*offer

*die

"This is enough, Griselda mine," quoth he.
And forth he went with a full sober cheer,
Out at the door, and after then came she,
And to the people he said in this mannere:
"This is my wife," quoth he, "that standeth here.
Honoure her, and love her, I you pray,
Whoso me loves; there is no more to say."

And, for that nothing of her olde gear
She shoulde bring into his house, he bade
That women should despoile* her right there;
Of which these ladies were nothing glad
To handle her clothes wherein she was clad:
But natheless this maiden bright of hue
From foot to head they clothed have all new.

*strip

Her haire have they comb'd that lay untress'd*
Full rudely, and with their fingers small
A crown upon her head they have dress'd,
And set her full of nouches <7> great and small:

*loose

Of her array why should I make a tale?
Unneth* the people her knew for her fairness,
When she transmuted was in such richness.

*scarcely

The marquis hath her spoused with a ring
Brought for the same cause, and then her set
Upon a horse snow-white, and well ambling,
And to his palace, ere he longer let*
With joyful people, that her led and met,
Conveyed her; and thus the day they spend
In revel, till the sunne gan descend.

*delayed

And, shortly forth this tale for to chase,
I say, that to this newe marchioness
God hath such favour sent her of his grace,
That it ne seemed not by likeliness
That she was born and fed in rudeness, --
As in a cot, or in an ox's stall, --
But nourish'd in an emperore's hall.

To every wight she waxen* is so dear
And worshipful, that folk where she was born,
That from her birthe knew her year by year,
Unnethes trowed they, but durst have sworn,
That to Janicol' of whom I spake before,
She was not daughter, for by conjecture
Them thought she was another creature.

*grown

scarcely believed

For though that ever virtuous was she,
She was increased in such excellence
Of thewes* good, y-set in high bounte,
And so discreet, and fair of eloquence,
So benign, and so digne* of reverence,
And coulde so the people's heart embrace,
That each her lov'd that looked on her face.

*qualities

*worthy

Not only of Saluces in the town
Published was the bounte of her name,
But eke besides in many a regioun;
If one said well, another said the same:

So spread of here high bounte the fame,
That men and women, young as well as old,
Went to Saluces, her for to behold.

Thus Walter lowly, -- nay, but royally,-
Wedded with fort'n'ate honestete,*
In Godde's peace lived full easily
At home, and outward grace enough had he:
And, for he saw that under low degree
Was honest virtue hid, the people him held
A prudent man, and that is seen full seld'.*

*virtue

*seldom

Not only this Griseldis through her wit
Couth all the feat of wifely homeliness,
But eke, when that the case required it,
The common profit coulde she redress:
There n'as discord, rancour, nor heaviness
In all the land, that she could not appease,
And wisely bring them all in rest and ease

knew all the duties

Though that her husband absent were or non,*
If gentlemen or other of that country,
Were wroth,* she woulde bringe them at one,
So wise and ripe wordes hadde she,
And judgement of so great equity,
That she from heaven sent was, as men wend,*
People to save, and every wrong t'amend

*not

*at feud

*weened, imagined

Not longe time after that this Griseld'
Was wedded, she a daughter had y-bore;
All she had lever* borne a knave** child,
Glad was the marquis and his folk therefore;
For, though a maiden child came all before,
She may unto a knave child attain
By likelihood, since she is not barren.

*rather **boy

Pars Tertia.

Third Part

There fell, as falleth many times mo',
When that his child had sucked but a throw,* little while
This marquis in his hearte longed so
To tempt his wife, her sadness* for to know, *steadfastness
That he might not out of his hearte throw
This marvellous desire his wife t'assay;* *try
Needless,* God wot, he thought her to affray.** *without cause
 **alarm, disturb

He had assayed her enough before,
And found her ever good; what needed it
Her for to tempt, and always more and more?
Though some men praise it for a subtle wit,
But as for me, I say that *evil it sit* *it ill became him*
T'assay a wife when that it is no need,
And putte her in anguish and in dread.

For which this marquis wrought in this mannere:
He came at night alone there as she lay,
With sterne face and with full troubled cheer,
And saide thus; "Griseld'," quoth he "that day
That I you took out of your poor array,
And put you in estate of high nobless,
Ye have it not forgotten, as I guess.

"I say, Griseld', this present dignity,
In which that I have put you, as I trow* *believe
Maketh you not forgetful for to be
That I you took in poor estate full low,
For any weal you must yourselfe know.
Take heed of every word that I you say,
There is no wight that hears it but we tway.* *two

"Ye know yourself well how that ye came here
Into this house, it is not long ago;
And though to me ye be right lefe* and dear, *loved
Unto my gentles* ye be nothing so: *nobles, gentlefolk
They say, to them it is great shame and woe
For to be subject, and be in servage,
To thee, that born art of small lineage.

"And namely* since thy daughter was y-bore
These wordes have they spoken doubtless;
But I desire, as I have done before,
To live my life with them in rest and peace:
I may not in this case be reckeless;
I must do with thy daughter for the best,
Not as I would, but as my gentles lest.*

*especially

*please

"And yet, God wot, this is full loth* to me:
But natheless withoute your weeting*
I will nought do; but this will I," quoth he,
"That ye to me assenten in this thing.
Shew now your patience in your working,
That ye me hight* and swore in your village
The day that maked was our marriage."

*odious

*knowing

*promised

When she had heard all this, she not amev'd*
Neither in word, in cheer, nor countenance
(For, as it seemed, she was not aggriev'd);
She saide; "Lord, all lies in your pleasance,
My child and I, with hearty obeisance
Be youres all, and ye may save or spill*
Your owen thing: work then after your will.

*changed

*destroy

"There may no thing, so God my soule save,
Like to you, that may displease me:
Nor I desire nothing for to have,
Nor dreade for to lose, save only ye:
This will is in mine heart, and aye shall be,
No length of time, nor death, may this deface,
Nor change my corage* to another place."

be pleasing

*spirit, heart

Glad was the marquis for her answering,
But yet he feigned as he were not so;
All dreary was his cheer and his looking
When that he should out of the chamber go.
Soon after this, a furlong way or two,<8>
He privily hath told all his intent
Unto a man, and to his wife him sent.

A *manner sergeant* was this private* man,
The which he faithful often founden had
In thinges great, and eke such folk well can
Do execution in thinges bad:
The lord knew well, that he him loved and drad.*
And when this sergeant knew his lorde's will,
Into the chamber stalked he full still.

kind of squire
*discreet

*dreaded

"Madam," he said, "ye must forgive it me,
Though I do thing to which I am constrain'd;
Ye be so wise, that right well knowe ye
That lordes' hestes may not be y-feign'd;

see note <9>

*pleasure

They may well be bewailed and complain'd,
But men must needs unto their lust* obey;
And so will I, there is no more to say.

"This child I am commanded for to take."
And spake no more, but out the child he hent*
Dispiteously,* and gan a cheer** to make
As though he would have slain it ere he went.
Griseldis must all suffer and consent:
And as a lamb she sat there meek and still,
And let this cruel sergeant do his will

*seized

*unpityingly **show, aspect

Suspicious* was the diffame** of this man,
Suspect his face, suspect his word also,
Suspect the time in which he this began:
Alas! her daughter, that she loved so,
She weened* he would have it slain right tho,**
But nathless she neither wept nor siked,*
Conforming her to what the marquis liked.

*ominous **evil reputation

*thought **then

*sighed

But at the last to speake she began,
And meekly she unto the sergeant pray'd,
So as he was a worthy gentle man,
That she might kiss her child, ere that it died:
And in her barme* this little child she laid,
With full sad face, and gan the child to bless,*
And lulled it, and after gan it kiss.

*lap, bosom

*cross

And thus she said in her benigne voice:
Farewell, my child, I shall thee never see;
But since I have thee marked with the cross,
Of that father y-blessed may'st thou be
That for us died upon a cross of tree:
Thy soul, my little child, I *him betake,*
For this night shalt thou dien for my sake.

commit unto him

I trow* that to a norice** in this case
It had been hard this ruche* for to see:
Well might a mother then have cried, "Alas!"
But nathless so sad steadfast was she,
That she endured all adversity,
And to the sergeant meekely she said,
"Have here again your little younge maid.

*believe **nurse
*pitiful sight

"Go now," quoth she, "and do my lord's behest.
And one thing would I pray you of your grace,
But if my lord forbade you at the least,
Bury this little body in some place,
That neither beasts nor birdes it arace."*
But he no word would to that purpose say,
But took the child and went upon his way.

unless
*tear <10>

The sergeant came unto his lord again,
And of Griselda's words and of her cheer*
He told him point for point, in short and plain,
And him presented with his daughter dear.
Somewhat this lord had ruth in his mannere,
But nathless his purpose held he still,
As lordes do, when they will have their will;

*demeanour

And bade this sergeant that he privily
Shoulde the child full softly wind and wrap,
With alle circumstances tenderly,
And carry it in a coffer, or in lap;
But, upon pain his head off for to swap,*
That no man shoulde know of his intent,
Nor whence he came, nor whither that he went;

*strike

But at Bologna, to his sister dear,
That at that time of Panic'* was Countess, *Panico
He should it take, and shew her this mattere,
Beseeching her to do her business
This child to foster in all gentleness,
And whose child it was he bade her hide
From every wight, for aught that might betide.

The sergeant went, and hath fulfill'd this thing.
But to the marquis now returne we;
For now went he full fast imagining
If by his wife's cheer he mighte see,
Or by her wordes apperceive, that she
Were changed; but he never could her find,
But ever-in-one* alike sad** and kind. *constantly **steadfast

As glad, as humble, as busy in service,
And eke in love, as she was wont to be,
Was she to him, in every *manner wise;* *sort of way*
And of her daughter not a word spake she;
No accident for no adversity *no change of humour resulting
Was seen in her, nor e'er her daughter's name from her affliction*
She named, or in earnest or in game.

Pars Quarta

Fourth Part

In this estate there passed be four year
Ere she with childe was; but, as God wo'ld,
A knave* child she bare by this Waltere, *boy
Full gracious and fair for to behold;
And when that folk it to his father told,
Not only he, but all his country, merry
Were for this child, and God they thank and hery.* *praise

When it was two year old, and from the breast
Departed* of the norice, on a day *taken, weaned
This marquis *caughte yet another lest* *was seized by yet
To tempt his wife yet farther, if he may. another desire*

"Left I my will and all my liberty,
And took your clothing: wherefore I you pray,
Do your pleasance, I will your lust* obey.

*will

"And, certes, if I hadde prescience
Your will to know, ere ye your lust* me told,
I would it do withoute negligence:
But, now I know your lust, and what ye wo'ld,
All your pleasance firm and stable I hold;
For, wist I that my death might do you ease,
Right gladly would I dien you to please.

*will

"Death may not make no comparisoun
Unto your love." And when this marquis say*
The constance of his wife, he cast adown
His eyen two, and wonder'd how she may
In patience suffer all this array;
And forth he went with dreary countenance;
But to his heart it was full great pleasance.

*saw

This ugly sergeant, in the same wise
That he her daughter caught, right so hath he
(Or worse, if men can any worse devise,)
Y-hent* her son, that full was of beauty:
And ever-in-one* so patient was she,
That she no cheere made of heaviness,
But kiss'd her son, and after gan him bless.

*seized
*unvaryingly

Save this she prayed him, if that he might,
Her little son he would in earthe grave,*
His tender limbes, delicate to sight,
From fowles and from beastes for to save.
But she none answer of him mighte have;
He went his way, as him nothing ne raught,*
But to Bologna tenderly it brought.

*bury

*cared

The marquis wonder'd ever longer more
Upon her patience; and, if that he
Not hadde soothly knowen therebefore
That perfectly her children loved she,

He would have ween'd* that of some subtilty,
And of malice, or for cruel corage,*
She hadde suffer'd this with sad* visage.

*thought
*disposition
*steadfast, unmoved

But well he knew, that, next himself, certain
She lov'd her children best in every wise.
But now of women would I aske fain,
If these assayes mighte not suffice?
What could a sturdy* husband more devise
To prove her wifhood and her steadfastness,
And he continuing ev'r in sturdiness?

*stern

But there be folk of such condition,
That, when they have a certain purpose take,
They cannot stint* of their intention,
But, right as they were bound unto a stake,
They will not of their firste purpose slake:.*
Right so this marquis fully hath purpos'd
To tempt his wife, as he was first dispos'd.

*cease

*slacken, abate

He waited, if by word or countenance
That she to him was changed of corage:.*
But never could he finde variance,
She was aye one in heart and in visage,
And aye the farther that she was in age,
The more true (if that it were possible)
She was to him in love, and more penible.*

*spirit

*painstaking in devotion

For which it seemed thus, that of them two
There was but one will; for, as Walter lest,*
The same pleasance was her lust* also;
And, God be thanked, all fell for the best.
She shewed well, for no worldly unrest,
A wife as of herself no thinge should
Will, in effect, but as her husbaud would.

*pleas'd

*pleasure

The sland'r of Walter wondrous wide sprad,
That of a cruel heart he wickedly,
For* he a poore woman wedded had,
Had murder'd both his children privily:

*because

Such murmur was among them commonly.
No wonder is: for to the people's ear
There came no word, but that they murder'd were.

For which, whereas his people therebefore
Had lov'd him well, the sland'r of his diffame* *infamy
Made them that they him hated therefore.
To be a murd'rer is a hateful name.
But nathless, for earnest or for game,
He of his cruel purpose would not stent;
To tempt his wife was set all his intent.

When that his daughter twelve year was of age,
He to the Court of Rome, in subtle wise
Informed of his will, sent his message,* *messenger
Commanding him such bulles to devise
As to his cruel purpose may suffice,
How that the Pope, for his people's rest,
Bade him to wed another, if him lest.* *wished

I say he bade they shoulde counterfeit
The Pope's bulles, making mention
That he had leave his firste wife to lete,* *leave
To stinte* rancour and dissension *put an end to
Betwixt his people and him: thus spake the bull,
The which they have published at full.

The rude people, as no wonder is,
Weened* full well that it had been right so: *thought, believed
But, when these tidings came to Griseldis.
I deeme that her heart was full of woe;
But she, alike sad* for evermo', *steadfast
Disposed was, this humble creature,
Th' adversity of fortune all t' endure;

Abiding ever his lust and his pleasance,
To whom that she was given, heart and all,
As *to her very worldly suffisance.* *to the utmost extent
But, shortly if this story tell I shall, of her power*
The marquis written hath in special

A letter, in which he shewed his intent,
And secretly it to Bologna sent.

To th' earl of Panico, which hadde tho* *there
Wedded his sister, pray'd he specially
To bringe home again his children two
In honourable estate all openly:
But one thing he him prayed utterly,
That he to no wight, though men would inquire,
Shoulde not tell whose children that they were,

But say, the maiden should y-wedded be
Unto the marquis of Saluce anon.
And as this earl was prayed, so did he,
For, at day set, he on his way is gone
Toward Saluce, and lorde's many a one
In rich array, this maiden for to guide, --
Her younge brother riding her beside.

Arrayed was toward* her marriage *as if for
This freshe maiden, full of gemmes clear;
Her brother, which that seven year was of age,
Arrayed eke full fresh in his mannere:
And thus, in great nobless, and with glad cheer,
Toward Saluces shaping their journey,
From day to day they rode upon their way.

Pars Quinta.

Fifth Part

Among all this, after his wick' usage, *while all this was
going on*
The marquis, yet his wife to tempte more
To the uttermost proof of her corage,
Fully to have experience and lore* *knowledge
If that she were as steadfast as before,
He on a day, in open audience,
Full boisterously said her this sentence:

"Certes, Griseld', I had enough pleasance

Have holden me in honour and nobley,*
Where as I was not worthy for to be,
That thank I God and you, to whom I pray
Foryield* it you; there is no more to say:
Unto my father gladly will I wend,*
And with him dwell, unto my lifes end,

*nobility

*reward
*go

"Where I was foster'd as a child full small,
Till I be dead my life there will I lead,
A widow clean in body, heart, and all.
For since I gave to you my maidenhead,
And am your true wife, it is no dread,*
God shielde* such a lordes wife to take
Another man to husband or to make.*

*doubt
*forbid
*mate

"And of your newe wife, God of his grace
So grant you weal and all prosperity:
For I will gladly yield to her my place,
In which that I was blissful wont to be.
For since it liketh you, my Lord," quoth she,
"That whilom weren all mine heartes rest,
That I shall go, I will go when you lest.

"But whereas ye me proffer such dowaire
As I first brought, it is well in my mind,
It was my wretched clothes, nothing fair,
The which to me were hard now for to find.
O goode God! how gentle and how kind
Ye seemed by your speech and your visage,
The day that maked was our marriage!

"But sooth is said, -- algate* I find it true,
For in effect it proved is on me, --
Love is not old as when that it is new.
But certes, Lord, for no adversity,
To dien in this case, it shall not be
That e'er in word or work I shall repent
That I you gave mine heart in whole intent.

*at all events

"My Lord, ye know that in my father's place

And fortune aye they cursed as they gon:*
But she from weeping kept her eyen drey,*
Nor in this time worde spake she none.
Her father, that this tiding heard anon,
Cursed the day and time, that nature
Shope* him to be a living creature. *formed, ordained

For, out of doubt, this olde poore man
Was ever in suspect of her marriage:
For ever deem'd he, since it first began,
That when the lord *fulfill'd had his corage,* *had gratified his whim*
He woulde think it were a disparage* *disparagement
To his estate, so low for to alight,
And voide* her as soon as e'er he might. *dismiss

Against* his daughter hastily went he *to meet
(For he by noise of folk knew her coming),
And with her olde coat, as it might be,
He cover'd her, full sorrowfully weeping:
But on her body might he it not bring,
For rude was the cloth, and more of age
By dayes fele* than at her marriage. *many <11>

Thus with her father for a certain space
Dwelled this flow'r of wifely patience,
That neither by her words nor by her face,
Before the folk nor eke in their absence,
Ne shewed she that her was done offence,
Nor of her high estate no remembrance
Ne hadde she, *as by* her countenance. *to judge from*

No wonder is, for in her great estate
Her ghost* was ever in plein** humility; *spirit **full
No tender mouth, no hearte delicate,
No pomp, and no semblant of royalty;
But full of patient benignity,
Discreet and prideless, aye honourable,
And to her husband ever meek and stable.

Men speak of Job, and most for his humbles,

A full great fool is he that you believeth."

Thus saide the sad* folk in that city,
When that the people gazed up and down;
For they were glad, right for the novelty,
To have a newe lady of their town.
No more of this now make I mentioun,
But to Griseld' again I will me dress,
And tell her constancy and business.

*sedate

Full busy was Griseld' in ev'ry thing
That to the feaste was appertinent;
Right nought was she abash'd* of her clothing,
Though it were rude, and somedeal eke to-rent*;
But with glad cheer* unto the gate she went
With other folk, to greet the marchioness,
And after that did forth her business.

*ashamed

*tattered

*expression

With so glad cheer* his gwestes she receiv'd
And so conningly* each in his degree,
That no defaulte no man apperceiv'd,
But aye they wonder'd what she mighte be
That in so poor array was for to see,
And coude* such honour and reverence;
And worthily they praise her prudence.

*expression

*cleverly, skilfully

*knew, understood

In all this meane while she not stent*
This maid, and eke her brother, to commend
With all her heart in full benign intent,
So well, that no man could her praise amend:
But at the last, when that these lordes wend*
To sitte down to meat, he gan to call
Griseld', as she was busy in the hall.

*ceased

*go

"Griseld'," quoth he, as it were in his play,
"How liketh thee my wife, and her beauty?"
"Right well, my Lord," quoth she, "for, in good fay,*
A fairer saw I never none than she:
I pray to God give you prosperity;
And so I hope, that he will to you send

*faith

Pleasance enough unto your lives end.

"One thing beseech I you, and warn also,
That ye not pricke with no tormenting
This tender maiden, as ye have done mo:* *me <13>
For she is foster'd in her nourishing
More tenderly, and, to my supposing,
She mighte not adversity endure
As could a poore foster'd creature."

And when this Walter saw her patience,
Her gladde cheer, and no malice at all,
And* he so often had her done offence, *although
And she aye sad* and constant as a wall, *steadfast
Continuing ev'r her innocence o'er all,
The sturdy marquis gan his hearte dress* *prepare
To rue upon her wifely steadfastness.

"This is enough, Griselda mine," quoth he,
"Be now no more *aghast, nor evil paid,* *afraid, nor displeas'd*
I have thy faith and thy benignity
As well as ever woman was, assay'd,
In great estate and poorely array'd:
Now know I, deare wife, thy steadfastness;"
And her in arms he took, and gan to kiss.

And she for wonder took of it no keep;* *notice
She hearde not what thing he to her said:
She far'd as she had start out of a sleep,
Till she out of her mazedness abraid.* *awoke
"Griseld'," quoth he, "by God that for us died,
Thou art my wife, none other I have,
Nor ever had, as God my soule save.

"This is thy daughter, which thou hast suppos'd
To be my wife; that other faithfully
Shall be mine heir, as I have aye dispos'd;
Thou bare them of thy body truely:
At Bologna kept I them privily:
Take them again, for now may'st thou not say

That thou hast lorn* none of thy children tway.

*lost

"And folk, that otherwise have said of me,
I warn them well, that I have done this deed
For no malice, nor for no cruelty,
But to assay in thee thy womanhead:
And not to slay my children (God forbid),
But for to keep them privily and still,
Till I thy purpose knew, and all thy will."

When she this heard, in swoon adown she falleth
For piteous joy; and after her swooning,
She both her younge children to her calleth,
And in her armes piteously weeping
Embraced them, and tenderly kissing,
Full like a mother, with her salte tears
She bathed both their visage and their hairs.

O, what a piteous thing it was to see
Her swooning, and her humble voice to hear!
"Grand mercy, Lord, God thank it you," quoth she,
That ye have saved me my children dear;
Now reck* I never to be dead right here;
Since I stand in your love, and in your grace,
No *force of* death, nor when my spirit pace.*

*care

no matter for *pass

"O tender, O dear, O young children mine,
Your woeful mother *weened steadfastly*
That cruel houndes, or some foul vermine,
Had eaten you; but God of his mercy,
And your benigne father tenderly
Have *done you keep:"* and in that same stound*
All suddenly she swapt** down to the ground.

believed firmly

*caused you to
be preserved*

*hour **fell

And in her swoon so sadly* holdeth she
Her children two, when she gan them embrace,
That with great sleight* and great difficulty
The children from her arm they can arace,*
O! many a tear on many a piteous face
Down ran of them that stoode her beside,

*firmly

*art
*pull away

Unneth* aboute her might they abide.

*scarcely

Walter her gladdeth, and her sorrow slaketh:*
She riseth up abashed* from her trance,
And every wight her joy and feaste maketh,
Till she hath caught again her countenance.
Walter her doth so faithfully pleasance,
That it was dainty for to see the cheer
Betwixt them two, since they be met in fere.*

*assuages
*astonished

*together

The ladies, when that they their time sey,*
Have taken her, and into chamber gone,
And stripped her out of her rude array,
And in a cloth of gold that brightly shone,
And with a crown of many a riche stone
Upon her head, they into hall her brought:
And there she was honoured as her ought.

*saw

Thus had this piteous day a blissful end;
For every man and woman did his might
This day in mirth and revel to dispend,
Till on the welkin* shone the starres bright:
For more solemn in every mannes sight
This feaste was, and greater of costage,*
Than was the revel of her marriage.

*firmament

*expense

Full many a year in high prosperity
Lived these two in concord and in rest;
And richely his daughter married he
Unto a lord, one of the worthiest
Of all Itale; and then in peace and rest
His wife's father in his court he kept,
Till that the soul out of his body crept.

His son succeeded in his heritage,
In rest and peace, after his father's day:
And fortunate was eke in marriage,
All* he put not his wife in great assay:
This world is not so strong, it *is no nay,*
As it hath been in olde times yore;

*although
not to be denied

And hearken what this author saith, therefore;

This story is said, <14> not for that wives should
Follow Griselda in humility,
For it were importable* though they would;
But for that every wight in his degree
Shoulde be constant in adversity,
As was Griselda; therefore Petrarch writeth
This story, which with high style he inditeth.

*not to be borne

For, since a woman was so patient
Unto a mortal man, well more we ought
Receiven all in gree* that God us sent.
For great skill is he proved that he wrought:
But he tempteth no man that he hath bought,
As saith Saint James, if ye his 'pistle read;
He proveth folk all day, it is no dread.*

good-will
see note <15>

*doubt

And suffereth us, for our exercise,
With sharpe scourges of adversity
Full often to be beat in sundry wise;
Not for to know our will, for certes he,
Ere we were born, knew all our frailty;
And for our best is all his governance;
Let us then live in virtuous sufferance.

But one word, lordings, hearken, ere I go:
It were full hard to finde now-a-days
In all a town Griseldas three or two:
For, if that they were put to such assays,
The gold of them hath now so bad allays*
With brass, that though the coin be fair *at eye,*
It woulde rather break in two than ply.*

*alloys

to see

*bend

For which here, for the Wife's love of Bath, --
Whose life and all her sex may God maintain
In high mast'ry, and elles were it scath,* --
I will, with lusty hearte fresh and green,
Say you a song to gladden you, I ween:
And let us stint of earnestful mattere.

*damage, pity

Hearken my song, that saith in this mannere.

L'Envoy of Chaucer.

"Griseld' is dead, and eke her patience,
And both at once are buried in Itale:
For which I cry in open audience,
No wedded man so hardy be t' assail
His wife's patience, in trust to find
Griselda's, for in certain he shall fail.

"O noble wives, full of high prudence,
Let no humility your tongues nail:
Nor let no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of you a story of such marvail,
As of Griselda patient and kind,
Lest Chichevache<16> you swallow in her entrail.

"Follow Echo, that holdeth no silence,
But ever answereth at the countertail;*
Be not bedaffed* for your innocence,
But sharply take on you the governail;*
Imprinte well this lesson in your mind,
For common profit, since it may avail.

*counter-tally <17>
*befooled
*helm

"Ye archiwives,* stand aye at defence,
Since ye be strong as is a great camail,*
Nor suffer not that men do you offence.
And slender wives, feeble in battail,
Be eager as a tiger yond in Ind;
Aye clapping as a mill, I you counsail.

*wives of rank
*camel

"Nor dread them not, nor do them reverence;
For though thine husband armed be in mail,
The arrows of thy crabbed eloquence
Shall pierce his breast, and eke his aventail;<18>
In jealousy I rede* eke thou him bind,
And thou shalt make him couch* as doth a quail.

*advise
*submit, shrink

"If thou be fair, where folk be in presence
Shew thou thy visage and thine apparail:
If thou be foul, be free of thy dispence;
To get thee friendes aye do thy travail:
Be aye of cheer as light as leaf on lind,* *linden, lime-tree
And let him care, and weep, and wring, and wail."

Notes to the Clerk's Tale

1. Petrarch, in his Latin romance, "De obedientia et fide uxoria Mythologia," (Of obedient and faithful wives in Mythology) translated the charming story of "the patient Grizel" from the Italian of Boccaccio's "Decameron;" and Chaucer has closely followed Petrarch's translation, made in 1373, the year before that in which he died. The fact that the embassy to Genoa, on which Chaucer was sent, took place in 1372-73, has lent countenance to the opinion that the English poet did actually visit the Italian bard at Padua, and hear the story from his own lips. This, however, is only a probability; for it is a moot point whether the two poets ever met.

2. Vesulus: Monte Viso, a lofty peak at the junction of the Maritime and Cottian Alps; from two springs on its east side rises the Po.

3. Buxomly: obediently; Anglo-Saxon, "bogsom," old English, "boughsome," that can be easily bent or bowed; German, "biegsam," pliant, obedient.

4. Well ofter of the well than of the tun she drank: she drank water much more often than wine.

5. Undern: afternoon, evening, though by some "undern" is understood as dinner-time -- 9 a. m. See note 4 to the Wife of Bath's Tale.

6. Very: true; French "vrai".

7. Nouches: Ornaments of some kind not precisely known; some editions read "ouches," studs, brooches. (Transcriber's note: The OED gives "nouches" as a form of "ouches," buckles)

8. A furlong way or two: a short time; literally, as long as it takes to walk one or two furlongs (a furlong is 220 yards)

9. Lordes' hestes may not be y-feign'd: it will not do merely to feign compliance with a lord's commands.

10. Arace: tear; French, "arracher."

11. Fele: many; German, "viel."

12. Dear enough a jane: worth nothing. A jane was a small coin of little worth, so the meaning is "not worth a red cent".

13. Mo: me. "This is one of the most licentious corruptions of orthography," says Tyrwhitt, "that I remember to have observed in Chaucer;" but such liberties were common among the European poets of his time, when there was an extreme lack of certainty in orthography.

14. The fourteen lines that follow are translated almost literally from Petrarch's Latin.

15. For great skill is he proved that he wrought: for it is most reasonable that He should prove or test that which he made.

16. Chichevache, in old popular fable, was a monster that fed only on good women, and was always very thin from scarcity of such food; a corresponding monster, Bycorne, fed only on obedient and kind husbands, and was always fat. The origin of the fable was French; but Lydgate has a ballad on the subject. "Chichevache" literally means "niggardly" or "greedy cow."

17. Countertail: Counter-tally or counter-foil; something exactly corresponding.

18. Aventail: forepart of a helmet, vizor.