

THE MERCHANT'S TALE

THE MERCHANT'S PROLOGUE

"So might marriage be for other men,"
The merchant said, "but I've got me a hen
Who'd peck my eyes out, given half a chance.
Marriage is the graveyard of romance!

"It's been no more than two months we've been
wed,
Already she has tossed me out of bed,
And has a tone of voice that's just for me --
Sarcastic, nasty, out to disagree,
As though I were the enemy, long loathed,
And she long suffering. Undressed or clothed,
It is the same with us, so much has hate
Turned off the least desire, sad to state.

"She is a lovely woman, young and pretty,
But hard -- so hard! -- and quite bereft of pity,
The opposite of Theresa's temperament.
I swear, even in Hell she'd not repent,
But curse me for the hate that put her there!
My life with her is more than I can bear!
Take my advice, my friends, and do not wed,
For if you do, you'll wish that you were dead!"

"Enough!" the bartender said. "On to your tale!
This litany of woes is getting stale.
Use your expertise on marital war,
But of your personal life -- please, no more!"

"Quite right," the merchant said. "I'll shape my
pain
Into a tale that all will entertain.
For what might seem a rant straight from the

heart
Becomes a melody when touched by art."

THE MERCHANT'S TALE

A professor once had long been used to bedding
Young women whom he had no thought of
wedding.

Each semester he'd survey his classes,
Not for eager minds but shapely asses,
And always found a few who'd gladly trade
A bit of pleasure for a better grade.

Alas! As he grew older it grew harder
To find such tasty dainties for his larder,
For time was ticking mercilessly for him
While seemingly quite unconcerned with them,
Who stayed in age remarkably the same,
Although it seemed each year each changed her
name.

Finally, a faculty committee,
Made up of mostly men, more's the pity,
Concluded that such sex was out of bounds
And censured him, it turned out, on the grounds
Of merely asking for a goodnight kiss,
An innocent request, except for this:
That he implied, or she inferred, a threat,
If he did not, at some point certain, get
His way with her (though he in fact denied
That he in any way such things implied),
He would (she thought, inferred, well ... guessed,
whatever)
Perhaps not like so well her next endeavor.

Such evidence would clearly not convict
A dog of pissing on the street, but pricked
By conscience, other "victims" soon came forth,
Women newly militant, a broth
Of righteous fury, pain, and psychic damage,
An avalanche that finally did manage
To get our poor professor to retire
Rather than be fired. Oh, what ire
He felt at being massively betrayed!
So what if he'd occasionally strayed?

The trouble was he'd gotten unattractive,

Old and wrinkled, while his hyperactive
Female students longed for younger men,
And were less willing to surrender when
He broached the usual negative rewards.
He should have heard the angry, dissonant
chords!

Oh well, oh well, the question was, what now?
Old and ugly, he couldn't imagine how
He'd get his daily nookie by and by,
Now that he'd been robbed of his supply.
He guessed that he'd be forced at last to marry,
Some sweet young child, perhaps, whom he could
carry
Out of abject poverty, and who'd
Be grateful just for shelter and some food.

And then he'd send a stipend twice a year
To her family, just to make her fear
That he might discontinue his largesse
If her first thought were not his happiness.
Yes! Yes! Some child, with orifices tight,
Whom he would have a chance to break in right!

This vision grew in power before his eyes,
Making marriage seem a paradise,
That earlier had seemed a vicious trap
Laid by women to virtually kidnap
Unsuspecting men, and put them in
A little box, locked safe away from sin.
Why would anyone endure a wife,
Who'd claim one half of all one's goods for life,
When one could freely pick and choose the best,
As not a harried owner but a guest?

But now deprived of that choice, marriage seemed
Far more practical than he had dreamed,
Being that one's nookie, close at hand,
Lay waiting, 24/7, on demand.

And then there was the pretense he'd be spared
Of constantly pretending that he cared,
The lunches, dinners, dates, the evenings out,
The endless, stupid chattering about
One's lives, opinions, anything at all,
Before one could just get undressed and ball.

In marriage, of that nonsense he'd be free

And could enjoy his pleasure by decree --
No need to waste one's cunning on the chase,
Sure enough each night of an embrace.

But what if he got bored? The same old thing
Night after night would surely boredom bring.
Ecstasy's not easy to repeat.
But then, if he got bored, well, he could cheat.

Cheat? The very word now turned him cold!
How could he forget that he was old,
And that a fresh young thing might find him
 stale
And soon make him the moral of this tale?

Maybe he should just give up, forget it,
Before some Jezebel made him regret it.
But all too soon desire conquered fear,
And our poor fool was wed, as you shall hear.

A few months later, he (let's call him Jan)
Was looking at some pictures that a man
Had spread out on a table in a bar
In Bangkok. They hadn't gotten very far
When Jan put down his finger on a face
That seemed to him the epitome of grace,
Sweet innocence that could not be denied
Because it welled up from the love inside.

"Hey!" he said. "That's her! How much is she?"
Of course the price went up immediately.
"Four thousand American dollars," the agent said.
"That much?" Jan cried. "She has her
 maidenhead,"
The agent explained. "That always costs you more.
You know no man has been with her before.

"She's quite unusual, a girl like that,
To reach 16 with maidenhead intact.
Her parents know the value of such things,
And of the premium a virgin brings,
Especially one so beautiful. She must
Be the kind of girl that you can trust.
I have a document from an M.D.
Attesting to her pure virginity,
Free of all diseases, nice and clean.
You'll think you're living in some kind of dream."

"Three thousand!" Jan said, knowing he should
bargain.

"No way," the agent said. He knew his marlin,
Had him on the hook, now pull him in,
Thrashing in the golden grip of sin.

"Here is one for less." He turned the page.
"She's had few men, considering her age.
Been in a whorehouse since she was eight,
But now she's ten, really not too late
To turn into a mistress, tried and true.
Three thousand on the button, just for you!"

"No, no," said Jan, easily defeated,
Even knowing he was being cheated.
"I'll take the first one. Do you know her name?"
"Call her Mai," he said. "It's all the same."

And so Jan purchased Mai, who was delivered
To his hotel the next day. How she quivered
As Jan began to kiss her, touch her breast,
And slowly stripped her till she was undressed,
Determined to determine whether she
Was still possessed of her virginity,
And try out his new purchase in the sack
Before it was too late to give her back.

And yes! Oh, yes! She was a virgin pure.
The cries and bloody sheet said that for sure.
After, he was gentle, kissed her hand
And told her it would wear a wedding band,
Promised her a life of happiness,
Finally unnerved by her distress.
But she could speak no English, he no Thai,
And so we leave them there, our Jan and Mai.

Two years later, back home in the States,
Jan's abundant passion scarce abates.
He consumes his morsel every night,
Virility engorged by his delight,
While Mai endures his thrusts through fantasy,
Imagining a prince in love as he.

She knows that she is lucky, more or less,
Having to endure but slight duress,
A bit of nightly mauling, not so much
For room and board, an education, such
Support for her twin sisters, nine years old,

As needed to prevent their being sold.

She hated his stiff member in her rear,
His spittle drooling on her neck and ear,
The way his flesh hung flaccid on his bones,
The ghastly rasp of his asthmatic moans,
His tongue that licked her like a lollipop,
His thick-veined hands that never seemed to stop
Caressing her, as if she were his dog,
While he, meanwhile, was happy as a hog,
Young again, reborn into bright passion,
Sex night and day, with neither pause nor ration,
A cornucopia of non-stop pleasure,
Thanks to her -- his playmate and his treasure.

He thought she would be grateful just for food,
And would endure him out of gratitude,
But joy seemed mutual, or so he thought,
And so he had the paradise he sought.

Into this paradise one day there came
Jan's former student, Damian by name,
To work with him on Chaucer's fabliaux,
A project they had started long ago,
Before Jan's resignation, out to prove
That Chaucer had a jaundiced view of love.

But this was before Jan married Mai,
When he had good reason to deny
The power of love to rearrange the heart,
As is so often seen in Chaucer's art.

Before I travel further, I must first
Describe how Damian was roundly cursed
By Jan for even mentioning their work.
"I was," he said, "At that time just a jerk.
When you meet Mai, you'll understand that we
Misunderstood the glint in Chaucer's glee.

"His fun with cuckolds was a large embrace
Of all sweet love, from sex to heavenly grace,
A hierarchy we, alas, have lost,
Replaced with irony, but at what cost!
For love is one, a ladder to the sky,
As you will learn, if fortunate as I.

"But here comes Mai -- my wife, my love, my
treasure.

Now you'll know the cause of all my pleasure,
The beauty that defines for me all beauty,
The good that makes a blessing of all duty."

Damian turned to see a lovely girl
Whose innocent face made his senses whirl
As though an angel promised ecstasy,
All the more lurid for her purity.

Instantly, Damian was smitten,
As though by some diseased mosquito bitten.
He stared at her as she came up to him,
Marveling at the glow of her fresh skin,
The perfect set of her brown almond eyes,
The bit of cleft where so much pleasure lies,
The -- "This is Mai," Jan said. "And Damian,
My former student." Mai shook his hand, and

when

Skin touched skin, both felt the urge of life,
Despite the fact that she remained Jan's wife,
An urge that Mai had never felt so strongly,
For she had been initiated wrongly,
Robbed of the experience of love,
That makes of sex a song of joy, and moves
The body to a moment of pure bliss.
But of such love Mai had not one kiss.

And so those two, Damian and Mai,
As they touched hands exchanged words eye-to
eye.

Both felt as though they had been given wings,
And now like angels sang where sunlight sings!

Jan was pleased such abject awe to see,
Basking in his student's jealousy.
She's mine! He thought. And I'm the only one
Who can into her golden body come.
Others may long to, but I can with her lie
Until there's neither earth nor sea nor sky,
But just my darling with me in her arms,
While other men must fantasize her charms!

Soon Damian had persuaded Jan
That he was of his scholarship a fan,
Offering to edit the ideas
That he had come to pilfer through the years
From textbooks and some studies he had read
Before his mind had gone completely dead.

Damian came over every day
To where his dreams and thoughts and longings
 lay,
But never could be with his love alone
Since Jan would never leave him on his own,
But talked for hours, now he had an ear,
Of things no one but him would want to hear,
While his poor victim furtively would try
To get a glimpse of his sweet goddess Mai.

This went on for weeks until one day
Damian proposed a clever way
To replicate 'The Merchant's Tale in Chaucer,
Which Jan had found ridiculous. "Of course her
Husband was a cuckold -- he was blind,
Not only physically, but in his mind.
Now I would hold my Mai's hand night and day
To make sure that she'd never get away
Far enough to boff another man.
Just try me for a whole day, if you can!"

"Night and day?" Damian asked. "And when
Mai needed the toilet? What would you do then?"
"I'd let her lead me to the bathroom door,"
Jan said, "and wait till she was through. No more
Than that would I allow, I promise you.
And when I had to go, she'd be there, too!"

"I'd like to see that," Damian said. "Suppose
You put this theory to the test and chose
To wear a blindfold for a night and day
As though Zeus struck you blind. What do you
 say?
Do you think that Mai would play along
And lead you night and day, and do no wrong --"
"How could she do wrong?" Jan asked. "All night
And day I'll have her hand in mine gripped
 tight."

And so it was decided that within
The week Jan would be blindfolded, and then
See whether he could keep his honor more
Successfully than that old fool of yore
In Chaucer's tale, whose wife had in a tree
Her paramour bestrode adulterously.

Meanwhile, Damian slipped Mai a note

With all the details of his plan. He wrote
Rapturously of love for her, and of
The ways in which he'd soon express that love.

She wrote back, trembling with desire,
The two of them swept upward in the fire
That burned in their bone-dry imaginations,
Fed by their abundant expectations.

The night before the promised day of passion,
Jan demanded thrice his normal ration,
Boffing Mai again, again, again,
As though he weren't certain where or when
He'd get another chance, while she endured
His undesired bugging, ensured
Of ecstasy, pleasure, joy, and bliss
If only she could once more get through this!

Before she fell in love with Damian,
Mai had given up what might have been,
Accepting that for her sex was a chore,
And that her life would offer nothing more.

But now she had been lit by love's fierce fire,
All she felt was amorous desire.
Even as Jan thrust inside of her,
She dreamed of Damian, and felt the stir
Of what she thought she might discover soon.

The morning came before Jan could resume
His love-making. And as had been agreed,
He put on blinders, then asked Mai to feed
Him breakfast, which she did. When Damian
Came to the door, both answered, Mai with Jan,
And then they silent sat, all three, an hour,
Until Jan said, "You see? It's in my power
To guard my honor even though I'm blind.
I think I've proved my point, if you don't mind."

"It's morning yet, said Damian. "There's more,
Much more to this experiment before
We can say that you have won the game,
And blind have kept your honor all the same."

Hours more passed. Jan began to fret.
"My hand is tired. Isn't this over yet?"
"Not yet," said Damian. "But tell me, please,
Don't you need the bathroom? Mai can ease

You down onto the toilet -- I won't see.
And you can call her when you're done. Then we
Can pass the time until the evening's come,
And it will be high time that I go home."

"Not on your life!" Jan cried. "Mai will stay
With me the whole time -- all the night and day!
I won't let her go -- not for one minute!
I will win this game, now that I'm in it!

"Don't think that I don't see what's going on!
You think that I will cheat once you are gone!
You must stay all night so you can see
That Mai won't get a chance to cheat on me!

"I'm no fool -- I'll keep her by my side
Till Satan come and beg me for a ride!
Not on my wife! I will say to him,
Besting all -- even the Lord of Sin!
Take me to the toilet, Mai, and close
Your eyes when I begin, and hold your nose!"

Mai did as she was told and closed the door,
Leaving Damian outside. No more
Could he hold back from beating on his chest,
Robbed of the sweet taste of Mai's young breast,
Thinking of her chained to that old fool,
Forced to smell the vileness of his stool!
My God! He'd kill him! That's what he would do!

But then the door was opened -- Jan was through.
Mai motioned to her lover to go in,
Finger to her lips, so Damian
Slipped inside the putrid-smelling room
And heard Mai say, "I must now assume
Your position on the throne, my dear.
But modesty forbids that you be near.
As Swift says in his poem about such links,
You'll associate me with my stinks,
And then won't love me anymore. So please
Just stand right here beside the house of ease.
I'll be right out to guide you to your chair,
Where Damian awaits our presence there."

"Damian!" Jan cried. "Damian!
Curse the day I ever mentored him!
Why did he propose this stupid test?
Now I am embarked, I'll have no rest

Until I've proven I can keep you pure
By means as neat and elegant as sure.
So I'll wait here, just outside the door.
But do not lock it, Mai! I'll say no more."

So Mai went in and closed the door behind her.
It took two seconds for Damian to find her
Breasts within his hands, his tongue and hers
Locked like wrestlers, their battered senses blurs.
Two seconds more, and Damian's pants were
 down,
As were Mai's panties. She felt that she might
 drown
In ecstasy and gave a little moan.

"What was that?" Jan called. "Are you alone?"
"Just a cramp," she said. "I'll be all right.
I'll take a little laxative tonight."

So back they went hot at it, those young two,
Their mouths together joined as though with
 glue,
Damian now buried deep inside
His lover, who no longer could abide
The silence and gave out a cry of joy,
Then another as the desperate boy
Pulled her harder onto him, and harder --

"What was that?" Jan cried. "Now go no farther!"
He ripped his blindfold off, opened the door,
And screamed at the salacious scene he saw --
His former student buried in his wife,
His helpmate and the treasure of his life,
His wife all limp upon him, having just
Had her first orgasm at his thrust.

Instantly, the tableau came apart
As Jan, still yelping, held his aching heart.
"What have you done to me?" he kept repeating.
"Nothing, my dear, nothing," Mai said, seating
Her beet-red husband on the toilet top.

"Why did you cry out to me to stop?
I was having cramps, and still have some --"
(As Damian slipped out as he had come)
"-- and need more time in here. You should not
 be
So jealous --" "I may be old, but I can see!

I saw your lover in you to the hilt!
Now there's no putting back the milk that's spilt!
My life is ruined, ruined, that's the thing!
Here's where I want to put my wedding ring!"

He opened up the toilet, but then Mai
Slammed it down again. "No need to buy
Another wedding ring. Let me explain
What happened to you, and so ease your
pain.

"As is well known, all scientists agree:
We tend to see what we expect to see.
The eye is ever subject to the mind,
Which, never eager to be left behind,
Sees what is not there, before the eye
Can tell it what it actually did espy.

"So did you, anticipating wrong,
See what you expected all along,
Turning cramps to orgasms, and arms
To someone ravishing your dear wife's charms.

"But as you see, there is no lover here,
Just you and me. Now, please go have a beer
With Damian, who's waiting in the study,
Your former student and your bosom buddy,
While I attempt my colon to relieve.
And, please, from now on doubt what you
perceive."

Which Jan did, for the remainder of his life,
Trusting not his eyes but his young wife,
Determined to retain connubial bliss
Even if it meant his wine was piss,
Drinking it with relish, though somewhere
He had to, had to realize what was there.

So do we all protect our happiness
By being blind to what might cause distress,
Deciding not to see what we have seen,
Cuckolds all, nor wit nor will might wean.

THE MERCHANT'S EPILOGUE

"Yes!" the bartender said. "That is so true!
Such scheming wives we all are subject to!

Marry, and quite soon you'll see 'The Switch:
The woman whom you married is a bitch!
Which is to say, she is herself, not who
You thought she was when she first married you!

"My wife was beautiful and loved me so --
Until our wedding night, when off she'd go
Into complaints that I was this and that,
A browbeater, a bully, and a brat,
And she could take no more! (This only hours
After we were wed -- so soon it sours!)

"So now she is obese and loud and coarse,
A woman I'd be happy to divorce
Except for our three kids, on whom I dote,
For whom I slave long hours on this boat,
While she, my nemesis, is on her back
Supplying other men with what I lack!

"I know I'm not alone in my despair:
Of married folk there's many another pair
Undone before the marriage vows are cold --
But that's a tale far too often told!"