

CRUISE TO
NOWHERE TALES

A MODERN VERSION
OF CHAUCER'S
CANTERBURY TALES

THE WIFE'S TALE

Nicholas Gordon

Copyright © 2010 by Nicholas Gordon

The tales in this book may be used free for any personal or non-commercial purpose. For commercial use of these tales, please contact the author at webmaster@poemsforfree.com.

Published 2010

Printed by CafePress.com in the United States of America

THE WIFE'S TALE

THE WIFE'S PROLOGUE

"I've had more husbands than I can remember,
Most as cold and hard as late December,
Each the victim of my one obsession –
To get all they possessed in my possession.

For I was born to poverty and hunger,
But I was beautiful when I was younger
And long ago decided I would trade
My body for a joy that would not fade:
Security in tasteful luxury,
All gotten through my skill at uxory.

I married first a neighbor, at sixteen,
A man of eighty, ugly, sick, and mean,
Not much better off than we were, but
Enough to stop the gnawing in my gut.

He taught me that to get I had to give,
Tit for tat, his joy, my chance to live,
His meanness, my opportunity
To do him dirt, as you shall shortly see.

One day he had a heart attack, and I
Saw my chance – I would not let it by.
I went right through his pockets and his drawers
As he was dying, writhing on all fours,

And then I left, with little enough to show
For three years of my life. I know, I know!
You're thinking that I had no heart. But he
Got what he deserved! He treated me
With just as much compassion as a gull
Treats a clam he's pried out of his shell!

He left me with enough to look around
For my next sugar daddy. Soon I found
A nice old man who lived for two good years
And showed me life was more than hate and tears.
He was good to me, and I to him,
And left me with enough that never again
Would I be forced to marry out of need.

And so of both ideals and hunger freed,
I married purely for what I could get,
With neither disillusion nor regret.
And love? What is love, I'd like to know?
Passion, yes! But love? It's just a show
We put on for ourselves to prove that we
Are more than sharks in a shark-infested sea.

I was a hot one, ready for romance,
But only on the side, too wise to chance
A marriage that would garner me no gain
And end only in ugliness and pain.

As I grew older, my gigolos grew younger,
Well-cooked meat to satisfy my hunger.
Now I became the mark with all the money.

But I knew better than to trust the honey
Of sex and sweet talk, orgasms and lies.
The fox knows well what trade the trickster plies!

And so I've married upwards all my life,
A skilled and thoroughly well-seasoned wife
About to be divorced. Are any here
Interested? I'm joking! Never fear,
The tale is coming – this I promise you."

"Let's have it, please, without much more ado!"
The therapist exclaimed. "This history
Has gone on far too long. Don't you agree?"
"Not at all," said the entrepreneur. "I find
The truth a better tale. To my mind,
The lady is an unalloyed delight,
And it behooves us now to be polite
And listen to each other without objection."

"There are times when someone needs correction,"
The therapist replied. "One needn't suffer
Silently the chafings of another,
For in politeness there's an unsaid lie
That festers in the *kishkes* by and by."

"Enough! Enough!" the bartender said. "Please tell
Your tale!" (This to the wife.) "It would be well
To get back underway. The time draws near
The gambling's end, and we have much to hear."

THE WIFE'S TALE

"What Men Want Most in a Wife," a reality show,
Enlisted lovely women who would go
All over the world on camera asking men
What they most wanted in a wife, and then
Bring back the answer that would be their choice,
After which the public had a voice,
Voting for the answer they thought right.

The prize, ten million dollars, though it might
Seem large, was not all that the contest offered:
The winner won a date with Simon Crawford,
The richest man in the world, on which she could
Try to get him hooked, a prize that would
Be worth a hundred billion, perhaps more,
Though the show had a surprise in store,
Which by the by you shall be told. For now,
Let's follow Nancy Lasker, and see how
She fared. Nancy was a pretty girl,
The type whose short loose skirt was wont to swirl
In a breeze, revealing lovely thighs,
The kind that drew like lodestones longing eyes.

Ah, Nancy! Not so smart, nor much aware
Of what a profit center she had there!
For seven weeks, with others on the show,
She asked men what nobody seemed to know.
Some said they wanted beauty, some said love.
Some said maternal instinct most would move
Their hearts; others, red-hot sex galore.

Some looked for religion, some were more
Material and wanted a large dowry,
While others simply wanted Nancy. Flowery
Praises heaped on her quite turned her head.
Yet she'd have given all to have instead
Just one opinion she could then bring back
To offer to the public. Alas, alack!
She was less sure than ever in her life
About what most men wanted in a wife.

Heading back to the studio, she passed
A beggar on the sidewalk, about the last
Person she would think might help her out.
He was an ugly, filthy, smelly lout
With unkempt hair and beard, and yet he stared
Right at her, as she wondered how he dared
To think that he could look at her like that.
And then, quick as a young and healthy cat,
He was in front of her, blocking her way.

"You have, I know, no notion what to say,"
He said to her. "In just an hour or so
You'll have to choose –" "How could you possibly
know?"

She asked, astonished. "I know the winning answer,"
He said. And lithe and graceful as a dancer
He came up to her ear. "I'll whisper it,
And guarantee you'll win in just a bit,
But first you must promise to marry me!" "You?"
She said, incredulous. "Marry you?"

He nodded. "For ten million?" he asked. "Why not?
I have something you want an awful lot!
It's just a business transaction, nothing more."

Well, she thought. How strange! But still, she saw
The logic in his reasoning. She had
Little to lose if he were simply mad
And whispered gibberish into her ear.
"OK," she said. "Providing what I hear,
I use, and win the contest. It's a deal."
"You'll win," he said, "for sure. And just to seal –"
"I won't kiss you!" she said. "Let's just shake hands."
And so they did. So what if he demands
His prize? she thought. I need not give it him.
I'll simply pay him off if I should win.
And so he put his lips right to her ear,
And whispered the right choice, as you shall hear.

Off she went into the studio
And was made up and costumed for the show.
Each contestant then was asked to say
What quality she chose, without delay.
"Beauty," said one. "Great sex," declared another,
"Adoration," "love ," "a second mother."

When it was Nancy's turn, she said the thing
The beggar had told her, which had the proper ring:
"All people want the same thing – girl or boy:
Someone who finds joy in others' joy."

Why yes, of course! the audience almost gasped.

How simple! How obvious! And when at last
The public voted yes, that Nancy was right,
She won the contest. Later on that night,
She went to see the beggar, who was waiting.

"You came!" he said. "It's time that we were mating!
I have a judge all ready right nearby."
But Nancy, quite upset, began to cry.
"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't go through with it.
I'll pay you what you ask – don't throw a fit!"

"You promised!" he yelled. "You gave your word!
Now why
Should I give up my rights because you cry?
You got what you wanted! I'll get mine!
That's only fair, regardless how you whine!"

"Ten million!" she offered. "All! Please take it all!
Less taxes, of course." And then began to bawl:
"I'll never marry someone I don't love!"

"What crap! As I can very readily prove.
You'd marry Simon Crawford tonight, I'll bet,
Even though you two have never met!
But now you'll have to un-schedule that date
Since you'll be married to a jealous mate.

"Let me clue you in, my clueless honey:
I marry for the sex, you for the money.
You got your money, now I want my sex
Morning, noon, and night! Let's clear the decks!

"You see that long, low building over there?
Go in, and up a cast-iron flight of stairs.
Open the door at the top, and there's a room
In which you'll have to wait to meet your groom.
Now, go! I'll get the judge, and then we'll do
What I have lusted for since meeting you."

Nancy Lasker walked across the street
Towards a narrow doorway, to the beat
Of a reluctant heart. I could just go,
She thought, and hide somewhere. He'll never know
Where I went or what became of me.
I have ten million dollars. But then she
Thought about her promise. It wasn't right.
She won because of him. And then a light
Went on inside her head. Oh, yes, of course!
She'd marry him and then get a divorce!
Simple! She'd keep her promise and her life
By being but a momentary wife!
She had money enough to pull it off.
And if he got some, well, he'd earned it. Oft
We think of ways to have our cake and eat it,
Or, perhaps, to take the rap and beat it.

Nancy fairly flew right up the stairs
And waited for her groom, all her cares
Suspended in the glare of her idea.
And then " knock! knock! – the fateful hour was
here!

She opened the door to a huge, well-lighted room.
Far away was her tuxedo'd groom
Smiling 'mid a crowd of cheering fans,
TV cameras, flashes, two brass bands
Playing "Here Comes the Bride" as down the aisle
She walked alone, too amazed to smile,
Until joined by her former scruffy beggar,
Now all spruced up and shaved. Even better,
She recognized the handsome man who offered
Her his arm as none but Simon Crawford!

Twenty-one million watched as they got married.
Twenty-one million watched them as he carried
Her into their penthouse suite and closed the door.
Twenty-one million then imagined more:
Sheer heaven! Fantasy made real! As she
Reaped the reward for her morality.

So ends my tale, with Nancy in the sack,
Earning a large fortune on her back.
Of course it ended in divorce, though both
Knew well what their dear partner wanted most:
Someone who found joy in others' joy,
So mutually each might the other buoy.

But knowing isn't doing, and neither did,
Both finally finding joy in getting rid
Of the other, as so often is
The ending of beginnings such as this.

Which brings me to my moral: Do not be

Too dependent on morality.
For love too often winds up just for show,
While money is the one sure good we know.