**THE CANTERBURY TALES**  
*Or... Geoffrey Chaucer's Flying Circus*  
by Burton Bumgarner

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

- **BORING SCHOLAR**..................lectures on Chaucer 11
- **HARRY BAILEY**......................host of the Tabard Inn and the narrator of The Canterbury Tales 117
- **STAGE MANAGER**....................of the play 4
- **SIGN CHANGER**........................changes signs for each scene n/a
- **GEOFFREY CHAUCER**................author of The Canterbury Tales; unfocused 59
- **WRONG PILGRIMS** 1-4..............Thanksgiving pilgrims in the wrong story 4
- **MRS. BAILEY**......................Harry's wife 6
- **THE KNIGHT**..........................Elvis 10
- **ADORING FANS OF KNIGHT**........sit in the audience n/a
- **THESEUS**.............................southern sheriff 18
- **ARCITE**..............................good ol' boy 18
- **PALAMON**.............................another good ol' boy 16
- **EMELYE**..............................Theseus's sister-in-law 9
- **HORSES** 1-2..........................ridden by Arcite and Palamon n/a
- **COCONUT GUYS** 1-2..................follow the horses, clicking coconut shells n/a
- **THE MILLER**..........................crass character 21
- **BACKUP BROTHERS**................monks who chant and hit themselves with phone books n/a
- **THE PARSON**..........................lectures on the Seven Deadly Sins 9

**The Seven Deadly Sins**

- **LUST**.................................alluring 1
- **GLUTTONY**............................ill-mannered 1
- **GREED**...............................greedy 1
- **SLOTH**...............................lazy 1
- **ANGER**...............................angry 2
- **ENVY**.................................envious 2
- **PRIDE**...............................CEO of all sins 1

For preview only
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<td>OLD WIDOW</td>
<td>victim of Tax Man</td>
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SETTING
An easel, DOWN LEFT, will be used as in vaudeville—the name of each scene is on the easel and will be removed by the Sign Changer at the beginning of each scene. A small desk with quill pen, legal pad, tabloid, bell and a chair are CENTER. A podium and small end table are DOWN RIGHT. A pitcher of water and a glass are on the end table. A large poster board with a fake phone number and a piece of tape are on the podium (to be hung in Scene Five). See page 47 for set design.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE
Scene One: Prologue to the Prologue
Scene Two: Prologue
Scene Three: The Knight’s Tale
Scene Four: The Parson’s Tale
Scene Five: The Wife of Bath’s Tale
Scene Six: Medieval Jeopardy
Scene Seven: The Pardoner’s Tale

ACT TWO
Scene One: Prologue
Scene Two: The Nun’s Priest’s Tale
Scene Three: The Cook’s Tale
Scene Four: The King Larry Show
Scene Five: The Friar’s Tale
Scene Six: The End
ACT ONE

Scene One: Prologue to the Prologue of Act One

AT RISE: The sign reads “Prologue to the Prologue.” The BORING SCHOLAR ENTERS LEFT with his briefcase and crosses CENTER. With irritating slowness he removes a stack of notes and places them on the podium. He starts to speak, clears the throat, pours a glass of water and takes a sip; then returns to the notes.

BORING SCHOLAR: (Boring, low-key presentation.) Throughout the Medieval period of English history there existed the aristocracy, a relatively small group that obtained its position and status by birth alone, and the commoners, which included everyone else.

During this time we begin to see the emergence of a middle class of citizenry. It was into this middle class that Geoffrey Chaucer was born around the year 1343. In 1386 he began writing a large-scale literary opus, which he called “The Canterbury Tales.” I shall read to you the prologue. Unless you are a scholar of the Middle English language you will not be able to understand a single word I’m saying. (Clears his throat. Takes another drink of water. Takes a deep breath. HARRY BAILEY ENTERS RIGHT, with a script in his hands, and looks at the BORING SCHOLAR with disgust. The BORING SCHOLAR reads from the Prologue of “The Canterbury Tales” with proper pronunciation—more or less—and in an irritating singsong voice.) “Whan that April with his shoures soote
The droughte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour, Of which vertu engendred is the flour…”

HARRY: (Crosses to the podium.) Excuse me. What are you doing?

BORING SCHOLAR: (Snooty.) I’m reciting the Prologue of “The Canterbury Tales.” What does it look like I’m doing?

HARRY: This is a stage play, not a boring old lecture.

BORING SCHOLAR: I happen to be an expert on boring old lectures!

HARRY: (Motions RIGHT. STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the podium. To STAGE MANAGER.) Get this person out of here. (BORING SCHOLAR grabs his notes and his briefcase. STAGE MANAGER takes the pitcher and glass and escorts BORING SCHOLAR OFF RIGHT.) I apologize, ladies and gentlemen. We will now begin with the Prologue. (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT, crosses LEFT in front of HARRY and removes the “Prologue to the Prologue” sign. The new sign reads “Prologue.” The SIGN CHANGER slowly crosses RIGHT, annoying HARRY.) I don’t suppose it occurred...
to you to maybe enter from the other side. [SIGN CHANGER grunts and EXITS RIGHT.]

End of Scene One

ACT ONE

Scene Two: Prologue

HARRY: The year is 1385, and Geoffrey Chaucer is about to begin writing “The Canterbury Tales.”

CHAUCER: (ENTERS LEFT and sits at the desk. Takes the quill, then thinks.) Let’s see. I can either write a literary masterpiece that revolutionizes English literature, or I can go down to the tavern and hang out with my friends. Hmm. That’s a tough one. I think I’ll run down to the tavern. I can revolutionize English literature later. (Stands.)

HARRY: (To CHAUCER.) You’re supposed to write “The Canterbury Tales”!

CHAUCER: But I want to go to the tavern.

HARRY: (Firmly.) Sit down and write, buster!

CHAUCER: (Sits and thinks.) I’m not feeling very revolutionary. How about a courtroom drama? (HARRY shakes his head no.) A spy novel? A horror story?

HARRY: “The Canterbury Tales”!

CHAUCER: Let’s see. Where to begin? Springtime. That’s always nice. Everybody loves springtime. (Writes.)

When April showers come your way,
They bring the flowers that bloom in May.
The trees get leaves, the little birds sing;
Holy smokes! It must be spring—

Time to take a little vacation.
See some sights in the British nation.
Pull the car out of the garage,
It’s time to go on a pilgrim-age! (Rhyme with garage.)

HARRY: (Annoyed.) That’s how you began “The Canterbury Tales”?

CHAUCER: Actually, I wrote it in Middle English.

HARRY: How about giving the Reader’s Digest version?

CHAUCER: Sure thing. (To AUDIENCE.) I’m going to write a story about a group of pilgrims on their way to visit the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury. Becket was the Archbishop of Canterbury back in the twelfth century, and he had a little disagreement with King Henry II. Actually, it was a big disagreement, and followers of the king murdered Becket in the cathedral. Everyone felt bad about
it, so then made him a saint and turned his shrine into a tourist spot. Visiting shrines of dead people is popular activity here in the Middle Ages, since we don’t have much else to do, except avoiding bands of marauding bandits, and trying really hard not come down with the bubonic plague. My pilgrims meet at the Tabard Inn, in the London suburb of Southwark, and they agree to travel together on a little vacation to Canterbury. It’s about a 65-mile trip, which doesn’t seem that far. The innkeeper... (To HARRY) ...that’s you... decides to go with them. To pass the time, he decides they should each tell two stories—one on the way to Canterbury, and another on the way back. That’s about all I’ve got so far. Now all I need is some pilgrims. (Returns to the desk, picks up the quill and writes. WRONG PILGRIMS 1-4 ENTER LEFT and cross CENTER. They are dressed as Thanksgiving pilgrims. HARRY watches in disbelief.)

WRONG PILGRIM 1: Behold! We have brought forth ourselves to a new land! Thus we are now free to impose upon each other the oppressions and persecutions that were first imposed upon us!

WRONG PILGRIM 2: We have crossed the raging seas and have suffered and died and... uh... all kinds of stuff that wasn’t any fun!

WRONG PILGRIM 3: We shall celebrate almost starving to death with a great feast featuring massive amounts of turkey and dressing and pumpkin pie!

WRONG PILGRIM 4: Followed by an afternoon of parades and football games on TV! We shall give thanks for these gifts of bounty which, though undeserved, are truly appreciated!

HARRY: Stop! Cut! Wrong pilgrims!

WRONG PILGRIMS: Oh, Sorry. (The WRONG PILGRIMS EXIT LEFT.)

HARRY: Let’s try again. (To CHAUCER.) You write. I’ll get the story started. (To AUDIENCE.) A group of pilgrims... from the Middle Ages... meet at the Tabard Inn. The host, a man named Harry Bailey, that’s me, greets his guests.

CHAUCER: If I’m gonna write this thing, I need a bagel and a cup of coffee. (EXITS RIGHT. HARRY sits behind the desk. He takes a tabloid out of the drawer and begins to read. The KNIGHT, PARSON, WIFE OF BATH, PARSON, NUN’S PRIEST, COOK, PHYSICIAN, LAWYER, FRIAR, MILLER, MERCHANT, CLERK and SQUIRE ENTER RIGHT and cross to the desk. They carry luggage. When HARRY fails to acknowledge them, a PILGRIM rings the bell.)

HARRY: (Jumps to his feet. Speaks rapidly.) Good afternoon. Welcome to the Tabard Inn. I’m your host, Harry Bailey. You must be on the Canterbury tour. Great place. I know you’ll love it. Your rooms are ready. We have a complimentary continental breakfast from six to nine and free in-room movies. I wish I was going with you. I think I...
will. Say, I've got a great idea. Let's entertain each other by telling stories. I'll act as the emcee and judge, and whoever tells the best story will get a free meal at the Tabard Inn on the return trip. And the rest of you can pay for it. How about it? Sound like fun, huh?

Okay. Let's go. Hurry up. Haven't got all day.

MRS. BAILEY: (ENTERS LEFT. Coarse.) Harry! Have you emptied the chamber pots and taken out the garbage?

HARRY: (Meek.) I was just about to do that, dear.

MRS. BAILEY: Have you cleaned up all the rooms? Have you started cooking the gruel?

HARRY: I'm just about to start, dear.

MRS. BAILEY: Have you fed the chickens and slopped the hogs?

HARRY: I'm on it, dear.

MRS. BAILEY: Nothing ever gets done around here unless I stay on you every second of the day!

HARRY: That's right, dear. I'm a worthless slug.

MRS. BAILEY: As soon as you finish your chores you can trim the shrubs and clean the windows and paint the hotel inside and out.

HARRY: Yes, dear. Don't you worry about a thing.

MRS. BAILEY: My mother was right about you, Harry! (EXITS LEFT.)

HARRY: (To PILGRIMS.) Hurry up. Let's go.

PARSON: She seems to have you scheduled for all kinds of labor.

HARRY: She's not serious. Come on. (Quickly ushers the PILGRIMS OFF LEFT. He crosses CENTER and addresses the AUDIENCE. The desk and chair are moved LEFT.) After my escape from my wife... I mean, we ventured forth to Canterbury, and we began the telling of the tales. (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT with a sign, crosses LEFT in front of HARRY. The new sign reads "The Knight's Tale." SIGN CHANGER slowly crosses RIGHT, annoying HARRY.) Think you could move any slower? (SIGN CHANGER grunts and EXITS RIGHT.)

End of Scene Two

ACT ONE

Scene Three: The Knight's Tale

CHAUCER ENTERS RIGHT with a bagel and a coffee cup. He takes a bite of the bagel, sips coffee, sits at the desk and makes notes on a notepad with his quill. (OPTIONAL: ADORING FANS of KNIGHT are planted in the AUDIENCE.)
CHAUCER: (Reads as he writes.)
   “A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
   That fro the time that he first bigan
   To riden out, he loved chivalrye...” (Stops and stands, stretches.)

HARRY: What are you doing?

CHAUCER: I don’t feel like writing.

HARRY: What about “The Canterbury Tales”?

CHAUCER: Well... you’re the host. You write it.

HARRY: But I’m fictitious!

CHAUCER: Hmm... So you’re saying you can’t write it?

HARRY: I can only write it if you write that I’m writing it. But you’re writing it anyway, so why don’t you sit down and write it?

CHAUCER: (Takes his quill and pad. Yawns.) I’m kind of tired. I need a nap. (EXITS RIGHT.)

HARRY: I never realized Chaucer had so much trouble focusing. (To AUDIENCE.) The Knight personified the best qualities of chivalry. He was polite, never saying an offending word against a fellow pilgrim. He was well-educated, well-spoken and a gentleman in every sense of the word. Ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Memphis, Tennessee, the Knight!

KNIGHT: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER. ADORING FANS in the AUDIENCE scream. HARRY EXITS RIGHT.) Thank ya. Thank ya very much. (Crosses to the podium.) I got a little story we like to tell in Memphis. It’s about this fellow named Theseus, the Duke of Athens.

THESEUS: (ENTERS LEFT and crosses DOWNSTAGE. To AUDIENCE.) Athens. That’s down in Georgia, in case ya didn’t know.

KNIGHT: Theseus gets kind of hacked off at these two fellows named Arcite... (ARCITE ENTERS RIGHT and CROSSES DOWNSTAGE.)... and Palamon... (PALAMON ENTERS LEFT and stands near THESEUS)... and tosses ‘em in jail. (ARCITE and PALAMON cross DOWN CENTER and sit on the floor.)

THESEUS: You boys really hack me off, ya know that? (EXITS LEFT.)

ARCITE: (Distressed.) What are we going to do now?

PALAMON: We could sing a little song. That always brightens things up.

ARCITE: I don’t know any songs.

PALAMON: I know one! I know one! (Jumps to his feet and sings like Elvis.) “The warden threw a party at the county jail,

The prison band was there and they began to wail...”
KNIGHT: (Crosses to PALAMON and interrupts him.) Hey! I do the singing around here!

PALAMON: (Sits. To ARCITE.) Sorry.

ARCITE: That's okay. You aren't a very good singer.

KNIGHT: Theseus had this really cute sister-in-law named Emelye. (THESEUS ENTERS LEFT with EMELYE. ARCITE and PALAMON turn and watch as they cross the stage.)

EMELYE: I got to find myself a boyfriend! I am the only girl in Athens that don't have one!

THESEUS: Now don't you worry your pretty head none about that. We'll get you a boyfriend one of these days.

EMELYE: But I want a boyfriend now!

THESEUS: These things take time. You don't wanna end up with some no-good nobody with a broken down pickup truck and drawer full of bills.

EMELYE: If you don't find me a boyfriend, I'm gonna make you sorry!

THESEUS: I'll work on it. You just hold your horses. (EXITS RIGHT with EMELYE.)

ARCITE: Wow! Did you see her?

PALAMON: I did! And there's something that really has me curious.

ARCITE: What's that?

PALAMON: How come if we're in jail, we can see a pretty girl walking down the street?

KNIGHT: Don't worry about it.

ARCITE: I think I'd like to marry that girl.

PALAMON: I wouldn't mind marrying her myself.

ARCITE: (Stands.) I'm getting out of here.

PALAMON: You mean escape? How are you going to do that?

ARCITE: I'm going to walk over there. (Points LEFT.) Have a nice life. (EXITS LEFT.)

PALAMON: Wow. I wish I could escape.

KNIGHT: Arcite couldn't forget how beautiful the sheriff's sister-in-law was. So he got himself a disguise and snuck back into town. (ARCITE ENTERS LEFT wearing a Halloween mask [NOTE: A half mask works best so as not to muffle the actor's lines].) That's a pretty weak disguise.

ARCITE: Sorry.

PALAMON: You know, I should escape. It can't be that hard. There ain't any walls or bars or nothing. (Stands and EXITS RIGHT.)

ARCITE: I gotta find that girl. Where is she?
EMELYE: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to ARCITE.) You think it's Halloween or something?

ARCITE: (Removes the mask and kneels at her feet.) You are the girl of my dreams. Will you marry me?

EMELYE: Hmm. I like you better with the mask on.

PALAMON: (ENTERS RIGHT, crosses to EMELYE and kneels at her feet.) You are the girl of my dreams. Will you marry me?

EMELYE: What am I? A weirdo magnet or something?

THESEUS: (ENTERS RIGHT.) Hey there, little sister-in-law. I see ya found yourself a couple of boyfriends. Say. You boys look kind of familiar. Do I know you? (PALAMON turns away from THESEUS and ARCITE puts on the mask quickly.)

EMELYE: These boys want to marry me. Which one should I choose?

THESEUS: We are a civilized society struggling to maintain our moral incorruptibility and our high standards for decency. In the case of two suitors seeking the hand of one lady, there's only one proper and genteel course of action.

ARCITE: (Takes a coin from his pocket.) We flip for her?

THESEUS: No. You fight for her until one of you dies.

PALAMON: You call that proper and genteel?

THESEUS: Hey! It's the Middle Ages! Okay? Now, get on your horses.

ARCITE/PALAMON: What horses? (HORSES ENTER RIGHT and LEFT. [Each HORSE is an ACTOR accompanied by a COCONUT GUY who clicks coconut halves for sound effects à la Monty Python. The HORSES hold ARCITE and PALAMON on their backs. The coconuts click as the HORSES move.])

THESEUS: Those horses!

ARCITE: Haven't I seen this somewhere before?

THESEUS: Gentlemen! Mount your horses! (ARCITE and PALAMON cross to a HORSE and pause.) The object is to impale the other fellow with your jousting pole.

PALAMON: What jousting pole?

THESEUS: The jousting pole that you are now holding in your hands.

ARCITE: We aren't holding jousting poles in our hands, in case you've missed that little detail.

THESEUS: The director won't let us use real jousting poles.

PALAMON: How are we supposed to joust without jousting poles?

THESEUS: Just pretend you have real jousting poles.

ARCITE: This is stupid!
1 PALAMON: Invisible jousting poles and coconuts! (They cross their arms and refuse to participate. HARRY ENTERS RIGHT.)

HARRY: What is the problem?

THESEUS: They want real jousting poles.

5 HARRY: We can't get real jousting poles on our budget! Not to mention the insurance, the medical liability… and the funeral expenses in case one of you actually impales the other! You'll just have to make do with what you have!

ARCITE: But we don't have anything!

HARRY: Then you'll have to make do with nothing! (EXITS RIGHT.)

THESEUS: May I please continue?

ARCITE/PALAMON: (Without enthusiasm.) Sure.

THESEUS: Now, when the maiden drops her handkerchief, you are to try to knock your opponent from his horse. Is that clear?

ARCITE: It's clear… and kind of strange.

THESEUS: Gentlemen, mount your horses. (ARCITE and PALAMON hop on the backs of their HORSES. EMELYE takes a handkerchief from her pocket, holds it up and drops it. HORSES charge toward each other with the coconuts clicking behind them. They make a pass and miss. They turn around and try again. They miss again.) Come on! Somebody needs to hit the ground here! (As they charge this time PALAMON is "struck" and falls from his horse. He lies still.)

ARCITE: Yeah! I win! I get to marry the pretty girl!

EMELYE: (Not all that happy.) Great. It's the guy with the Halloween mask.

KNIGHT: In a rare example of medieval irony, Arcite falls from his horse and is killed. (ARCITE falls from his HORSE and lies still.)

PALAMON: (Sits up and rubs his head.) Wow! That really hurt!

KNIGHT: And so, Palamon lost the jousting contest, but won the hand of Emelye. And Arcite won the jousting match, but was killed. How ironic is that?

EMELYE: (PALAMON stands and offers EMELYE his arm. She reluctantly takes it.) I guess a normal boyfriend is asking too much.

KNIGHT: Hope you liked my little story. (Some of the ADORING FANS in the AUDIENCE scream. The KNIGHT takes a handkerchief from around his neck and tosses it to his ADORING FANS.) We're gonna leave the building now and let someone else have the stage. Thank ya. Thank ya very much. (ALL EXIT LEFT. HARRY ENTERS RIGHT.)

HARRY: Ladies and Gentlemen, the Knight has left the building… Isn't he great? The King… I mean the Knight. And he told a pretty good tale.
MILLER: (ENTERS RIGHT and runs to HARRY.) Hey, Harry. Can I go next? I got a great story! You're gonna love it!

HARRY: Oh no, it's the Miller. (To MILLER.) Your stories are not suitable for a family audience.

MILLER: Come on, Harry. Just this one story. See, there were these two guys ...

HARRY: Stop! Do not tell that story!

MILLER: But Harry! It's funny!

HARRY: NO! (Pushes MILLER OFF RIGHT. To AUDIENCE.) This might be a good time to hear from the Parson.

CHAUCER: (ENTERS RIGHT. Carries a Starbucks cup.) I'm back. I went to Starbucks. Cinnamon dolce latte. Delicious. Now I'm all refreshed and ready to write. What pilgrim are we on?

HARRY: The Parson. A stern man with no sense of humor.

CHAUCER: Bring him on! (Sits at the desk and writes.)

"A good man was ther of religioun,
But riche he was of holy thought and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk..." (Pauses to think.)

HARRY: (To CHAUCER.) A little writer's block?

CHAUCER: This writing is hard work. I need a break. (Stands.)

HARRY: But you only wrote three lines!

CHAUCER: Yes, but they were very good lines. (EXITS RIGHT.)

HARRY: Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Parson! (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS as before. The sign is changed to read “The Parson’s Tale.”)

SIGN CHANGER grunts and slowly EXITS RIGHT. To AUDIENCE.) Good thing the theater’s not on fire. He'd burn up before he took five steps. (EXITS RIGHT.)

End of Scene Three

ACT ONE
Scene Four: The Parson’s Tale

The BACKUP BROTHERS CHANT OFFSTAGE and then ENTER LEFT. They chant a phrase, stop and hit themselves in the head with phone directories, then continue. The chant is repeated until all have crossed the STAGE and EXITED RIGHT.

BACKUP BROTHERS: Requiem eternally dismayed... (Bang.) Ene-a-ray have a lovely day... (Bang.) Credo this vocation's really boring... (Bang.) People in the audience are snoring... (Bang.)

PARSON: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER. He resembles a televangelist or preacher.) I stand before you not to offer a silly
story! I am here today to make you feel guilty and disgusted with yourselves! Just 500 short years ago, Pope Gregory, the guy who brought us the Gregorian Chant, came up with a list of Seven Deadly Sins, and it's been the job of parsons like me to remind you about them every chance we get! It's important that you know these sins! Why, you ask? Because 700 years from now, when your class is studying the literature of the English Middle Ages, it's going to be on the test! Don't think it won't be there! No teacher in the history of high school ever gave a test on Chaucer without asking about the Seven Deadly Sins! I have taken such tests, brothers and sisters, and I always forgot one of 'em! (Calm.) But enough about me. Let's meet the Seven Deadly Sins! And here they are! (The SEVEN DEADLY SINS ENTER LEFT and cross CENTER. They wear signs around their necks with the name of each SIN.)

Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Anger, Envy, Pride. (GLUTTONY carries a bag of Doritos.) How are ya'll doing?

SINS: Fine, thank you.

PARSON: Don't be misled by their friendly demeanor. They are deadly! And your teacher will take off for spelling! (To SINS.) Introduce yourselves to the audience. Let 'em get a good look at you. (Each SIN steps forward, introduces him or herself, then steps back.)

LUST: (Alluring.) Hi, there. I'm Lust. (Blows a kiss to the AUDIENCE.)

GLUTTONY: I'm Gluttony. And I love food! (Crams Doritos into his mouth until it's too full to talk. Continues to talk to the AUDIENCE, but cannot be understood because his mouth is full. GREED pulls him back in place.)

GREED: I'm Greed. (Looks at GLUTTONY.) And I want those Doritos! Gimme! (Tries to wrestle the bag of Doritos away from GLUTTONY. A struggle ensues.)

PARSON: (Intervenes.) Stop it! You're embarrassing me!

GLUTTONY/GREED: (Humble.) Sorry.

PARSON: Please continue.

SLOTH: (Yawns.) I'm Sloth. And this is $0000 boring. (Yawns, lays down on the floor and goes to sleep.)

ANGER: I'm Anger! And I'm so mad I could chew up steel and spit nails! (Growls à la Incredible Hulk and starts to choke ENVY.) I can't stand it! And it's all his fault! (Growls.)

PARSON: (Intervenes and removes ANGER'S hands from ENVY'S neck.) Stop it! What's wrong with you?

ANGER: (Calm.) I know I need anger management... except then I wouldn't be angry anymore and I'd be out of a job.
ENVY: (Rubs his neck.) Wow! That hurt! I'm Envy and I wish I could hurt somebody like that. (Indicates SLOTH.) And I wish I could sleep like him. (Indicates GLUTTONY.) And I wish I had those Doritos. (Looks into AUDIENCE.) Nice shirt. I wish I had a shirt like that. Hey! Is that a Rolex? You are so lucky! I wish I had a Rolex. (Sighs.) Man, I don't have anything.

PRIDE: I'm Pride. I always compare myself to other people instead of being grateful for who I am. I'm proud to say I'm the worst of Seven Deadly Sins. I have no idea why. That's just the way they worked out. Thanks, Pope Gregory, for making me the CEO of the Seven Deadly Sins!

ENVY: Man, you are so lucky. I wish I was the CEO.

PARSON: So, here they are. (Each SIN takes a bow.) Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Anger, Envy and Pride. The Seven Deadly Sins!

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to PARSON.) Are you going to tell a story?

PARSON: Of course not. Storytelling would be a form of pride, and I might envy somebody else's story and get mad and go to sleep and eat too much and lust after more stories …

HARRY: You're supposed to tell a story. Not give a sermon.

PARSON: I don't know any stories.

HARRY: Well, thanks for trying. (PARSON and the SEVEN DEADLY SINS EXIT LEFT.) Let's try another pilgrim. Who's next? (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to PARSON.) Are you going to tell a story?

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HARRY: You're supposed to tell a story. Not give a sermon.
pleasure... actually not even moderate pleasure. Hmm. I'm neither pleased nor proud to introduce... (SOUND EFFECT: DRAGNET RIFF.) The Wife of Bath! (EXITS RIGHT.)

WIFE OF BATH: (ENTERS LEFT carrying a DVD, a stack of paper and an instruction manual. Crosses to the podium.) Before I begin my tale, I shall speak at length on the subject of marriage. (Holds up the stack of paper.) This should only take about 45 minutes. I am an expert on the subject of marriage. I have gone through five husbands—three of my husbands were good, and two were not so good. I learned the best thing to do with a husband is to rein him in and get him under control. You must do this early in the marriage, or else the window of opportunity will be past and you will be stuck with an unruly brute who burps out loud and leaves his dirty socks on the sofa. I have developed a 12-step program to help women to take control of their husbands and their lives. It's called “The Wife of Bath's Guide to Successful Husband Training.” Each step is presented in an easy to understand and entertaining 120-minute DVD. Now, I will send you the first DVD absolutely free. If you are not at least 50% satisfied, then you may return the DVD at no obligation. If you are at least halfway satisfied, then you will receive a new DVD every week for the next 12 weeks for the low price of $19.95 per disk. In my first lesson you'll learn all about whining and nagging and making his food so spicy he can't eat it. And if you order today, you'll receive (Holds up manual.) my “Wife of Bath Teach Yourself Karate in Three Weeks” manual absolutely free. Not only will you be able to nag your husband into a quivering mound of Jell-o, you'll make him afraid to leave the basement. So, take out those cell phones, turn 'em on and call this number. (Tapes the large piece of poster board with a fake phone number on the front of the podium.) Have your Visa or MasterCard ready. And now, I'd like to spend some time telling you about each of my marriages.

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to podium.) Excuse me. You're running out of time.

WIFE OF BATH: What are you talking about? I haven't even started yet.

HARRY: We have other pilgrims to hear from.

WIFE OF BATH: It's my turn!

HARRY: But you're selling DVDs. This isn't the Home Shopping Network.

WIFE OF BATH: Very well. I shall tell my story. And then I will be in the lobby if anyone wants to purchase one of my outstanding DVDs—"The Wife of Bath's Guide to Successful Husband Training." Don't
forget the special introductory offer, plus the “Wife of Bath Teach Yourself Karate in Three Weeks” manual absolutely free.

HARRY: Ma’am, if you don’t tell the story I’m going to have to ask you to make way for the next pilgrim.

WIFE OF BATH: (Insulted.) Okay, (HARRY EXITS RIGHT.) My tale is called “The Naughty Knight.” Back in the days of King Arthur, there was a very naughty Knight who one day just carried off a young lady against her will.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (ENTERS LEFT, dragging YOUNG LADY.) Come on, Beverly! It’s “The Oklahoma Table Saw Massacre, Part 10!” It’s a great movie!

YOUNG LADY: I told you I don’t like those kinds of movies! They gross me out!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: We’re talking quality entertainment here! The Toronto Film Festival! Sundance! The Academy Awards!

YOUNG LADY: That movie did not appear at any of those places!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: But other movies did. Come on, Beverly! I really want to see it!

YOUNG LADY: I don’t like horror movies!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: You’re just saying that! (Drags YOUNG LADY RIGHT.)

YOUNG LADY: If you drag me in that theater I’ll never speak to you again! (He drags her OFF.)

WIFE OF BATH: Now, it just so happened that, in Arthur’s court, dragging a young lady off to see a horror movie against her will was a crime punishable by death.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (ENTERS RIGHT, worried.) That’s silly! It’s just a movie!

YOUNG LADY’S VOICE: (From OFF RIGHT.) This is gross! (NAUGHTY KNIGHT EXITS RIGHT.)

WIFE OF BATH: The Naughty Knight was caught and taken before the queen. (NAUGHTY KNIGHT and TWO GUARDS ENTER RIGHT.) QUEEN ENTERS LEFT with KAZOO PLAYERS, who function as her COURT. They play “Rule Britannia” on their kazoos. GUARDS grab and bring NAUGHTY KNIGHT to the QUEEN.)

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (To GUARDS.) All that stuff’s fake. You’re not going to chop off my head over a little horror movie… are you?

GUARD 1: (With GUARD 2, makes NAUGHTY KNIGHT kneel in front of the QUEEN.) He took a young lady to a horror movie against her will, Your Highness.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: I didn’t know it was a crime.
GUARD 2: Oh, it's a crime all right. We can't have people watching horror movies against their will.

QUEEN: (To NAUGHTY KNIGHT.) You know that you deserve to die for your crime.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Please don't kill me! I'll never force someone to see another horror movie as long as I live!

QUEEN: I will grant you your life if you can answer a very important question.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (Grovels.) Anything, Your Worshipship! Anything at all! All you have to do is ask. I'll come up with the answer. (Cautious.) This won't be a math question will it?

QUEEN: I shall grant you a year to find the answer to my question.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: I'm sure I can find the answer in less time than that. I'm very smart, and I'll work really hard to find the answer.

QUEEN: Very well. Here's the question. What is it that women most desire?

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: What kind of question is that?

QUEEN: The kind of question that will determine whether you live or die. You have one year. (Exits left with Kazoo Players and Guards. Kazoo players play their kazoos.)

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: How am I supposed to find the answer to something like that? I guess I could take a poll. (Nervous) Hey! I need some help out here! (Citizens 1-5 enter right and stand in a line.) I need a little polling data. What is it that women most desire?

CITIZEN 1: Money!
CITIZEN 2: Honor!
CITIZEN 3: Beauty!
CITIZEN 4: Nice clothes!
CITIZEN 5: To be flattered and waited upon!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: To never be criticized!
CITIZEN 2: To be trusted!
CITIZEN 3: To be loved!
CITIZEN 4: To be happy!
CITIZEN 5: To have a really great retirement plan at work!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Hmm. None of those sound like the right answer. I guess I'll wander around the world for a year and then go get my head chopped off. (To citizens.) Thanks for your help.

CITIZENS: You're welcome. (They exit right.)

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (Paces back and forth.) Why is this such a difficult question? And why am I losing my head over a horror movie? I
WIFE OF BATH: The Naughty Knight paced back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. This went on for almost a year. Then one day, as he was pacing, he came upon an ugly old woman.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (UGLY OLD WOMAN ENTERS LEFT. NAUGHTY KNIGHT doesn’t see her until he bumps into her.) Excuse me. (Looks at OLD WOMAN and gasps.) Geez! You look like something from a horror move!

OLD WOMAN: Sir Knight, tell me what you are seeking.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: I’ve got to find the answer to a question by Tuesday, or the queen is going to have my head removed from the rest of me. I’d do anything if I could find out the answer.

OLD WOMAN: And what is this question?

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: The queen wants me to find out what it is that women most desire?

OLD WOMAN: I can give you the answer to that question.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (Excited.) You can? That’s great! I’m not going to lose my head!

OLD WOMAN: You must promise to honor whatever I request of you.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: You got it! Anything at all!

OLD WOMAN: S- I- e- a- r- w- e- r- b- y- y- o- u r- h- o- n- o- r.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: I swear by my honor. (OLD WOMAN whispers in NAUGHTY KNIGHT’S ear.) That’s it?

OLD WOMAN: Now you know the answer to the question. Let’s go to the queen and tell her.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: You’re going, too?

OLD WOMAN: I haven’t been to London in years. (QUEEN ENTERS LEFT with KAZOO PLAYERS. OLD WOMAN and the NAUGHTY KNIGHT approach her.)

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (Excited.) I got it!

QUEEN: Very well. Tell us, what is it that women most desire?

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Women wish to have control of their husbands! Did I get it right?

QUEEN: That is correct. (NAUGHTY KNIGHT jumps around in delight.) I gave the answer to this man. In return, he promised to honor my request. In the presence of this court, my request is that he make me his wife.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: (Gasps and chokes.) Uh... uh... uh...

OLD WOMAN: I saved your life.
NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Uh... yeah... but... well... Isn't there something else you'd like?

OLD WOMAN: I want only to be married to you.

QUEEN: Very well. By the powers invested in me as the queen of England, I pronounce you man and wife. (KAZOO PLAYERS play a few bars of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March.") Have a great life. (QUEEN and PLAYERS EXIT LEFT as PLAYERS play "Rule Britannia.")

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Well... that was kind of sudden.

OLD WOMAN: I take it you don't find me attractive.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Well... no. Not at all. You're old and ugly. Sorry.

OLD WOMAN: I am old and ugly, but this could be an advantage. I will always be true and faithful.

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: But you look like... well... like someone hit you with the ugly stick.

OLD WOMAN: I will give you a choice. You can have me as I am, old and ugly, but true and faithful until the day I die, or you can have me young and beautiful, but untruthful and unfaithful.

YOUNG LADY: (ENTERS RIGHT and stands beside OLD WOMAN.) Which will you choose?

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: That's a tough one. If I choose you... (Indicates OLD WOMAN.) ...you'll be true and faithful, but you're ugly enough to stop traffic. And you... (Indicates YOUNG LADY.) ...are truly beautiful, but you're going to make my life miserable. Hmm. I don't know. I'd really like to have a pretty wife. But I don't want to be miserable. Is bachelorhood an option?

YOUNG LADY/OLD WOMAN: NO!

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Well, I can't decide. (To OLD WOMAN.) I'll leave it up to you. You decide.

OLD WOMAN: So I may choose and do exactly as I wish?

NAUGHTY KNIGHT: Either way, I lose.

OLD WOMAN: Don't be so sure.

YOUNG LADY: (Takes NAUGHTY KNIGHT'S arm.) I choose to be your wife. And because you let me choose, I choose to be true and faithful... and not make you miserable.

OLD WOMAN: You have a wife who is beautiful both inside and outside. (Steps away and EXITS LEFT.)

YOUNG LADY: We shall have a long and happy marriage. But no horror movies! (EXITS LEFT with NAUGHTY KNIGHT.)

WIFE OF BATH: And so, my story is over. The lesson—in marriage, the wife shall rule over the husband, and all shall be well. But if
1 you get in a bind, call this number. (Indicates the phone number on the podium.)

**HARRY**: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER.) Thank you for a very enlightening, though slightly creepy, tale. Tell me, what happened to your five husbands?

**WIFE OF BATH**: They died.

**HARRY**: Shocking. (Ushers her OFF RIGHT.) Well, off you go.

**MILLER**: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to HARRY.) Hey, Harry. Let me tell you this tale. There were these two guys ...

**HARRY**: (Looks at his watch.) Gosh, Miller. I'd love to hear your story, but I'm afraid it's time for the next pilgrim. You know, the Wife of Bath might like to hear your story.

**MILLER**: Good idea! (EXITS RIGHT.)

**HARRY**: (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses LEFT with a new sign. The new sign reads “Medieval Jeopardy.” SIGN CHANGER grunts and EXITS RIGHT.) I'll take "Boring" for $200, Alex! (To AUDIENCE.)

And now for something completely different. (EXITS RIGHT.)

*End of Scene Five*

**ACT ONE**

Scene Six: Medieval Jeopardy

**KAZOO PLAYERS ENTER LEFT and play the “Jeopardy” theme. ALEX and the CONTESTANTS—BOB (the SQUIRE), MANDY (the CLERK) and FRANKIE (the MERCHANT)—ENTER RIGHT. Each CONTESTANT brings a podium. ALEX moves the STAGE LEFT podium to CENTER. The three CONTESTANTS stand side by side à la Jeopardy. Each podium has the name of the contestant on the front. KAZOO PLAYERS move RIGHT and stand waiting.**

**ALEX**: I am Alex of Trebek, and this is the game where we give the answers and our players try to guess the questions. Let’s meet our players. First, Frankie. I understand you're a merchant.

**FRANKIE**: That's right, Alex. I buy stuff, I sell stuff. Kind of a boring job.

**ALEX**: I bet it is. Next is Bob. I understand you're a squire.

**BOB**: That's right, Alex. I'm youthful, handsome and I love dancing and romantic evenings by the fire.

**ALEX**: Well, Bob, that's almost interesting. Now, let’s meet our returning champion, Mandy. I believe you told us you work at a convenience store.

**MANDY**: (Spaced out.) Yeah. I'm, like, a clerk.

**ALEX**: You must have a lot of insight into human behavior.
MANDY: (Giggles.) I, like, tried to study philosophy and stuff, but it was, like, a mistake.

ALEX: Okay, players. Let's play our game. Mandy, you're first.

MANDY: I'll take “Medieval Literature” for $100, Alex.

ALEX: The answer is—a tale of knights, ladies and quests.

MANDY: (Jumps up and down.) I know! I know!... uh... (Thinks.) Never mind.

BOB: The answer is romance, Alex.

ALEX: Sorry. You did not phrase your answer in the form of a question.

FRANKIE: What is a romance?

ALEX: Right, Frankie.

FRANKIE: I'll take “Canterbury Tales” for $100, Alex.

ALEX: The answer is—the best dressed pilgrims.

MANDY: (Jumps up and down.) I know! I know! Uh... hmm. That's a tough one.

BOB: The answer is the Knight, the Parson and the Pardoner, Alex.

ALEX: Sorry, Bob. You once again forgot to phrase your answer in the form of a question.

BOB: Can't you make an exception?

ALEX: I'm afraid not, Bob.

FRANKIE: Who is the Wife of Bath? And I'll take “Canterbury Tales” for $300, Alex.

ALEX: Average time it took to travel from London to Canterbury in the fourteenth century.

MANDY: (Jumps up and down.) I know! I know!... uh... five years?

BOB: That would be four days... I mean... what are four days?

ALEX: Sorry, Bob. You did not originally phrase your answer in the form of a question.
BOB: But I changed it to a question! Please, Alex! Let me get one right!


FRANKIE: Right, Frankie. You choose again.

FRANKIE: I’ll take U.S. Presidents for $100, Alex.

BOB: I quit! (EXITS LEFT.)

FRANKIE: Hey! You can’t quit! I’m winning here! (EXITS LEFT.)

FRANKIE’S VOICE: (From OFF LEFT.) Come back here, you sorry squire!

ALEX: Well, Mandy. It looks like you remain our champion.

MANDY: (Giggles.) Yeah. Ain’t that something?

ALEX: It is. (To AUDIENCE.) Tune in next time for another episode.

KAZOO PLAYERS play “Jeopardy” theme as STAGE MANAGER and STAGEHANDS ENTER and move ALEX’S podium LEFT and other podiums OFFSTAGE. They also place a sack of coins beneath the desk. ALEX, MANDY and KAZOO PLAYERS EXIT RIGHT. HARRY ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER.

HARRY: Thank you, Alex and players. That was... kind of strange.


There’s never a large bird of prey when you need one. Let’s meet a pilgrim who’s really kind of worthless. A man who sells pardons for sins and crimes. In other words, a con man.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Pardoner! (EXITS RIGHT.)

End of Scene Six

ACT ONE

Scene Seven: The Pardoner’s Tale

The PARDONER ENTERS RIGHT dressed as a tacky used car salesman. He crosses CENTER and addresses the AUDIENCE in a “used car salesman” accent.

PARDONER: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, serfs and nobles, Bob Pardoner here, and have we got deals for you! Hop on your horse carts and make your way down to Big Bob’s Used Cars! We’ve got horses, we’ve got mules, we’ve got pony carts. You name it, we’ve got it! All you have to do is sign on the dotted line and drive off in one of these new or extremely used vehicles! Now, I’m gonna tell you a little story in a minute, but first I want you to think about a brand new, previously owned ox cart. You’ll have enough room to haul your whole family plus a couple of dead animals!
HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to PARDONER.) Excuse me.

PARDONER: Hey. I'm trying to generate a little business here.

HARRY: Either tell your tale or get off the stage so the next pilgrim can have a turn.

PARDONER: Look, pardner. Things ain't been so good lately at the car dealership.

HARRY: First of all, you're the Pardoner, not me. Second of all, cars haven't been invented yet. And thirdly, if you don't tell your story I'm going to send the Wife of Bath out here to help you get started.

PARDONER: (Crosses to the podium and suddenly takes on the air of a scholar.) In my illustrious vocation, I am sometimes called upon to act in ways that may be less than honest. I do, in fact, on occasion separate people from their money. But I have concluded that money is the root of all evil. (To HARRY.) Are you happy now?

HARRY: (Sarcastic.) Thrilled. (EXITS RIGHT.)

PARDONER: My tale is titled "The Three Thieves," and it concerns three youths who have less than stellar reputations. (THIEVES ENTER LEFT and cross to CENTER. Each carries a sack.)

THIEF 1: (To THIEF 2.) So, what did you steal from the poor old widow?

THIEF 2: (Removes a coin from his sack.) Her last cent! How cruel is that?

THIEF 1: Not bad.

THIEF 2: (To THIEF 1.) What did you steal from the poor widower?

THIEF 1: (Removes a bottle and a coin from his sack.) I got his last cent and his last drop of mead. (To THIEF 3.) How about you? What did you get from the orphans?

THIEF 3: (Removes a small sack of coins from his sack.) I took all of the money people left for the orphans in the charity box at the church. Am I a great thief or what?

THIEF 1: That's pretty good.

THIEF 3: Pretty good? It's fantastic! I am the master thief! There is nothing I won't take from nobody!

THIEF 2: Excuse me, your sentence has too many negatives.

THIEF 3: What are you talking about?

THIEF 2: You mean to say, there isn't anything you wouldn't take from anyone, or perhaps there is nothing you wouldn't take from anyone, although that really isn't proper.

THIEF 3: You wanna pipe down now, or after I break your nose?

THIEF 2: Uh... now would be good.
THIEF 3: I’m the best thief that ever lived!
THIEF 1: What about us?
THIEF 3: You’re okay. But I’m the best. I could cheat anybody! Widows! Orphans! Priests! Insurance companies! I’m the best, I tell you! I could even cheat Death itself!
THIEF 1: Ooh. Now there’s an idea.
THIEF 2: Actually, I don’t believe that’s possible… (THIEF 3 makes a threatening move toward THIEF 2.) …but it’s worth a try.
THIEF 1: We could all three cheat Death itself and we’d be famous.
20 And maybe Larry King… (Or other television personality.) …would interview us.
THIEF 3: Let’s do it! Let’s cheat Death itself!
THIEF 1: We could be like the Three Musketeers… only not as honest.
THIEF 2: How does one actually find Death itself in order to cheat it?
THIEF 3: Try the yellow pages. (A BACKUP BROTHER ENTERS LEFT, hits himself in the head with his directory and hands it to THIEF 3.) Thanks. (BACKUP BROTHER bows and EXITS LEFT. THIEF 3 thumbs through the directory.) Let’s see. Dating Services, Decks and Patios, Dentists …
THIEF 1: You’re getting closer.
THIEF 2: (Points at the directory) You missed it… look, it’s right there.
THIEF 3: Death. (Takes a cell phone from his sack.) I took this from one of the orphans. (Dials.) Hello? Could I speak with Death itself please?… Sure. I’ll hold… Damn it! It’s an answering machine.
THIEF 2: Leave a message.
THIEF 3: (Hands THIEF 2 the phone.) Here. I can’t stand talking to those things.
THIEF 2: (On phone) Hi. I’m a thief, and I’d like to talk with you about ways my friends and I can cheat you. If you could get back to us we would greatly appreciate it. Have a nice day. (Hands phone to THIEF 3.)
THIEF 1: I can’t believe you told Death itself to have a nice day.
THIEF 2: It pays to be polite. (OLD MAN ENTERS LEFT and crosses CENTER.)
THIEF 3: Oh, look! Someone else we can cheat! (They surround OLD MAN.) Tell me, Old Man. Have you thought about investing in a good retirement plan?
THIEF 2: How about a winning lottery ticket?
THIEF 1: How about a fully loaded Lexus with easy monthly payments?
OLD MAN: You seek Death Itself.
THIEF 3: Well, yes. Do you know where we can find Death Itself?
OLD MAN: In the forest. Behind a tree.
THIEF 1: How will we know which tree? They all pretty much look alike.
OLD MAN: You will know.
THIEF 2: So how about that lottery ticket?
OLD MAN: No thank you. (EXITS LEFT.)
THIEF 1: (They look around.) I don’t see anything that looks like a tree.
THIEVES 2/3: No.
THIEF 2: What about that desk?
THIEF 3: There’s no way a tree could look like a desk.
THIEF 2: Well, the desk was a tree at one time. Before it became a desk.
THIEF 1: That’s kind of stretching things a bit.
THIEF 2: Do you see any real trees?
THIEVES 1/3: No.
THIEF 2: Okay. Let’s look under the desk. (They cross to the desk and remove the bag of gold.)
THIEF 1: That’s not Death Itself. It’s a bag of gold. (Looks in bag.) Wow! There’s a lot of money here! (OTHERS look in the bag with amazement.)
THIEVES 1/3: WOW!
THIEF 2: You are planning on dividing evenly between us... aren’t you?
THIEF 1: Of course. Say, this calls for a celebration. Why doesn’t one of us run into town and pick up some food and drinks. We’ll have a little party.
THIEF 2: Out here in the woods? (Looks around.) Where there aren’t any trees?
THIEF 3: That’s a great idea. (To THIEF 1.) Why don’t you run into the village and grab a couple bottles of mead and a bag of Doritos?
THIEF 1: Why don’t you?
THIEF 3: Someone has to stay here and guard our gold.
THIEF 1: That someone should be me.
THIEF 3: Let’s send him. (Indicates THIEF 2.)
THIEF 2: Good idea. (To THIEF 2.) Run into the village and pick up some mead and Doritos.
THIEF 2: Why me?
THIEF 3: We took a poll and you won.
THIEF 2: Well... okay. You guys wouldn't think of trying to take my share of the gold, would you?
THIEF 1: What do you think we are? Thieves?
THIEF 2: Yes.
THIEF 3: We'll guard your share of the gold. And when you get back we'll have a party and celebrate our good fortune and our bad natures.
THIEF 2: Well... okay. (EXITS RIGHT.)
THIEF 3: Boy, is he ever dumb.
THIEF 1: What do you mean?
THIEF 3: What I mean is, when he gets back we're gonna kill him.
THIEF 1: Why didn't we kill him before he left?
THIEF 3: I want some Doritos. (PARDONER moves the table near the podium CENTER. STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT, places two bottles and a bag of Doritos on the table and EXITS RIGHT.)
THIEF 2: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the table. MANDY, the clerk, ENTERS RIGHT and stands behind the table.) I need a bottle of mead and some Doritos.
MANDY: (Sarcastic.) Lucky you.
THIEF 2: You don't have a very good attitude.
MANDY: It's the Middle Ages and I'm a clerk in a convenience store. What'd you expect?
THIEF 2: A little assistance.
MANDY: (Sarcastic.) How insensitive of me. Isn't it a lovely day? How may I assist you, sir?
THIEF 2: I need a bottle of mead and a bag of Doritos.
MANDY: You're in luck. That's about all I have in the store. (THIEF 2 picks up the Doritos and a bottle.) That'll be two gold coins.
THIEF 2: I won't be paying. I'm a thief.
MANDY: Why am I not surprised?
THIEF 2: (Looks at the second bottle on the table.) What's that?
MANDY: Deadly poison.
THIEF 2: Is it dangerous?
MANDY: Of course it's dangerous! It's deadly poison!
THIEF 2: If my fellow thieves drink this then I can have all of the gold. I'll take the deadly poison.
MANDY: That'll be two gold coins. Well, that would be two gold coins... if you weren't going to steal it. (THIEF 2 takes the bottles and the...
I hate my job. (Moves table LEFT then EXITS LEFT.)

THIEF 3: When he gets back you stab him with the dagger.

THIEF 1: Uh... I don't have a dagger.

THIEF 3: Well then, you run him through with your sword.

THIEF 1: I don't have a sword.

THIEF 3: How do you plan on killing him?

THIEF 1: I was planning on you killing him.

THIEF 3: It was my idea. So you do the killing.

THIEF 1: I'd rather not.

THIEF 3: Well, you don't expect me to kill him, do you?

THIEF 1: I thought you might.

THIEF 3: I don't have anything to kill him with.

THIEF 1: Neither do I.

THIEF 3: You can hit him over the head with the mead bottle.

THIEF 1: What if it's one of those plastic recyclable bottles?

THIEF 3: I've got something. (Reaches inside his pocket and removes a spork.) Here. Kill him with this.

THIEF 1: A spork? I'm supposed to kill him with a plastic spork?

THIEF 3: We're talking a lot of gold here!

THIEF 1: Okay. I'll try.

THIEF 2: (ENTERS RIGHT with the bottle of poison and the Doritos.) I got some party goodies.

THIEF 3: Before we start our little celebration, our friend here has something he'd like to show you. (THIEF 1 attacks him with the spork.)

THIEF 2: A spork? You're killing me with a spork?

THIEF 1: Sorry. We didn't have a dagger.

THIEF 2: (Dying breath.) That's okay. (Falls to the floor, dead.)

THIEF 1: That was easier than I thought it would be.

THIEF 3: Let's drink a little mead before we divide up our gold.

THIEF 1: I don't like mead.

THIEF 3: (Uncorks the bottle, drinks and passes it to THIEF 1.) Come on. Live a little. (THIEF 1 drinks. THIEF 3 starts to choke.) Or die a little. (Collapses, dead.)

THIEF 1: I really don't like this stuff. (Falls to the floor, dead.)

PARDONER: And so, the moral of this tale is this—You can't cheat death itself. And you shouldn't steal stuff. So, if you need a brand new used car, see the Pardoner. We have a huge selection of new...
and slightly ancient vehicles, easy financing available and balloons for the kids. Thank you. (THEIVES stand and EXIT LEFT. PARDONER EXITS RIGHT.)

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT.) That was a pretty good tale there, Pardoner.

HARRY: (Enters Right and crosses to HARRY. His arm is in a sling and his head is bandaged.) Hey, Harry! I cleaned up my story!

HARRY: Does it have the same characters?

MILLER: More or less.

MILLER: (Indicates his injured arm.) I don't think she likes me.

HARRY: Have you tried it out on the Wife of Bath?

MILLER: (Indicates his injured arm.) I don't think she likes me.

HARRY: I'd love to hear your story. Miller. But I need to have a little talk with Chaucer. (CHAUCER ENTERS RIGHT with a bag of popcorn.) Did you go to the movies?

CHAUCER: I did. I just love "Titanic." (Or choose a current popular movie.) How did you like the Wife of Bath? I made sure her story was extra long so I could see the movie and all the trailers.

HARRY: She was something. I'm not sure what.

MILLER: I bet she'd be real good at tractor pulls. Anyway, these two guys got a ladder—

HARRY: (Interrupts.) Guess what? It's time for intermission. I need to meet with the pilgrims for a little pep talk. (ALL PILGRIMS ENTER and stand UPSTAGE. To MILLER.) So I guess your story will have to wait for Act Two. (To CHAUCER.) You just had to go and write about a miller!

CHAUCER: It seemed like a good idea at the time.

HARRY: Does it seem like a good idea now? His story is disgusting!

CHAUCER: I was trying to show a cross section of the society in which I lived. Millers are not known for having a lot of class.

HARRY: He is not to tell that story!

CHAUCER: What if people want to read it?

HARRY: They'll have wait and read it in college.

CHAUCER: Okay. It'll give them something to look forward to. (EXITS RIGHT.)

HARRY: You know, when it comes to writing, you're not exactly an overachiever. (To AUDIENCE.) And now, here's the part where the host gives the cast a little pep talk. I'm going to let them know how
well they all did in Act One and give them some fatherly nurture and encouragement. (To CAST, à la Marine drill sergeant.) You call that acting? I’ve seen better acting at a kindergarten talent show! My dog’s a better actor… and he can’t read! You’re an embarrassment! You’re a disgrace to the acting profession! I don’t know why I put up with you!

(Turns and sees the AUDIENCE. Startled.) Oh. I thought the intermission had started. (To AUDIENCE.) We’re going to do a little “team building.” You can stand up, walk around, use your cell phones, run out to the parking lot and see if you turned off your headlights. We’ll start Act Two in about fifteen minutes. Okay? Blackout. (BLACKOUT.)

End of ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One: Prologue to Act Two

SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and changes sign to “Prologue to Act Two,” then EXITS RIGHT.

AT RISE: BORING SCHOLAR ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the podium.

BORING SCHOLAR: I am the only expert on Chaucer and the literature of the late Middle Ages in this entire theater. Therefore, you shall listen while I talk very slowly. Try to stay awake. (Recites.)”Ther was also a Reve and a Millere, A somnour and a Pardoner also…”

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the podium.) I’m the only expert. Wait a minute!

BORING SCHOLAR: But I’m the expert!

HARRY: You’re boring!

BORING SCHOLAR: So? (Continues.) “To Canterburyward, I mene it so, And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle—”

HARRY: (Motions STAGE RIGHT. STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT.) I thought you got rid of this person.

STAGE MANAGER: I thought I did, too. He must have snuck in the stage door.

BORING SCHOLAR: (Insulted.) I didn’t sneak in the stage door! (Meek.) I impersonated a techie and I walked right across the stage.

HARRY: Well, now you can impersonate Houdini and disappear!

BORING SCHOLAR: (Frantic.) What’s a brilliant person like me supposed to do?
HARRY: Go teach language arts somewhere! (STAGE MANAGER drags BORING SCHOLAR OFF RIGHT. To AUDIENCE.) It’s time for Act Two. We left our pilgrims making their way to Canterbury and telling their stories and having a good time. (Pause.) And now, “The Canterbury Tales,” Act Two. The pilgrims are still making their way to Canterbury, telling their stories and having a good time. (CHAUCER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to CENTER. He carries a pizza box and a soft drink.) Uh... what are you doing?

CHAUCER: I’m going to enjoy this delicious pizza. The Cook made it.

HARRY: I know I’m going to regret asking, but what kind of pizza did the Cook make?

CHAUCER: Take a look for yourself.

HARRY: (Slowly opens the box. His reaction is one of repulsion.) What is that?

CHAUCER: A gruel pizza. A thick mixture of watered down oats, salt and... that’s about it. Oh yeah. A little mozzarella cheese.

HARRY: That’s disgusting.

CHAUCER: Well... it’s either that or pepperoni... (To AUDIENCE.) ...and you really don’t want to know how we made pepperoni in the Middle Ages.

HARRY: You’ll never finish writing “The Canterbury Tales”!

CHAUCER: I’ll finish it.

HARRY: Actually, you won’t. (To AUDIENCE.) He fooled around for 15 years, writing a tale or two every now and then. But “The Canterbury Tales” remained unfinished. (To CHAUCER.) Go eat your nasty pizza. (CHAUCER EXITS RIGHT.) And now it’s time for another tale. (SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT as before. The new sign reads “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” SIGN CHANGER crosses in front of HARRY and EXITS RIGHT.) Don’t worry about UFOs. Nobody would want to abduct you.

End of Scene One

ACT TWO

Scene Two: The Nun’s Priest Tale

The BACKUP BROTHERS CHANT OFFSTAGE and then ENTER RIGHT. They chant a phrase, stop and hit themselves in the head with phone directories, then continue. The chant is repeated until all have crossed the STAGE and EXITED LEFT.

BACKUP BROTHERS: Requiem eternally dismayed... (Bang.) Ere-a-kay have a lovely day... (Bang.) Credo this vocation’s really boring... (Bang.) People in the audience are snoring... (Bang.)
NUN'S PRIEST: (ENTERS LEFT and crosses to the podium.) Hi there, I'm the Nun's Priest, and my tale is about rooster named Chanticleer... (CHANTICLEER ENTERS LEFT and crosses CENTER.) ... and his wife, Pertelote. (PERTELOTE ENTERS LEFT and crosses CENTER.) I know we don't give a lot of thought to poultry, unless we're having lunch at KFC...

CHANTICLEER: (He and PERTELOTE are horrified.) Hey! Don't talk like that!

NUN'S PRIEST: Sorry. Anyway, I'm going to tell you a happy little tale with a good moral message. After that, I will take up a collection for the poor, hear confessions and do... uh... other priestly stuff. By the way, there is a moderate amount of violence in this tale, and it may not be appropriate for the pre-confirmed or those with certain cardiovascular conditions. If you fall into one of those two categories, please place your hands over your ears and face the back of the theater. Are we all set? Okay. This is the tale of Chanticleer, the greatest of roosters.

CHANTICLEER: (Yells.) Hey! Wake up ya bunch of lazy slobs! Ya gonna sleep all day, for crying out loud?

PERTELOTE: I wish you wouldn't do that!

CHANTICLEER: No one in all of chickendom can give a wake up call like me! I'm the best! I'm the handsomest! I'm the smartest! I'm the bravest!

PERTELOTE: (Sarcastic.) Don't forget modestest.

CHANTICLEER: I wish you wouldn't do that!

NUN'S PRIEST: Chanticleer usually had a few kernels of corn, a cup of coffee, he read the “The New York Times” and went back to sleep on his perch.

PERTELOTE: I wish you wouldn't do that!

CHANTICLEER: (Yawns.) I think I'll mosey back to the old perch and catch a little shut-eye. (Squats down on the floor and closes his eyes, imitating a sleeping chicken.)

PERTELOTE: I guess that leaves me to sit on the eggs, scratch around for food and try to avoid being Sunday dinner! My mother warned me about roosters like you! She said, Pertelote, marry a nice boy from the neighborhood. But would I listen to her? No! I had to go and marry Chanticleer! The handsomest, bravest, you-name-it-he's-itest rooster in the world! Ha! Ha!
NUN'S PRIEST: On one particular day, Chanticleer was sleeping on his perch. Pertelote was out in the yard scratching around and talking on her cell phone.

PERTELOTE: (Takes out a cell phone and talks.) I don't want to roll all of my credit card charges into one easy monthly payment! I don't have a credit card! I'm a chicken! (Pauses as if listening.) No, I'm not a coward! I'm not that kind of chicken! If I wanted a credit card I'd get a credit card.

NUN'S PRIEST: Suddenly Chanticleer started yelling in his sleep.

CHANTICLEER: No! Stop! Leave me alone! Help! Police! Murder!

PERTELOTE: (On phone.) I've got to hang up now. (Hangs up the phone, crosses to CHANTICLEER and shakes him awake.) What is wrong with you? You're disturbing the whole barnyard... which I guess is what you're supposed to do... but everyone's already awake... except for you, you lazy rooster!

CHANTICLEER: (Awakens, stands and embraces PERTELOTE.) Oh! My dear wife! I was so afraid! I had a terrible dream!

PERTELOTE: (Pushes CHANTICLEER away.) Hey! Knock it off! You're wrinkling my feathers!

CHANTICLEER: I've never experienced such a horrible nightmare in my life!

PERTELOTE: In your case I think the term is "daymare."

CHANTICLEER: I was strutting around the barnyard, like I always do. I checked on the cow, greeted the goat, said good morning to the horse. Then, from out of nowhere came this horrible beast! He kind of looked like the dog, only he was smaller, and had very beady eyes. He looked at me like I was going to be his lunch! I tried to run toward the barn, only my legs moved in slow motion, and the beast was moving toward me faster than I could move away from him! What does it mean, dear Pertelote?

PERTELOTE: It means you need to lay off the stromboli! Do you realize you're the only rooster in England that smells like garlic?

CHANTICLEER: I don't think the dream was caused by stromboli.

PERTELOTE: Trust me, you are what you eat. You need a dose of Pepto-Bismol and a good exercise routine. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're acting like a big baby!

CHANTICLEER: It's just scary, I mean, my Aunt Helen dreamed she heard her friend Jessica calling out for help. (Falsetto voice.) You've gotta help me, Helen! I'm about to be murdered! (Normal voice.) Well, Aunt Helen woke up and decided it was just a bad dream. She went back to sleep and had the same dream again. (Falsetto voice.) Help me, Helen! I'm about to be murdered! (Normal voice.)
Aunt Helen woke up and thought it was kind of weird, but she went back to sleep anyway. And a third time she had the same dream. (Falsetto voice.) Helen! Help me! Is it asking too much for a little help here? (Normal voice.) This time, Aunt Helen woke up and went out in the barnyard to look for Jessica. But there was no Jessica! She was gone! All that was left was a pile of feathers! How do you explain that?

**PERTELOTE:** She became Kentucky Fried Dinner. Geez, Chanticleer. It happens. You gotta get a grip on reality here.

**CHANTICLEER:** The point is, my lovely Pertelote, dreams are an important tool in unlocking the mysteries of the subconscious. Freud discovered that dreams are attempts by the subconscious to resolve conflict. Information stored in the subconscious is unruly. It cannot easily pass into the conscious, and therefore must be filtered through a censor of pre-consciousness.

**PERTELOTE:** What are you talking about?

**CHANTICLEER:** Sigmund Freud, my lovely Pertelote. The father of modern psychoanalysis.

**PERTELOTE:** I see two problems with your argument. First of all, Freud wrote “The Interpretation of Dreams” in the year 1900. We’re about 500 years too early. And second, we’re chickens! Freud didn’t write about the subconscious of chickens!

**CHANTICLEER:** Well… the point is, I’m going to be murdered!

**PERTELOTE:** I don’t have time for this. I’m supposed to have lunch with some of the hens. Then we’re going to go laugh at the pigs. Why don’t you go strut around the barnyard and act like you’re important. (EXITS RIGHT.)

**CHANTICLEER:** I am important! I am the coolest rooster that ever lived! And someone wants to kill me! And how does she know Freud didn’t write about the subconscious of chickens? Oh, well. I might as well act like… a rooster. (Yells.) Wake up, ya bunch of lazy slobs! (Proud of himself.) Yep. I’m cool. I guess I don’t need to worry about anyone killing me. It’s just a bad dream.

**NUN’S PRIEST:** Poor Chanticleer didn’t realize that his dream had been just as he originally feared. It was a warning after all. As he strolled to the edge of the farm, a hungry fox was sneaking around, waiting for the chance to grab her noonday meal. Chanticleer had never before seen a fox. (FOX ENTERS and slowly crosses to CHANTICLEER. When she is beside him, he sees her.)

**CHANTICLEER:** (Startled.) Uh… who are you?

**FOX:** (Sly.) I’m just a lowly creature from the wilds. I heard a voice sail out over the fields and throughout the forest, and I had to see
to whom this voice belonged. It is you, dear sir. Your voice is like
music.

CHANTICLEER: (Flattered.) Well, I do have a great voice. I’m the
coldest creature on the farm, you know.

FOX: Oh, I know. You must be the great rooster known as Chanticleer. You’re famous throughout the land.

CHANTICLEER: (Pleased.) Really? Well, how about that.

FOX: Yes. I am very fond of roosters. I’ve entertained many at my
house. But I have never seen nor heard the likes of Chanticleer. I
should like to entertain you. Would you consider being my guest
for dinner?

CHANTICLEER: I’m not supposed to leave the barnyard. You say I’m
famous throughout the land? (FOX nods and grins.) Now, would that
be throughout the immediate area, or throughout all of England?

FOX: I confess I’ve never been throughout all of England. (CHANTICLEER
frowns.) But I wouldn’t be surprised if your outstanding reputation
hadn’t spread throughout all of the British Empire.

CHANTICLEER: Wow! I’m famous! I always knew I’d be famous.

FOX: I would be greatly honored if you would demonstrate your great
roostering ability.

CHANTICLEER: Now?

FOX: Of course.

CHANTICLEER: Okay. Here goes. (Prepares to yell.)

FOX: Oh, sir. I’ve been told that one’s rooster call can travel much
further if one closes his eyes.

CHANTICLEER: Really? I never knew that. I’ll try it. (Closes his eyes.)

FOX: (Reaches up and grabs CHANTICLEER around the mouth and the
middle. CHANTICLEER’S eyes open and register fear.)

FOX: Well, now. It
looks like you will be joining me for dinner after all.

CHANTICLEER: (Removes FOX’S hand from his mouth.) Would you
happen to be a predator?

FOX: I, sir, am a fox. I am most certainly a predator.

CHANTICLEER: I thought so. (Yells.) Stop! Leave me alone! Help!
Police! Murder!

FOX: (Shakes CHANTICLEER and covers his mouth.) We’ll have none of
that! (Drags CHANTICLEER OFF LEFT.)

PERTELOTE: (ENTERS RIGHT just in time to see CHANTICLEER and
FOX vanish.) Good heavens. It’s a fox! (Yells.) Help! Dangerous
predator! Hungry carnivore! Malicious mammal! (FARMER and
various ANIMALS ENTER RIGHT.) It got Chanticleer!

FARMER: Let’s get him!
Yeah! (FARMER and ANIMALS quickly cross RIGHT and EXIT. FOX and CHANTICLEER ENTER RIGHT, cross and quickly EXIT LEFT. The FARMER and ANIMALS follow. They cross at least four times. Throughout the chase, the FARMER and ANIMALS yell threats to FOX and words of encouragement to CHANTICLEER. Finally, FOX stops CENTER.)

CHANTICLEER: (Pulls the FOX’S hand from his mouth.) If I were you, I’d tell those silly people to go back home. They’ll never find you once we enter the forest, and you’re going to have rooster for dinner and there’s nothing they can do about it.

FOX: That sounds like a good idea. I’m tired of running. (Lets go of CHANTICLEER and faces the wing space where the FARMER and ANIMALS are waiting. Yells.) Go home, you silly people! You’ll never find me once I enter the forest! I’m having rooster for dinner, and there’s nothing you can do about it!

NUN’S PRIEST: Now, Chanticleer was vain, conceited, arrogant, overconfident, he had an over inflated ego, a feeling of self-importance that was far from realistic...

CHANTICLEER: (Annoyed, interrupts.) All right! They get the idea.

NUN’S PRIEST: But even with all of his bad qualities, Chanticleer was clever.

CHANTICLEER: (Sarcastic.) Gee, thanks.

NUN’S PRIEST: And no sooner had the fox turned loose of Chanticleer to yell his taunts at the pursuers, than the rooster flew... and roosters don’t like to fly... to the top of a tree.

CHANTICLEER: (Runs to the desk and stands on top of it.) You’ll never catch me now, you sneaky fox! I’m safe in the top of this tree.

FOX: (Turns to look at CHANTICLEER.) That’s a desk.

CHANTICLEER: No it’s not. It’s a tree.

FOX: Sorry. It’s a desk.

CHANTICLEER: Well, could you pretend it’s a tree?

FOX: I really don’t have time for this.

FARMER: (ENTERS RIGHT suddenly with ANIMALS and PERTELOTE.) There they are! (FOX quickly EXITS LEFT. FARMER and ANIMALS chase FOX and EXIT LEFT.)

PERTELOTE: (Crosses to CHANTICLEER.) Why are you standing on that desk?

CHANTICLEER: This is a tree. I cleverly outwitted that fox. When she let go of me, I flew up here.

PERTELOTE: You hate to fly. And you’re not very good at it.

CHANTICLEER: (Frustrated.) Okay. What do you think happened?
PERTELOTE: I think the fox let go of you and you climbed up on that desk.
CHANTICLEER: Whatever. Would you help me down?
PERTELOTE: You got yourself up there. You can get yourself down.
CHANTICLEER: (Sighs and slowly eases down from the desk.) Well, now. What do you think about my theory of dreams now?
PERTELOTE: About the same thing I thought five minutes ago. Why?
CHANTICLEER: That fox was the creature I dreamed about! My dream came true!
PERTELOTE: You're crazy! (FARMER, ANIMALS and FOX ENTER LEFT and face DOWNSTAGE.)
CHANTICLEER: But it's true!
NUN'S PRIEST: And so, my little tale draws to a close with this very simple moral.
CHANTICLEER: We should never let flattery close our eyes when we most need to see.
FOX: And we should never speak when we most need to keep our mouths shut.

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER. NUN'S PRIEST CAST EXITS RIGHT.) Wow! Is that a great tale or what? How'd you like the rooster and the fox? Pretty weird, huh? It's amazing what kind of costumes you can find at the secondhand store. So, we're on our way to Canterbury and—

CHAUCER: (ENTERS RIGHT holding his stomach.) I don't feel good.
HARRY: You didn't really eat that pizza, did you?
CHAUCER: Well... most of it. What tale are we up to?
HARRY: We're about to start the Cook's Tale.
CHAUCER: I can't think about food! (EXITS RIGHT quickly. SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and changes the sign to read "The Cook's Tale." HARRY gives him a long, evil stare the entire time he's ONSTAGE. SIGN CHANGER grumbles and EXITS RIGHT.)

End of Scene Two

ACT TWO
Scene Three: The Cook's Tale
The STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT wearing headphones and moves the desk CENTER. A mixing bowl, a bag of corn meal, a pitcher of water, a carton of eggs, a bundle of weeds, a bottle of Dr. Pepper, a small bundle of straw, a package of meat, a whisk and a serving spoon are placed on the desk. COOK ENTERS RIGHT wearing an apron and chef's hat and crosses to the desk.
STAGE MANAGER: Now we have a show you're sure to love. "Thirty Minute Medieval Meals" with your host, the Cook. You're on in five seconds. Four... three... two... one. (EXITS RIGHT.)

COOK: (To AUDIENCE, as if on television.) Hi. I'm the Cook, and I'll show you how to make medieval meals in just 30 minutes. Most of the ingredients are found around your home or your farm or out in the forest somewhere. Today everyone's favorite—barnyard casserole. Now we start with a little corn meal, which we get from the Miller. Dump some right in the mixing bowl. (Pours corn meal in bowl.) It doesn't matter how much. Next we add water. (Pours water into the bowl.) Next some fresh farm eggs. (Cracks an egg and drops it in the bowl, shell and all.) Some fresh herbs. (Sniffs weeds.) I think these are just weeds, but you know, "herb" is just a fancy word for "weed" anyway. Next some Dr. Pepper. (Opens soda bottle, pours some in the bowl, takes a swig, pours some more in the bowl.) Some straw. Now, this is organic straw. It costs a little more, but it's worth it. (Picks up some straw and tosses it in.) Next, we add meat. I bought this from the butcher and I have no idea what kind of meat it is. (Sniffs package and makes a sour face.) Sometimes, the less you know the better. Now, we're going to mix this up... (Uses whisk.) ...and we're going to pour it into our cauldron and cook for about 30 minutes, or until most of it burns up.

HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to COOK.) What are you doing?

COOK: I'm making a delicious medieval meal. (Uses serving spoon.) Here. Taste.

HARRY: (Looks at the spoon and makes a disgusted face.) I think I'll pass.

COOK: Come on! It's medieval barnyard casserole.

HARRY: You're supposed to tell a tale, not host a cooking show.

COOK: I think I'd rather cook, if you don't mind.

HARRY: I need some help here! (CHAUCER ENTERS RIGHT with a drink cup from a fast food restaurant. To CHAUCER.) The Cook isn't telling a tale.

CHAUCER: You know, I started the Cook's Tale, but I got sidetracked.

COOK: (To AUDIENCE.) You know the Cook's Tale, but I got sidetracked.

HARRY: I only wrote 58 lines. It just wasn't working out.

CHAUCER: Okay. Get this junk out of here! (The STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT and helps the COOK remove the COOK'S ingredients from the desk and EXITS RIGHT with the COOK. To CHAUCER.) What pilgrims are left?

CHAUCER: Well, we have the Physician and the Lawyer.

HARRY: Let's see how fast we can deal with them. (The SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses in front of HARRY and CHAUCER. The
ACT TWO
Scene Four: The King Larry Show
HARRY and CHAUCER move the desk DOWN CENTER. They bring four chairs and place them in front of the desk à la television talk show. The STAGE MANAGER ENTERS RIGHT and addresses the AUDIENCE. HARRY EXITS RIGHT.

STAGE MANAGER: And now it's time for "The King Larry Show," with your host, King Larry and his lovable sidekick, Geoff Chaucer.

LARRY: (ENTERS LEFT and addresses the AUDIENCE à la talk show monologue.) So why are all the Kings of England named Edward or Henry or names like that? Why don't we have a king named Sparky? Now there's a monarch the people could really appreciate. When the Saxons tried to invade us, they'd be laughing so hard at King Sparky our guys could sneak up behind 'em. They'd be impaled before they knew what hit 'em. And what's with our current king, Richard? That guy's about as bright as a firefly. He never learned to read because they haven't invented scrolls with pop-ups. The guy's about as funny as bubonic plague... and about as deadly, too.

CHAUCER: (CHAUCER crosses to LARRY and interrupts him.) If our monarchs get much dumber we're going to have to start calling them by a new name—French!

CHAUCER: Uh... excuse me.

LARRY: I'm trying to do a talk show monologue here, Geoff. What is it?

CHAUCER: Well, King Richard doesn't have a sense of humor. But he does have a terrible temper. I thought you just might like to know.


CHAUCER: China never had a King Richard.

LARRY: (To CHAUCER.) How about Egypt?

CHAUCER: I don't think so.

LARRY: Work with me here, Geoff. I'm trying to save my neck. (To AUDIENCE.) Anyway, here in England we have a wonderful king named Richard. Just a delightful person. Couldn't ask for a better monarch if someone tortured you. Anyway, we have a great show today. Two of the Canterbury pilgrims. Who are they, Geoff?
CHAUCER: They are the Physician and the Man of Law.
LARRY: Let’s meet our guests. (Crosses to the desk and sits behind it.)
CHAUCER: (Crosses to the chairs and sits in the one closest to LARRY.)
From the traveling pilgrims, it’s the Physician. (PHYSICIAN ENTERS RIGHT, crosses to the desk, shakes hands with LARRY and CHAUCER. ALL sit.)
LARRY: So, you’re a physician. What is your specialty?
PHYSICIAN: That would be the bubonic plague, Larry.
LARRY: Wow. Pretty tough specialty.
PHYSICIAN: The plague kills millions of people every time there’s an outbreak. And this is the fourteenth century, Larry. There aren’t that many people to start with.
LARRY: What can you do for people once they have the plague?
PHYSICIAN: Nothing, Larry. Once they’re sick, I stay away from them.
LARRY: You mean you don’t help them?
PHYSICIAN: That is one nasty disease. It can kill a person in less than a day. I’d have to be nuts to be around somebody with plague.
LARRY: How can it be your specialty if you don’t treat the victims?
PHYSICIAN: I never thought about that, Larry. I really can’t say.
LARRY: Since you’re worthless as a doctor, how about telling us about this tale you’re sharing with the other pilgrims.
PHYSICIAN: Sure thing, Larry. My tale is about a lovely young lady who attracts the attention of a wicked old judge. The judge gets a lawyer named Claudius to declare that the young lady is the property of the judge. Rather than let the wicked old judge have his daughter, the young lady’s father chops off her head and takes it to the judge. The people of the town rise up and throw the judge in prison, where he slays himself. Just as Claudius is about to be hanged, the young lady’s father pleads for his life, and he’s spared.
CHAUCER: Would you call this a comedy?
PHYSICIAN: Not exactly.
LARRY: Hmm. I believe that’s one of the most repulsive tales I’ve ever heard.
PHYSICIAN: Then you haven’t heard the Miller’s tale.
LARRY: And I don’t intend to. Let’s meet our next guest and see if his tale is a little more cheerful. Ladies and gentlemen, The Man of Law. (LAWYER ENTERS RIGHT, crosses to the desk, shakes hands with the OTHERS and sits.) So tell us, have you won any big legal cases?
LAWYER: Not lately.
LARRY: How about in the recent past?
LAWYER: (Thinks.) Hmm. I'd have to say not in the recent past either.
LARRY: The distant past?
LAWYER: (Thinks.) Well... no. Not in the distant past either.
LARRY: Have you ever won a big legal case?
LAWYER: That would be another negative, Larry.
CHAUCER: What do you do for a living?
LAWYER: I lose legal cases and charge people money.
LARRY: Somehow, I'm not surprised. Tell us about your tale?
LAWYER: Well, it's a pretty good story. I'm hoping I can sell it to a big publishing company or the tabloids and get out of the legal profession. I'm not very good at it.
LARRY/CHAUCER/PHYSICIAN: We know.
LAWYER: My story is about a man who meets a woman who's the daughter of the Emperor of Rome... or maybe Paris. Anyway, the man's mother doesn't like the woman so she arranged a massacre at a dinner party they're giving, and everyone is killed except the man. So his mother sticks him out in the middle of the ocean in a boat without a paddle. Or maybe it's a lake. And maybe he has a paddle, but the current is so strong he can't row against it. Or maybe it sinks.
LARRY: It sounds like you really haven't thought this through.
LAWYER: Oh, I've thought it through. I just keep changing some of the details. I want him to drift around for a while, and I want some fights, and the guy's mother is really mean and she's always trying to kill people.
CHAUCER: Maybe you should try a different kind of story. Like one that makes sense.
LARRY: Or just stick to being a bad attorney.
MILLER: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to LARRY.) Hey, Larry! Let me tell my story. It's about these two dudes with a ladder...
LARRY: (Stands and steps in front of MILLER.) Wouldn't you know it?
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MILLER: (Stands and steps in front of MILLER.) Hey, Larry! Let me tell my story. It's about these two dudes with a ladder...
LARRY: (Stands and steps in front of MILLER.) Wouldn't you know it?
HARRY: [ENTERS RIGHT. To CHAUCER.] Why did you write about him?

CHAUCER: I wasn’t thinking.

HARRY: Keep writing.

CHAUCER: I think I’ll watch TV. [EXITS RIGHT. The SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT as before. The sign is changed to read “The Friar’s Tale.”]

HARRY: I went to Google and typed in “rude ingrate.” His name came up. [SIGN CHANGER grumbles and EXITS RIGHT.]

End of Scene Four

ACT TWO

Scene Five: The Friar’s Tale

HARRY crosses CENTER.

HARRY: Ladies and gentlemen, I’m proud to present a great comic talent… well, not really great. A man who was scheduled to open in Las Vegas next month… until someone saw his act. A standup comic who’s been doing the clubs for years… and still isn’t funny. Let’s give a warm Canterbury welcome to the Friar!

FRIAR: [ENTERS RIGHT and crosses CENTER. He is dressed like a washed up lounge lizard. HARRY EXITS RIGHT. [NOTE: Rim shot sound effects might be a nice touch here.]] Thanks, Harry. So, how about that Wife of Bath and her hang up on marriage? You know, marriage isn’t a word, it’s a sentence… a life sentence! Get it? I never knew what happiness was until I got married… now it’s too late! My father always told me, love is a beautiful dream… and marriage is the alarm clock! Listen, guys. Don’t ever marry for money… you can borrow it cheaper! My wife has a split personality… and I hate both of ’em!

WIFE OF BATH: [ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to FRIAR. Grabs him by the collar.] Maybe you’d better tell your story and leave the jokes to someone who’s funny!

FRIAR: [Nervous.] Say, that’s a very good idea.

WIFE OF BATH: (Threatens.) I’ll be watching you! [EXITS RIGHT.]

FRIAR: [To AUDIENCE.] You know, some people can’t take a joke. And some people are a joke.

WIFE OF BATH’S VOICE: (From OFF RIGHT.) I heard that!

FRIAR: My tale is called “The Devil and the Tax Man.” [TAX MAN ENTERS LEFT, sits at the desk, pulls out the tabloid and begins to read.] The Tax Man’s job was to collect taxes for the governor. The governor wasn’t the most honest guy in the world. And his Tax Collector was even worse.
FARMER: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the TAX MAN. Holds a summons in his hand.) Hey! Did you send me this? (Holds out the summons.)

TAX MAN: (Glances at it, then returns to the tabloid. Bored.) Yep.

FARMER: What does it mean?

TAX MAN: It means you owe a mess of back taxes.

FARMER: But I paid my taxes!

TAX MAN: Apparently you didn't pay all of them.

FARMER: Well, I say I did! I gave you two sacks of gold!

TAX MAN: Funny. I only remember one sack of gold.

FARMER: Your memory ain't so good!

TAX MAN: My memory doesn't have to be so good.

FARMER: What am I supposed to do?

TAX MAN: You are to appear in the magistrate's court.

FARMER: That magistrate will throw me in jail! He throws everybody in jail!

TAX MAN: Hmm. That kind of stinks for you, doesn't it?

FARMER: I can't go to jail! I got cows to milk and crops to harvest! If I have to spend time in jail I'll lose my farm!

TAX MAN: That is a problem.

FARMER: Isn't there something you can do?

TAX MAN: (Puts down the tabloid.) Funny you should ask. Now, for two bags of gold, I think I can get you out of it.

FARMER: Two bags of gold? That's perty near every cent I got!

TAX MAN: At least you'll still have your cows and your crops.

FARMER: (Resigned.) I'll have it for you by Tuesday.

TAX MAN: Better make that Monday. (FARMER EXITS LEFT.)

FRIAR: Of course, the magistrate wouldn't receive a penny of the Farmer's money. It all went to the Tax Man.

TAX MAN: (To AUDIENCE.) I can't help it. I have expensive tastes.

FRIAR: It just so happened that someone was watching the Tax Man and was impressed.

DEVIL: (ENTERS LEFT and crosses to the TAX MAN. She has the aura of a professional woman. TAX MAN jumps to his feet, impressed.) Good morning. My name is Devilla. (They shake hands.)

TAX MAN: It's a pleasure to meet you. I don't believe I've seen you around here. Where do you live?

DEVIL: My home is... (Coy.) ... south of here.

TAX MAN: There's nothing south of here but a big lake.
DEVIL: Not that kind of south.
TAX MAN: Well, if you don’t owe me money, what are you doing here?
Not that I’m not pleased to see you. You’re very… attractive.
DEVIL: I hold an attraction for a lot of people.
TAX MAN: What do you do, if it’s not too personal a question?
DEVIL: Like you, I am a tax collector.
TAX MAN: From the way you’re dressed, I’d say you are a very successful tax collector. [Flirts.] Maybe you could teach me some of your tax collecting strategies.
DEVIL: My strategy is simple. I take all I can get. Either I get it by trickery or by force.
TAX MAN: It’s the same with me. How about dinner? What kind of food do you like?
DEVIL: Oh, I’ll eat anything. But let’s put dinner on hold for now. I’d like to watch you at work. Who is the poorest citizen in your district?
TAX MAN: That would be the old widow who lives in a tiny little cottage at the edge of the swamp. She is so poor she has to eat dirt.
DEVIL: Do you think you could squeeze half a sack of gold out of her bony little hands?
TAX MAN: Probably not. But it’d be fun to try. (Takes a cell phone from his pocket and dials. On phone.) Hello? Would you please bring the old widow that lives in that tiny little cottage at the edge of the swamp in? She’s going to get an audit. (Hangs up phone.) Some days, I just love my work.

OLD WIDOW: (ENTERS LEFT and crosses to the TAX MAN.) What’s the idea dragging me in here for an audit? Do you think I have anything left after you took it all?
TAX MAN: I’m afraid you owe another half sack of gold.
OLD WIDOW: Are you crazy? I don’t have a half sack of gold! I don’t have anything! You took my cows! You took my chickens! You took my laptop computer! There’s nothing left!
TAX MAN: Well, there is that shack you live in.
OLD WIDOW: You’re going to take my shack?
TAX MAN: It’s hardly worth half a bag of gold. Let’s see. I believe you have a frying pan and if I’m not mistaken, you are hiding a radish under your kitchen floor.
OLD WIDOW: You would take my last radish?
TAX MAN: Well… yes. Life is tough, isn’t it? Tough for you anyway. After I get the frying pan and the radish, you’ll still owe me three-fifths of a sack of gold. I guess we’ll have to take your shack.
OLD WIDOW: I can't believe this! How can you be so greedy that you'd steal from an old widow?
TAX MAN: I'm just collecting what you owe.
OLD WIDOW: (Angry.) You lie! You cheat! You steal! I curse you! I curse you and all your ill-gotten gain to the devil!
TAX MAN: Like that'll do any good.
DEVIL: Wait a minute. She may have something there. (To the wings.) Does anyone have a copy of the Merriam Webster Dictionary of Demonic Curses? (STAGE MANAGER runs ON RIGHT with a dictionary, which he hands to DEVIL. She thumbs through the book. STAGE MANAGER EXITS RIGHT.) Let's see. Curse you and all your ill-gotten gain. Here it is. (To TAX MAN.) You're out of luck.
TAX MAN: What are you talking about?
DEVIL: She used a real curse. Had she said “ill-received” or “ill-taken” gain, you'd be off the hook. But “ill-gotten” is the real thing. You have to go with me.
TAX MAN: To dinner?
DEVIL: I'm afraid we won't be going to dinner.
TAX MAN: Where are we going?
DEVIL: To a place of pain and suffering. Do you know who I am?
TAX MAN: Well, you're a very attractive lady... with horns on your head.
DEVIL: And that doesn't tell you anything?
TAX MAN: You mean? You're kidding... aren't you? Listen, you made me do it! You made me audit this poor old widow!
DEVIL: I only showed up after you'd turned evil. You made the decision of your own free will.
TAX MAN: Oh, no! What's going to happen to me?
DEVIL: Exactly what you deserve. Come on, cowboy.
OLD WIDOW: What about me?
DEVIL: You get to keep your frying pan and your radish. (EXIT LEFT with TAX MAN.)
TAX MAN: (Protests as he's dragged OFF LEFT by DEVIL.) Wait! Leave me here! Please! There's a lot of evil I can do here!
OLD WIDOW: Oh, well. It's a good thing I like radishes. (EXIT LEFT.)
FRIAR: And with that, the Tax Man was taken to the place of eternal pain and suffering. And that is the end of my story.
HARRY: (ENTERS RIGHT TO AUDIENCE.) I would just like to say that opinions regarding persons employed in the tax collecting industry in no way reflect the views of anyone associated with this production.
except him. (Indicates FRIAR.) Thank you, Friar. You just offended everyone who works for the IRS. (Shoves FRIAR OFF RIGHT. SIGN CHANGER ENTERS RIGHT and crosses in front of HARRY.) Oh, no. (SIGN CHANGER removes the sign. The new sign reads “The End.” SIGN CHANGER crosses in front of HARRY.) If ignorance is bliss, you must be the happiest person alive. (SIGN CHANGER grunts and EXITS RIGHT.)

End of Scene Five

ACT TWO
Scene Six: The End

HARRY: And now we come to the part you’ve all been waiting for... the end!

MILLER: (ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to HARRY.) I never got to tell my tale! Come on, Harry! It’s not fair!

HARRY: I don’t want to hear your tale!

MILLER: (Drops to his knees.) Please, Harry! Please let me tell my story!

HARRY: (Frustrated.) Okay! Tell your story! Ruin a perfectly good evening for a lot of nice people! Embarrass everyone who worked so hard to make this a great theatrical experience! (Pulls MILLER to his feet and pushes him CENTER.) Go! Speak! Make a fool of yourself!

MILLER: Thanks, Harry. You won’t regret this. (Looks at the sign.) What about the sign?

HARRY: What sign?

MILLER: “The Miller’s Tale.” Everybody else got a sign. (Points to the easel.)

HARRY: Just tell your tale!

MILLER: Okay. You’re gonna love it. There were two guys... (Looks out into the AUDIENCE and FREEZES.)

HARRY: Well?

MILLER: Uh... I’ve got a little problem here. (Crosses to HARRY and whispers to him. HARRY crosses DOWNSTAGE and looks out into the AUDIENCE.)

HARRY: So, that’s your mother.

MILLER: (Embarrassed.) Yep.

HARRY: Are you going to tell your tale?

MILLER: No.

HARRY: Why not?

MILLER: She wouldn’t like it.
HARRY: I'm not surprised. With that in mind, I believe it's time to wrap things up.

CHAUCER: (ENTERS RIGHT and quickly crosses to HARRY.) Wait! I haven't finished "The Canterbury Tales" yet!

HARRY: How many tales did you plan to write?

CHAUCER: A hundred and twenty.

HARRY: How many have you actually written?

CHAUCER: (Embarrassed.) I don't know. A couple dozen.

HARRY: At the rate you're going it'll take you centuries to write 120 tales.

CHAUCER: It is a pretty big task.

HARRY: Why don't you just send your pilgrims back home. Especially the Miller.

CHAUCER: But they haven't been to Canterbury yet!

HARRY: Look, Geoff. We have some basic issues here. The entire journey from Southwark to Canterbury would only take a couple of days at the most. You have enough pilgrims and tales to make four or five trips to and from Canterbury.

CHAUCER: Maybe if they walked really slowly ...

HARRY: Most of us were part of the emerging middle class. We rode horses.

CHAUCER: Oh. What else?

HARRY: Your premise is good. The journey not only gives a backdrop for the telling of the tales, but the use of prologues to each tale gives a strong sense of character to each of the pilgrims. This makes your "Canterbury Tales" a strong literary work for its time, but it's not original.

CHAUCER: What do you mean it's not original? Of course it's original! I made it up, didn't I?

HARRY: It bears a striking resemblance to another literary work called "The Decameron."

CHAUCER: (Guilty.) Uh... never heard of it.

HARRY: A collection of 100 tales written by Giovanni Boccaccio 35 years before you began your work. You even lifted some of your pilgrim's tales from "The Decameron."

CHAUCER: That's just your opinion.

HARRY: But don't worry—unfinished, your work will stand as one of the early literary classics of antiquity. For centuries "The Canterbury Tales" will be studied, analyzed and dissected by literary scholars. (CHAUCER smiles.) It will also be read by students, who will find it boring and very hard to read. (CHAUCER frowns.) It
will be turned into stage plays, movies and musicals. Let's face it, Geoff, you are one of the greatest literary forces to precede Shakespeare.

CHAUCER. Who do people like better? Me or Shakespeare?

HARRY. They like Shakespeare better. But don't feel bad. You've earned your place in history. Whether you deserve it or not is another matter.

CHAUCER. Do I make a lot of money?

HARRY. No.

CHAUCER. Okay. Let's call it quits and send the pilgrims back where they came from. (PILGRIMS ENTER with their luggage. They stand UPSTAGE.)

HARRY. (To PILGRIMS.) Ladies and gentlemen... and the Miller. It's time to call it quits. You can go home. (PILGRIMS moan in disappointment.)

WIFE OF BATH. But we haven't been to Canterbury yet!

HARRY. Sorry. The writer will work until the end of his life, but he will never finish the tales.

FRIAR. Well, that's not fair! What are we supposed to do?

HARRY. Go back where you came from.

WIFE OF BATH. But we're fictitious!

HARRY. Then you can just live forever on the pages of literary history. (BORING SCHOLAR ENTERS RIGHT and crosses to the podium.) Oh, no.

BORING SCHOLAR. And now, it's my turn. I shall read "The Canterbury Tales" from beginning to end in my most expressionless voice.

CHAUCER. I'm going out for Chinese food. Anyone want to go with me?

PILGRIMS. Yeah! (CHAUCER and PILGRIMS EXIT RIGHT.)

HARRY. I could go back to my hotel... and my wife... hhm, I think I'll go for Chinese. (EXITS RIGHT.)

BORING SCHOLAR. Now that I have your undivided attention, I shall begin my long, ponderous reading of Chaucer's great work. (Clears throat. Recites.) "Who that April with his shoures soote..."

STAGE MANAGER. (ENTERS RIGHT.) Okay! Blackout!

BORING SCHOLAR. Wait! (BLACKOUT. CURTAIN FALLS.)

END OF PLAY
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Easel, 13 signs with a scene name on each one, small desk, quill pen, legal pad, tabloid, bell, chair, podium, end table, pitcher of water, glass, bag of gold in desk.

BROUGHT ON:
ACT ONE, Scene One:
Briefcase, notes (BORING SCHOLAR)

ACT ONE, Scene Two:
Luggage (PILGRIMS)
Bagel, coffee cup (CHAUCER)

ACT ONE, Scene Three:
Halloween half mask, coin (ARCITE)
Coconut halves (COCONUT GUYS)
Handkerchief (EMELYE, KNIGHT)
Starbucks cup (CHAUCER)

ACT ONE, Scene Four:
Signs, each naming the character wearing it (SINS)
Bag of Doritos (GLUTTONY)
Watch (HARRY)

ACT ONE, Scene Five:
Legal pad and quill (CHAUCER)
DVD, instruction manual, stack of papers (WIFE OF BATH)
Kazoos (KAZOO PLAYERS)

ACT ONE, Scene Six:
Three podiums with names on them (MANDY, BOB, FRANKIE)
Kazoos (KAZOO PLAYERS)
Sack of coins (STAGE MANAGER)
Sack containing a coin (THIEF 2)
Sack containing a coin and a bottle (THIEF 1)
Sack containing a coin pouch and a cell phone, spork (THIEF 3)
Two bottles and a bag of Doritos (STAGE MANAGER)

ACT ONE, Scene Seven:
Phone directories (BACKUP BROTHERS)

ACT TWO, Scene One:
Pizza box, soft drink (CHAUCER)

ACT TWO, Scene Two:
Phone directories (BACKUP BROTHERS)
Cell phone (PERTELOTE)

ACT TWO, Scene Three:
Headphones (STAGE MANAGER)
Mixing bowl, bag of cornmeal, pitcher of water, bundle of weeds, bottle of soda, small bundle of straw, package of meat, whistle, serving spoon (STAGEHANDS)

For preview only
SOUND EFFECTS

Dragnet riff

COSTUMES

Costumes should be over the top. BORING SCHOLAR should wear a stuffy suit, maybe with dust or chalk on it. HARRY should look like an innkeeper with an apron. STAGE MANAGER should have a headset and wear dark clothing. SIGN CHANGER should have work clothes. CHAUCER should look like a typical, privileged writer of the Middle Ages. PILGRIMS should dress according to the time period and their profession with the following exceptions—the KNIGHT should be dressed like ELVIS, THESEUS like a southern sheriff, and EMELYE, ARCITE and PALAMON like present-day Southerners. All other characters can dress appropriately for their part (ANIMALS, QUEEN, etc.). The DEVIL should be dressed as a professional woman with horns.
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