

# **THE CANTERBURY TALES**

Episode 1

by Clayton Emery

Adapted from THE CANTERBURY TALES by Geoffrey Chaucer,  
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FADE IN

EXT. ON THE ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Southern England, 1475 AD, Spring

A party of PILGRIMS -- knights, yeoman, priests, nuns, mechanics -- ride along a dusty road.

It's late and they're tired. No one is talking much...

... Except CHAUCER, riding a donkey.

Chaucer is a short portly guy, middle-aged, with a pointed beard. He wears semi-fancy clothes.

As if talking to himself, he recites airily...

CHAUCER

(in Middle English)

*Whan that Aprill with his shoures  
soote / The droghte of March hath  
perced to the roote / And bathed  
every veyne in swich licour / Of  
which engendered is the flour --*

He stops, looks at CAMERA.

CHAUCER

(to camera)

Oh, hello. You look glazed... Ah,  
you're used to Modern English.

(to Pilgrims)

Everyone, back to places.

PILGRIMS grumble and moan. But turn their mounts around,  
ride back a ways.

Camera follows them, jiggling from stumbling in tall grass  
and vines by the road.

KNIGHT

Were we -- here?

Chaucer nods. Pilgrims turn around, start over, riding along.

CHAUCER

To start again... When April with  
its showers sweet / The drought of  
March pierces to the feet / And bathes  
every leaf in such liquor / That

(MORE)

CHAUCE (CONT'D)

truth is seen in every flower. /  
 When the West Wind too with its sweet  
 breath / Inspires in every holt and  
 heath / The tender crops, and the  
 young Sun / Has half through the Ram  
 his course run. / And small birds  
 sing melodies / And sleep by night  
 with open eyes. / So Nature sets  
 folk to find their courage / And  
 long to go on a pilgrimage.

MILLER and COOK, jolly guys, applaud. REEVE slow-claps.

Unperturbed, Chaucer bows to all three.

He continues to talk to Camera.

CHAUCE

So. Who are we, and what do we here?  
 We're pilgrims, bound for the  
 cathedral in Canterbury, a holy shrine  
 where blessed Saint Thomas Becket --

WIFE OF BATH

Boooo.

CHAUCE

-- Was assassinated. A pilgrimage  
 is a holy journey, you see, and makes  
 one a better person.

REEVE

(coughs)  
 Bullshit!

CHAUCE

Anyone can make a pilgrimage. We  
 should really travel to Jerusalem,  
 but that's so far. Canterbury is a  
 pleasant ride, and it's a beautiful  
 spring day. And it beats shuffling  
 papers or mucking cows.

Miller hoists a wine skin and drinks.

MILLER

I'll drink to that.

CHAUCE

I, your humble narrator, am Geoffrey  
 Chaucer. A scribbler and teller of  
 tales.

(MORE)

CHAUCER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Here they call me "The Manciple",  
but don't let on.

(normal voice)

And right at home. For the best  
part of pilgrimages, in my humble  
opinion, are the tales. With lots  
of time on the road, we can share  
stories. Tales of adventure...

FLASH FORWARD: From the Knight's Tale, Palamon and Arcite  
joust in an arena. They ride, clash, tumble off horses,  
jump up, and fight with swords.

CHAUCER (V.O.)

Tales of high romance...

FLASH FORWARD: From the Knight's Tale, in a garden, Palamon  
woos Emily. Then, in a forest, Arcite also woos Emily.

CHAUCER (V.O.)

Tales of low romance...

FLASH FORWARD: From the Miller's Tale, in a kitchen, Nicholas  
grabs saucy Alison and they screw like rabbits on a table.

CHAUCER (V.O.)

Tales of -- Well, I'm not sure what.

FLASH FORWARD: From the drunken Cook's Tale, hapless Tom  
wears a sheep costume between two wives. Both slap him.

CHAUCER

Tales of derring-do. And terror.  
Treachery. Sacrifice. Faith.  
Ghosts, witches, genies, flying  
horses, giant fish. Tales of life,  
death, love, and sorrow and everything  
in between. For these are -- The  
Canterbury Tales!

TITLE OVER

## **The Canterbury Tales**

Chaucer waves a hand at the company.

CHAUCER

You can collect a vast variety of  
stories, you see, because a pilgrimage  
attracts all kinds. Rich, poor,  
young, old, humble, noble --

(beat)

For example. Leading us is the  
Knight.

CAMERA PANS to the Knight leading the troupe.

Knight is older, gray, noble. His armor is rusted and tabard  
stained. He proudly carries a lance with pennant.

CHAUCER

The very soul of chivalry.  
Trustworthy, generous, dedicated.  
He's made war in Alexandria, Prussia,  
Morocco, and more, all for God.

Chaucer points forward.

CHAUCER

A Knight, of course, needs a squire,  
in this case, his son --

CAMERA PANS to one side of Knight. Not there. The other  
side. Not there either.

Chaucer whistles, points way back in line.

CAMERA PANS to find...

... SQUIRE chats up blushing SECOND NUN.

Squire is 20, handsome, with curly hair, in fine clothes  
embroidered with bright flowers. He carries a lute.

Second Nun, a novice, is 16 in a black habit and wimple.

CHAUCER

Our squire. A lusty bachelor, a  
cavalryman, a fighter. And he can  
sing like a nightingale.

Squire laughs. Second Nun blushes and whispers. Squire  
swings his lute to play --

-- FIRST NUN kicks his horse. It jolts, trots.

Second Nun withers under glare from First Nun.

CHAU CER

Ah, passion... We've also a Yeoman,  
a Cook, a Miller, a Reeve, a Merchant,  
a Ship's Captain --

KNIGHT

Sirrah!

CHAU CER

But you'll meet them all eventually.  
For now, let's have a drink.

Pilgrims cheer.

EXT. TABARD INN - EVENING

Tabard Inn is a prosperous place along a main road. There are tables inside and out under an arbor. The sign post is painted with a tabard (knight's surcoat).

LOCALS and TRAVELERS drink, chat.

Farther down is the Bell Inn. They share a courtyard.

Pilgrims dismount, water horses, stretch, use the privy.

HARRY BAILEY, a big jolly innkeeper, greets them. He always speaks in rhymed couplets.

Harry helps people dismount, carries bags, makes jokes.

Miller and Cook rush for beer inside.

Chaucer dismounts stiffly, from piles.

CHAU CER

Our host is Harry Bailey. His vittles  
are the best, his wine the strongest.  
He's bold of speech, and wise, and  
well-mannered, fit to marshal a hall.  
(beat)  
You'll see a lot of Harry.

NIGHT, AFTER SUPPER

A fire pit gives light. Pilgrims sit at table, push plates away, full and content. Drink slowly.

Harry collects coins. Priest pays for First and Second Nun. Cook argues, Harry grabs his scruff, Cook pays. Wife of Bath wipes her lips daintily.

Happy, Harry addresses the company.

HARRY

Now, lords and ladies, I say to thee --

Harry freezes, as does everyone else. Time has stopped.

Chaucer walks up to Harry and talks to Camera.

CHAUCEUR

(to Camera)

But first, a simple rule: Whoever  
tells a story must repeat it as  
closely as possible. Every - single -  
word.

As he talks, Chaucer steps O-S to a small table...

... Where an ink-stained COPYIST scribbles with a quill pen  
on parchment. A mug of beer is full.

Chaucer looms over Copyist, who keeps his head down.

CHAUCEUR

The teller, or copyist, must pay  
attention. Refrain from making things  
up, or finding new words, lest he  
recount lies.

Chaucer swipes Copyist's mug of beer, breaking his heart.

Chaucer walks back to Harry, who's still frozen.

CHAUCEUR

My wit is short, as you can see.  
Let Harry talk.

Chaucer snaps. Harry un-freezes. Chaucer drinks beer.

HARRY

-- You are all right welcome by me /  
For never I've seen so merry a  
company. / You go to Canterbury,  
God give you success / May you find  
reward from the martyr we bless. /  
I know well too, as you ride along /  
You'll share many a story and many a  
song / So, for amusement, I propose  
a game / To bring you pleasure, if  
all of a same. / By the soul of my  
father, who is now dead / Unless you  
be merry, I will give you my head!  
/ Hold up your hands, if you'll play  
along / Ah, there you go. That didn't  
take long.

Pilgrims raise hands in agreement. Harry claps hands.

HARRY

Lordlings, as you ride, to make the  
way short / Each one shall tell two  
tales, as if at court. / Two tales  
each to Canterbury / And two more  
tales as homeward-be. / Whosoever  
tells the best tale / Shall be treated  
to sup' and my finest ale. / And to  
make you all the more merry / I will  
ride too and keep thee company. /  
And be thy guide, and the stories'  
judge / Do you agree, and never  
begudge?

Pilgrims laugh and applaud, and lift mugs and cheer.

Harry pours more wine and beer.

CHAUCEUR

(rhyming)

The game was granted / And we all  
oaths swore / He would be our governor  
/ And ably keep the storied score --  
(stops rhyming)  
And now he's got me doing it.

Chaucer would drink, but he's dry. He hurries for more.

CHAUCEUR

Um... See you in the morning.

MORNING

The Inn is quiet, but a few people stir.

Harry comes out and wakes everyone with a rooster crow.

HARRY

(gives ROOSTER CROW)

Come, my little flock / Swiftly must  
ye walk!

Pilgrims saddle and mount, some wide awake, some half asleep.

Squire and Second Nun avoid glances, keeping a secret. First  
Nun suspects and confers with Wife of Bath.

Knight catches Squire by the ear to tend their horses.

Miller and Cook are already drunk. Miller boosts Cook to  
the saddle -- and clear over the horse to crash on the ground.

They get sorted and ride. Chaucer is hung over.

The party rides out of sight. Tabard WORKERS tend chores.



A shutter slams open. A MAID yells.

TABARD MAID  
Mercy! God save us! Fetch the  
Sheriff! There's been a murder!

EXT. ON THE ROAD - MORNING

The company comes to a stream. Pause to let horses drink.

HARRY  
Lordlings, listen, if you please. /  
You recall our bet, and we all agreed.  
/ Let's see then, who tells the first  
tale / As ever I may drink wine or  
ale.

Harry pulls out wooden tallies: one is shorter.

But drunken Cook jumps in.

COOK  
(drunk)  
I'll tell a tale, one you'll all  
love!

HARRY  
Hold, Sir Cook, and wait your turn.  
/ Wouldst our agreement you already  
spurn?

Cook launches into his story anyway.

#### TITLE OVER

#### THE COOK'S TALE

INT. STAGE

A crappy story told by a drunkard warrants a crappy set.

A warped stage has a tattered canvas backdrop. Painted on  
it, as if by a drunk, is a crooked village.

TOM, our hero, walks on stage and waits. Frowns at the set.

Tom wears peasant clothing and a hat.

COOK (V.O.)  
Once there was a man. Named -- Tom.

"TOM >-->" is now painted on the backdrop. Tom bows.

COOK (V.O.)  
No. Perkin.

First name is lined out. Below is painted "PERKIN >-->."  
Tom looks uncertain, but bows again.

COOK (V.O.)  
No, Tom.

Both names are slashed out. Tom shrugs: Whatever.

COOK (V.O.)  
Tom was a cook.

News to Tom, but OK. Someone O-S lobs him an apron and a  
chef's hat. He starts to put them on --

COOK  
No, a shepherd.

The backdrop is repainted as a sloppy meadow. There are two  
crappy sheep standees. One falls flat: splat.

Someone O-S lobs Tom a shepherd's crook. He's bewildered.

COOK (V.O.)  
No, a sheep. Shep -- Sheep.

Someone O-S lobs him a sheep costume. Tom dons it.

COOK (V.O.)  
Tha's it. Uh... He had a wife  
named... Gelsey.

GELSEY, a jolly wife, walks to Tom's side. Wonders why he's  
dressed as a sheep.

COOK (V.O.)  
And another wife named... something.

UNNAMED WIFE, also jolly, walks to Tom's opposite side.

But both wives are surprised and incensed.

Whispering, then louder, they berate Tom and each other.

Tom goes to speak, but both wives slap him --

-- And jump at a loud splash.

END COOK'S TALE

BACK AT THE STREAM

Drunk, Cook fell off his horse into the stream.

Miller, also drunk, applauds.

Pilgrims drag Cook out of the stream before he drowns.

Harry holds the tallies in his fist.

HARRY

Thus fall rebels, by the way. / Now  
draw your straws, before we assay.

Pilgrims draw tallies from Harry's fist.

But sneaky Harry pulls a sleight-of-hand because...

... The Knight draws the short tally. Pilgrims applaud.

Chaucer, even hung over, sees the trick.

CHAUCEUR

Whether by chance, or destiny, or --  
luck, the draw fell to the knight.  
Well and good. His tale is a famous  
one. So famous, it was adapted and  
performed in the Globe Theater by no  
less than --

(dramatic pause)

John Fletcher and William Shakespeare.

(beat)

Yeah, I never heard of them either.

Chaucer bows to Knight, who takes over storytelling.

KNIGHT

In God's name, I must begin the game.  
Now let us ride, and listen as I  
name...

TITLE OVERTHE KNIGHT'S TALE

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - EVENING

A battlefield supposedly in Ancient Greece, but keep everything medieval.

Smoke rolls in clouds as evening settles. Dead knights, broken weapons, and dead and wounded horses are scattered.

Battle sounds all around: galloping, clashing, horse screams, a weak bugle, men crying "Mercy!"

PALAMON and ARCITE stagger, blunder into each other.

Palamon is 21, tall, handsome, a lover. Sword and shield.

Arcite is 21, short but tough, a fighter. Battle axe.

Both wear battered leather armor. Helmets are gone.

Both wear tattered surcoats. Palamon has a unicorn. Arcite has crossed axes. Same colors from the same house.

Palamon is wounded in the leg. Arcite has a wounded arm.

PALAMON

Cousin.

ARCITE

Cousin.

They move back to back for protection. Watch the smoke and encroaching darkness.

PALAMON

Did we win or lose?

ARCITE

We fought like lions. That's enough.

Galloping comes closer. Bad news.

ARCITE

Something to take to our graves.

PALAMON

Arcite, you've two good legs. Run while you can. I'll hold them off.

ARCITE

And leave you, Palamon? For shame.

With a rush, Knights charge from all sides, howling.

PALAMON

For Venus!

ARCITE

For Mars!

And suddenly, looming huge and ghostly, are VENUS, goddess of love, and MARS, red god of war.

The two gods watch, nodding in approval as...

... Palamon and Arcite hurl themselves at charging Knights. But exhausted and wounded, they're cut down.

They fall together, brothers in arms.

Mars, ghostly, arranges their weapons on their chests.

Venus, ghostly, clasps the two friend's hands together.

LATER, ON ANOTHER PART OF THE BATTLEFIELD

Bodies are heaped like garbage.

Knights and Soldiers drag more bodies, by hand or horse, and pitch the bodies on the pile.

Men drag in Palamon and Arcite, bloodied and thought dead, and toss them on the heap.

BEGGARS and TOWNSFOLK watch the pile and wait their chance.

King CREON, the loser, is dragged in, arms bound, noose around his neck. A Knight yanks him to his knees.

CREON is King of Thebes. Old, sour, grizzled, with a gold tiara-crown. Fine armor is bloodied and tattered.

THESEUS rides in, dismounts, approaches the prisoner.

Duke Theseus is Governor of Athens. 50, resolute, unbending, in fine clothes and armor.

BODYGUARDS accompany him. His banner is a flag painted with the god Mars. Below hangs a pennon with a minotaur.

THESEUS

So, Creon, are you reduced. Wilt thou ask why?

CREON

(sarcastic)

I have sinned?

THESEUS

More than any man in living memory.  
Women in black besieged my city,  
Creon. Crying and lamenting and  
begging for justice. You warred  
against King Cappaneus --

CREON

And crushed him and his army.

THESEUS

Indeed. But too you crushed your  
dignity. You dishonored the dead,  
Creon. You threw their bodies on a  
tass, same as this one --

Theseus waves at the heap of bodies.

THESEUS

Husbands, sons, brothers, lovers.  
You heaped them in a midden and left  
them to rot, to be eaten by hounds.

CREON

A tribute to Creon's war-making.

THESEUS

And so made victims of their families,  
denied the chance to say farewell  
and inter their beloved. A man  
without honor belongs in Hell, Creon.

CREON

So send me hence and spare me your  
mawkish sentiment.

Furious, Theseus draws his sword and chops off Creon's head.

THESEUS

As he insulted others in life, so  
shall he suffer in death.

Theseus signals. Soldiers toss Creon's body and head on the  
pile.

A Bodyguard points to waiting Beggars and Townsfolk.

THESEUS BODYGUARD

Milord?

Theseus nods and walks away.

Bodyguard signals: Go. Beggars and Townsfolk rush to loot  
the pile of bodies.

They strip bodies of boots, weapons, armor, coin purses.  
Scrabble and fight over loot.

One Beggar yanks down Palamon and Arcite. Their hands are  
clasped, so they tumble together.

Arcite groans. Looters fall back in shock.

Bodyguard runs up, checks. Both are alive.

THESEUS BODYGUARD  
Milord! Duke Theseus!

Theseus returns, sees Palamon and Arcite are alive.

THESEUS BODYGUARD  
Look at their colors, milord.

THESEUS  
Huh. Brothers or cousins of the  
royal house...  
(thinks)  
Noble blood will avail them naught.  
Transport them to Athens and lock  
them in the tower. No ransom shall  
I accept.

THESEUS BODYGUARD  
No ransom, sire?

THESEUS  
They fought for Creon, so lived  
without honor. They'll die so,  
prisoners evermore.

Theseus walks off. Soldiers lift Palamon and Arcite onto  
litters. But Bodyguard must pry their hands apart.

They're carried off the battlefield. Looters resume looting.

Mars and Venus watch the friends carried off, then fade away.

Chaucer walks into the scene. Grimaces at looters. Looks  
at Palamon and Arcite being hauled away.

CHAUCEUR  
(to Camera)  
Nasty business, war. But crueler  
the peace by this hand. To ransom  
prisoners is a common practice, a  
money-maker. But to lock boys up  
for life? Civilized folk don't do  
that.

Shaking his head, Chaucer walks off.

INT. TOWER CELL - DAY

May. A dismal cell in the top of a stone tower.

Palamon and Arcite languish. They're healed but scarred, bearded and haggard, in rags and manacles.

Palamon wanders from window to window. Arcite sleeps.

SHOT: Outside, past iron bars, a glorious countryside of palace, town, fields, orchards, is aglow in May.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

Thus passed day by day, year after  
year. Palamon and Arcite rotted in  
their cell.

(beat)

Until it befell, one morning in May...

Outside, a girl sings.

Curious, Palamon goes to a window overlooking a garden.

SHOT: EMILY picks flowers, sings beautifully to herself. Sunshine makes her glow like an angel.

Emily is 17, with a long blonde braid, in a beautiful gown.

Palamon weeps at her beauty. Drops to his knees and prays.

PALAMON

(prays)

Venus, if it be thy will, help me  
escape from this prison that I might  
meet you, transfigured there in that  
garden.

Arcite wakes. Finds Palamon weeping.

ARCITE

Cousin, have patience. Fortune has  
given us this imprisonment as a --  
test. We must endure it.

PALAMON

Cousin, I am hurt not by prison, but  
through the heart. See the lady.  
Is she woman or goddess?

Arcite looks, sees Emily. He's smitten too.

Angry, Palamon jerks Arcite from the window.



PALAMON

T'is no great honor to be a traitor.

(Huh?)

We are sworn by blood oath.

And now you dare to love my lady,  
whom I shall serve until my heart  
dies? Thou art a false knight.

Arcite gets angry.

ARCITE

False? You didn't know if she be a  
lady or a goddess. I can love her  
too. "Who shall give a lover a law?"

SHOT: Emily leaves the garden with her gathered flowers.

PALAMON

We are like the two hounds who strove  
for a bone only to see a kite snatch  
it away.

ARCITE

Never even, for we are imprisoned,  
living but dead. So love her too,  
if it please thee.

PALAMON

I love her and always shall.

ARCITE

And each of us must take our chance.

The two turn away, their friendship shattered.

DAYS LATER

Arcite dawdles at the window, hoping for a glimpse of Emily.

Palamon lingers at a different window, staring out.

SHOT: Down in the garden, Theseus enters with PERRO.

Perro is an older man, a visiting Duke.

Theseus and Perro are old friends, and talk (inaudibly) as  
they walk the garden.

Arcite gawks. Rips a rag, waves it out the window.

SHOT, INAUDIBLE: In the garden, Perro sees the waving rag.  
Who's locked up? Theseus frowns: A couple of knights. Perro:  
Their names? Theseus: Palamon and Arcite, of a royal family.  
Perro, astonished: Arcite? Perro drags Theseus indoors.

Arcite cranes at the window.

SOON

Door lock clacks. GUARD waves to Arcite.

With a last look at Palamon, who's bewildered, Arcite exits.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

Theseus sits his throne. Perro, a guest, sits beside.

COURTIERS linger for news. Gossip, laugh quietly. Emily is among them. Hush as...

Guard leads Arcite in. Filthy, manacled, he blinks. Sees Emily but looks away.

Perro clasps his shoulders.

PERRO  
Arcite. As I live and breathe. We  
thought you dead.

Having suffered so long, Arcite is dazed, fuddled.

ARCITE  
Duke Perro... Are you a dream?

PERRO  
(laughs)  
T'is a dream to see you. Your family  
pines for you. Come home with me --

Arcite looks at Emily. The girl has no clue he loves her.

ARCITE  
Away -- from here?

THESEUS  
(clears throat)  
Perro, old friend, you must know,  
Arcite supported Creon, the cruelest  
man who ever walked the Grecian Isles.  
He is imprisoned with no hope of  
ransom.

PERRO  
Nay, this cannot be. I dandled Arcite  
on my knee. He is like a son. I  
cannot leave him here to languish.

Theseus squirms.

THESEUS

Perro, brother-in-arms. Know that we are sworn. I wouldst dive into Hell to fetch thee forth. But I too swore an oath to punish this man.

PERRO

And so he has been.

ARCITE

(looking at Emily)

And so I am.

PERRO

I must take him home, Theseus. I cannot return without him.

Theseus ponders, decides.

THESEUS

Arcite, of the royal house of Thebes. You are here under pain of death. Yet I cannot deny my friend. Thus I proclaim you are free to go, wherever you wish.

(beat)

Except Athens. If ever in your life you return to this country, with a sword you shall lose your head.

Perro nods graciously and leads Arcite away.

PERRO

Oh, the feast your family will host. But I say, when you went to war, what became of that other fellow, your boon companion?

Arcite gets one last look at Emily, then turns away.

ARCITE

Palamon? He's in paradise.

INT. TOWER CELL - DAY

Palamon languishes at the window as...

... Out in the harbor, a ship sets sail.

Palamon walks to the other window, sees...

Emily works in the garden, singing to herself.

EXT. SHIP - DAY

Arcite, still in rags but no manacles, stands at the stern and watches the city drop below the horizon.

He feels no joy.

EXT. STREET ON THE HARBOR - DAY

Chaucer walks along, eating an apple.

He points at the castle tower and the departing ship.

CHAUCER

(to Camera)

You lovers all, I pose a riddle.  
Who fares worse, Arcite or Palamon?  
One sees his lady every day, but  
dwells in prison. The other may  
walk where he will, but see his lady  
ne'er again. Who suffers more? You  
be the judge.

EXT. VARIOUS

Arcite is a free man. Cleaned up, new clothes, but still lean and scarred. And despondent.

MONTAGE

>> By night, unable to sleep, Arcite walks the harbor alone. PARTY PEOPLE pass with torches and bottles. One clasps Arcite's hand to join, but he pulls away and keeps walking.

>> By day, he walks miles through fields. Lambs gambol. A SHEPHERD waves a wineskin to join in. Arcite walks on.

>> One evening, he trudges along a forest's edge. Meets a GOOSE GIRL. She smiles, but he ignores her and trudges on.

Finally he slumps on a stump, just sits. And falls asleep.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

Arcite dreams of flashbacks:

>> He and Palamon fight side by side.

>> Bloodied but happy to be alive, they pour beer over each other's heads, laugh.

>> Thrown into the tower cell, they still clasp hands in eternal friendship.

>> Then, one dark day, they both see Emily and break their friendship.

Light glows in his dream, "wakes" him.

Arcite sits a stump. It's night, but a golden glow...

Is MERCURY in robe and winged helmet, with his caduceus (winged staff) of healing. The god smiles.

Arcite rises. Mercury takes his hand, leads him to...

HARBOR

... Where Mercury points his staff out to sea.

A sizzling light flares from the staff, shooting out to sea, over the horizon.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

Arcite wakes. He's at the harbor, no idea how he got here.

Sees his reflection in a puddle. Touches his face. He looks different than he imagined.

He grows excited.

ARCITE

Mercury, I thank thee. I shall see  
my lady. For once in her presence,  
I care not if I die.

Docked nearby is a ship loading by torchlight. Short-handed, a CAPTAIN yells at exasperated SAILORS.

Arcite runs to the Captain.

EXT. STREET ON THE HARBOR - DAY

The ship docks. Sailors tie up.

Arcite is the first passenger off. He wears a laborer's clothes and old hat, a beard, stained hands.

Slinging a bag, he heads for the castle.

## CASTLE GATE

Arcite presents himself to a GUARD, offering to work.

Guard admits him, points him to someone inside.

## SOON, IN THE GARDEN

GARDENER sets Arcite to weeding.

Emily enters the garden to pick herbs. She smiles but doesn't recognize him, goes about her work.

Arcite weeds, just happy to be near her. But his gaze...

... PANS UP the wall to...

## INT. TOWER CELL

Palamon still languishes at the window, watching Emily.

Sees Arcite weeding, looking up. Palamon wonders if he's familiar, shakes it off: No.

## ONE NIGHT

Palamon sleeps. Jerks awake as --

Door lock clacks. Door opens, but no one enters.

PALAMON

Who's there?

JENNY (O.S.)

Shh!

JENNY is a kitchen maid, young and frightened.

With jingling keys she unlocks Palamon's manacles. She carries a satchel.

JENNY

Hush, sirrah, for our lives.

PALAMON

Who are you? Where is the jailer?

JENNY

He sleeps like the dead, sir. We gave him spiced wine laced with opium. Now come, quickly.

Palamon follows her out.

## CASTLE STAIRS

They creep by candlelight. Jenny gives him the satchel.

PALAMON

Who is "we"? Why free me?

JENNY

A friend, sir, would see you set free.

PALAMON

I have no friends in Athens.

JENNY

One, sir, though I dare not speak his name. Many would free you if we dared. T'is not mete such a fine gentleman rot behind bars.

PALAMON

How know you I am a fine anything?

JENNY

We see you, sir, pining at the window, day after day. Pining for love. T'is a wondrous thing, is it not, that raises us above the animals?

PALAMON

Wouldst I'd been born a dumb beast fit only for slaughter ere I heard of love, but Saturn is our maker and our guide.

## OUTSIDE DOOR

Jenny unbolts the door. It leads outside.

JENNY

Go, sir, please. There is money in the sack for passage. Return to Thebes and have a happy life.

She pushes him out the door and bolts it shut.

## OUTSIDE, IN THE DARK

Palamon breathes free air. Looks up at the castle.

PALAMON

Free. And yet not. "Return to Thebes." Alas. It cannot be.

Shouldering his satchel, Palamon moves off in the dark.

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

A sunny forest glade. Fallen branches lie around.

Palamon sleeps against a tree, wrapped in a cloak.

A DONKEY brays. Palamon jerks awake. Blinks. Oh, yes, he's free!

Arcite enters the glade, leading a donkey with a basket.

Palamon hides, watches. Does he recognize this man?

Arcite picks up firewood, puts in the basket.

ARCITE

(to donkey)

Alas, poor donkey, luckier than I.  
For you wear your given name, and I  
must be called by a false one. Alas,  
Mars, to cast me and poor Palamon  
upon this shore. And alas, Juno, to  
cast the fiery dart into my heart, a  
captive of fair Emily --

Palamon comes out of hiding.

PALAMON

Arcite, false, wicked traitor. Still  
you love my lady. I shall be dead  
or you shall die, before ever you  
embrace Emily.

ARCITE

Traitor yourself. Who set you free?  
"A friend?" Why did you not flee  
for Thebes to have a happy life?

PALAMON

True fool, you. Love sets us free,  
and I will love Emily in spite of  
thy might.

ARCITE

By God who sits above, were you not  
sick and mad for love and without  
weapon, you'd die by my hand.

PALAMON

Strike then. I repudiate our pledge  
and bond.



ARCITE

Here's a pledge. Tomorrow I shall  
return with food and drink, and  
weapons and armor, and you shall  
choose the best.

PALAMON

And we shall fight, and see who wins  
the lady.

Arcite leaves with the donkey. Palamon picks up a branch  
and practices sword swings.

DAWN

Arcite arrives with donkey, food, wine, weapons, and leather  
armor and helmets.

Without a word, Arcite spreads a blanket and lays a repast.  
The two eat and drink.

Without speaking, Arcite lays out armor and weapons. Palamon  
chooses. They lace each other into armor and helmets.

Chaucer wanders in.

CHAU CER

(to Camera)

See how they prepare, helping each  
other? Is that queer? No, and I'll  
tell you why. By the rules of  
chivalry, both parties must start as  
equals. Thus the outcome is decided,  
not my man, but by --  
(points to heaven)

Armed, still without speaking, they square off.

Arcite points to a BIRD in a tree. Palamon nods. They wait.

The bird takes flight -- and the battle is on.

The two knights slam, pound, slash, grunt.

When one falls, the other waits until he rises, then resume.

When one spear is shattered, the other discards his to keep  
the fight even.

When one's shield is shattered, the other discards his.

Finally they're down to swords, hacking and slashing.

They're exhausted, sobbing for breath, but keep at it.

They lock together, lean on each other for support. Glare --

THESEUS (O.S.)

Stop!

Arcite and Palamon, dazed, look around.

Theseus rides a horse. With him are DUCHESS, his wife.  
Courtiers, Emily, and Guards. All out hunting with DOGS.

THESEUS

By mighty Mars, who are you two,  
both so bold as to fight without  
judge or officer, as in a properly  
conducted duel?

Arcite and Palamon disengage, but collapse, side by side.

PALAMON

Sir, no more words. Slay us, please.

THESEUS

Slay you? Wherefore?

ARCITE

We are woeful wretches in every way,  
milord, burdened by our lives. Give  
us neither mercy nor refuge, but  
slay me first, for holy charity.

PALAMON

Or me first. But slay us both.

Theseus dismounts and pulls off their helmets. Doesn't  
recognize either one.

THESEUS

Who are you -- worthy knights?

PALAMON

This is Arcite, my mortal foe,  
banished from your land on pain of  
losing his head, but slipped into  
your household for love of Emily.

EMILY

For -- me?

ARCITE

This is Palamon, my mortal foe,  
wickedly broken out of thy prison.  
He loves Emily so passionately he  
refused to flee, but clung to these  
woods in hopes of seeing her again.

EMILY

Me?

PALAMON

So slay us, lord duke. We deserve death. But kill us here, that our last sight might be of Emily.

Emily sobs. Duchess and Courtier women cry.

Theseus, furious, takes from his saddle a broad axe.

THESEUS

Your confessions merit swift decision.  
By mighty Mars the Red, you die.

LADIES

No!

Women swarm Theseus, surprising him.

DUCHESS

(weeping)

Have mercy, husband. Take pity upon them. These are the noblest, most gentle of knights, for they fight for only one thing -- love.

Theseus melts, lowers his ax.

THESEUS

By Venus, who is not a fool who is in love? But by Mars, this is not our way. And by Saturn, your destinies must you fulfill.

Theseus drops the ax. Signals two Guards to dismount and give up their horses. Pulls a coin purse from his belt.

THESEUS

So, your fate, by my decree. Both shall go free -- and return, fifty weeks from today. And each bring a score of knights, the finest men you can assemble, armed for the lists. And you shall fight in the arena, equal to equal, so the gods alone decide who dies, and who lives, to wed Emily.

Everyone falls to knees to thank Theseus.

SOON

Palamon and Arcite, on horses, gallop off in different directions, for once happy.

PALAMON

For love!

ARCITE

For victory!

Theseus and party watch them go. The Duchess smiles. Theseus smiles but shakes his head at youth.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

So did Palamon and Arcite prepare  
for war. And so did Theseus.

EXT. ARENA

Months pass as...

Theseus supervises the erection of a gigantic arena.

>> Masons erect arches of marble.

>> Carpenters assemble walls.

>> Painters paint glorious scenes.

>> Carpenters build tiers of seats.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

Theseus built an arena fit for  
royalty. Such a noble theater had  
no match in the world. And to honor  
the gods, he built three temples.

(beat)

The temple of Venus, Goddess of Love,  
was wrought with broken sleeps and  
cold sighs, fiery desires, sacred  
tears and laments.

GATE OF VENUS

A shining marble gate is topped by a temple to Venus.

TEMPLE OF VENUS

Inside, the walls are painted with legendary lovers and  
gardens, and feasts and dancing.

Her statue is naked, covered to the waist in sea water. She  
holds a lyre, wears a rose garland, accompanied by Cupid.

Venus, ghostly, inspects and blesses it with a grand gesture.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

The temple of Mars, God of War, was  
wrought with malice, dark plots,  
felony and scheming, cruel anger,  
and pale fear.

GATE OF MARS

A rusty iron gate is topped by a temple to Mars.

TEMPLE OF MARS

Inside, the walls are painted with cursed forests, stormy  
skies, natural disasters, and cutthroats and bloody kings.

His statue is dark stone with red jewel eyes. He stands on  
a cart with a wolf. An eternal fire before him wafts smoke.

Mars, ghostly, inspects the temple, finds it wanting.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

The temple of Diana the Chaste,  
Goddess of Virgins and the Hunt, was  
wrought with betrayal, care and woe,  
vengeance and devouring, and wonders  
untold.

GATE OF DIANA

A green gate is topped by a temple to Diana.

TEMPLE OF DIANA

Inside, the walls are painted with forest and fields and  
animals. A moon arches over a pool.

Her statue sits a stag, with hounds. She wears a hunting  
tunic, a bow and quiver, with downcast eyes for modesty.

Diana inspects the temple with modesty.

OUTSIDE

Theseus and Duchess marvel at the completed arena...

... As a HERALD runs up with a message.

Theseus and Duchess climb to the top and look to the harbor.

IN TOWN

A BAND OF MUSICIANS leads a parade.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

The champions were arrayed and rode  
like kings, for many kings had  
answered their call. Emetreus, King  
of India. Lygurge, King of Thrace.  
A Duke of Prussia. A Prince of  
Araby... Never was gathered such a  
noble company for love of chivalry.

Palamon rides at the head of 20 KNIGHTS wearing mostly white.

Arcite's 20 KNIGHTS wear mostly red.

The knights are from many lands, major heroes and minor kings  
in jewels, bear skins, raven feathers, lion skins, heraldic  
symbols. Servants lead hounds, eagles, tame leopards.

CITIZENS cheer as the parade enters the arena.

IN THE ARENA

The parade circles.

Palamon and Arcite, riding, stop before the judges' seats  
and bow to Theseus and Duchess.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

Duke Theseus, this worthy knight,  
gave them lodging, each to his rank.  
And feasted and entertained them as  
none better.

(beat)

But now comes the crux of our tale,  
and the dawn...

DAWN, OUTSIDE THE ARENA

It's quiet, very few people about.

Palamon, alone, armored and armed, leads a white goat, and  
carries an amphora and a bunch of flowers.

He passes the red gate of Mars and the green gate of Diana.

He enters the temple of Venus.

TEMPLE OF VENUS

Palamon ties the goat to something, puts the amphora and  
flowers before the statue. Kneels.

PALAMON

Venus, fairest of the fair, take  
pity on my bitter, smarting tears,  
(MORE)

PALAMON (CONT'D)

and hear my prayer. Forever shall I  
be thy true servant if you help me.  
I care not for boast of arms, nor of  
victory, nor renown or glory. I ask  
only to hold Emily in my arms. Give  
me my love, thou blessed dear lady.

Palamon prays. At a rumble, the statue shakes gently.

Palamon kisses "Thanks" to the statue, and trots out.

SOON AFTER, OUTSIDE THE ARENA

Emily, beautifully dressed, carries a white peacock, a quiver  
of fine arrows, and sticks of incense.

She passes the Gate of Mars and the Gate of Venus.

She enters the Temple of Diana.

TEMPLE OF DIANA

Emily frees the peacock, lays the quiver, lights incense  
before the statue. Washes her hands in the pool. Kneels.

EMILY

Diana, Goddess of Maidens and the  
Green Woods, hear my heart's desire.  
Wouldst I were a maiden all my life,  
and never a man's lover nor wife.  
Palamon and Arcite love me both, yet  
I'd ask you send them peace, and  
quench their hot desire for me. But  
if marriage must be my destiny, by  
thy grace, please aid him who most  
desires me.

Emily waits for a sign. The sticks of incense wink out one  
by one, and blood drips from the tips.

Terrified, sobbing, Emily rises, turns to run --

-- And Diana stands there, ghostly, blocking her.

DIANA

Daughter, cease thy sadness. Among  
the high gods, by eternal word, it  
is affirmed that wedded ye shall be.

Diana fades away. Emily addresses the statue.

EMILY

Lady, I put myself in thy protection.

Sad and confused, she creeps out.

SOON AFTER, OUTSIDE THE ARENA

Arcite, armed and armored, leads a RED BULL.

He passes the Gate of Venus and the Gate of Diana.

He reaches the Temple of Mars. Tethers the bull and enters.

TEMPLE OF MARS

Arcite's boots ring and weapons jingle in the scary temple.  
He marches to the statue and eternal fire, does not kneel.

ARCITE

Mars, God of Battle, accept my  
sorrowful sacrifice, and have pity  
on my pain. I am injured by love,  
for my love cares not if I sink or  
swim. So must I win her by strength,  
and by grace from thee. Help me,  
lord. My labor and your glory!  
Give me victory: I ask for no more.

Arcite steps back, waiting. And jumps as the fire roars.

MARS

(low rumble)  
Victory.

Arcite draws his sword, salutes the statue, and marches out.

Smoke rises to...

EXT. CLOUDS OF HEAVEN -- DAY

Clouds stretch to infinity.

Far off, three figures argue. Shout, gesture.

PAN CLOSER to see...

... Venus, Mars, and Diana argue, all speaking at once.  
Mercury flits around like their argument.

VENUS

... Clearly Palamon loves her the  
more. He deserves it for his  
sacrifice, all those years,  
languishing in prison for sight of  
her...



MARS

... Only the boldest and best can be rewarded, and Arcite strives like a bull on fire. By right of conquest shall he have the maid, and I'll support him to the death...

DIANA

... Speak not of love and war, but a saintly maiden with no wish to be a prize like some poppet at a fair. She deserves her heart's desire...

They squabble. Mercury gets bored and vanishes.

Mercury returns with a grin, watches the squabble as...

JUPITER (O.S.)

Hold!

Venus, Mars, and Diana stop bickering, bow...

JUPITER, king of gods, strides up, powerful and frightening.

Behind him, almost unnoticed, hobbles Jupiter's father SATURN, an ancient god in a saggy toga.

JUPITER

A fine mess these mortals make of their lives. Never have I seen such a predicament, tangled enough to puzzle the gods.

VENUS

Milord, as the protector of love, you must grant --

MARS

Milord, to me, protector of the realm, you must allow --

DIANA

Milord, to me, goddess of virgins, you must attest --

Jupiter raises a hand. They shut up. But Jupiter pulls his beard, stuck for a solution.

SATURN

(clears throat)  
I have a remedy.

Everyone turns to regard the oldest god.

## SATURN

My orbit, as you know, has the widest course. Thus is mine the power of time and experience. And the cold depths of space.

(beat)

Mine is drowning in the sea so dark. Mine is imprisonment, and hanging, and rebellion. Mine the grumbling and secret poisoning, the falling of towers, the dark treasons, the chill of disease. All things that end men are mine to command.

(beat)

Cease thy squawling. I decree. Palamon shall have his lady. Arcite shall have his victory. And there shall be peace between them.

The gods nod in obedience, but look uneasy...

... Then down through the clouds, as the tournament begins.

## EXT. ARENA - DAY

CITIZENS flock to the arena. Many can't get in, so mill around. Everyone chatters, lay bets, swoon for romance.

## KNIGHT (V.O.)

Great was the feasting, loud the songs, wild the dancing, and keen the stories. But today the companies meet in the arena to do or die.

Palamon and Arcite's Knights don helmets and fasten chin straps. Check weapons. Strap on shields. Mount horses. Grab lances and spears. Kneel to pray with their swords.

A trumpet blares. Drums beat a march.

Riding, Palamon leads his company one way. People cheer.

Riding, Arcite leads his company the other way. People cheer.

## GATE OF VENUS

Palamon leads his company through the white gate. He salutes the goddess with a kiss. His company cheers.

## GATE OF MARS

Arcite leads his company through the red gate. He salutes the god, bangs his sword on shield. Knights howl like wolves.

## GATE OF DIANA

Riding, Theseus, Duchess, Emily, and Courtiers enter the green gate. Emily sends up a silent prayer to Diana.

## INSIDE THE ARENA

Palamon and Arcite's companies stand and raise weapons as Theseus's party marches in.

Theseus leads his party up to the judges' seats. Many WORTHIES are there.

Trumpets blare. A MARSHAL waves for silence.

Crowd hushes. Theseus rises, signals Marshal.

## MARSHAL

Duke Theseus, by his great mercy,  
judges t'would be destructive to  
spill such gentle blood in mortal  
combat. Therefore, by his great  
wisdom, to balk death, he proclaims...

(beat)

No knight may ply, upon his life,  
arrow, battle ax, short knife, nor  
short sword, nor make more than one  
charge with sharp spear. Anyone  
unhorsed may defend with long sword  
or mace. No one wounded may be slain,  
but shall be dragged to yon stakes  
at either end, by force if must.

Marshall points to two large stakes topped with pennants at each end of the arena.

## MARSHAL

If it happens that Palamon or Arcite  
are captured or slain, the tournament  
ends. God speed you on!

Knights mutter. Marshals approach. Grudgingly, Knights surrender bows and arrows, short swords, daggers.

Crowd buzzes, then cheers the decision.

## CROWD

The-se-us! The-se-us!

Knights accept the decision and shout enthusiastically.

A trumpet blares. Drums signal: "Get ready."

Palamon salutes Emily, who blushes. Arcite also salutes.

Palamon turns to salute Arcite, but he rides off.

Two companies assemble in long lines at each end.

Theseus borrows a handkerchief from Emily. Holds it high.

Everyone waits with bated breath, even...

#### IN THE CLOUDS

The gods Venus, Mars, Diana, Mercury, and Jupiter lean to watch. Saturn, ancient, dozes.

#### IN THE ARENA

Musicians poise instruments.

Theseus drops the handkerchief.

Trumpets blare. Drums pound non-stop.

Palamon and Arcite lead their companies at a full gallop.

Hooves thunder as the two lines approach. Lances and spears lower, wicked points gleaming.

Crowd gasps as the two Companies clash like a thunderstorm.

>> A Knight is smashed out of the saddle by a lance.

>> Two Knights knock each other from the saddle.

>> A Knight flips from the saddle, but his foot is caught in the stirrup, and he's dragged by the panicked horse.

>> A horse is tripped by a lance, and the Knight flies off.

>> A Knight grabs a lance and jumps from the saddle to crash into an opponent.

Spears break, lances shatter. Helmets are smashed off. Shields break. Horses crash to the turf.

Knights are allowed only one lance, so when theirs breaks, they draw swords or maces and swing wildly at other riders.

>> One Knight has his helmet swiped off. He slams to the ground, face bloody. Marshals drag him to the "Out" stake. He struggles to stay in, but he's out.

>> One Knight, on foot, is knocked down by a runaway horse. Breaks his leg. Marshals drag him off kicking and screaming.

And so on, furious battles everywhere.

## UP IN THE CLOUDS

Even the gods are excited, laughing, pointing, cheering.

## ON THE FIELD

Arcite has lost his helmet. Alone, he swings a mace savagely at anyone in white, heedless of harm.

Palamon works as a team, pointing, shouting, covering others while slashing with his long sword.

Bloodied red and white Knights pile at the "Out" stakes. Now spectators, they shout encouragement.

Fighting rages. Horses rear and caper. Knights fight afoot.

Finally Palamon and Arcite square off. Their horses slam together so hard they lose weapons.

A-horse, they grapple to kill each other with bare hands.

Since the chiefs' capture would win or lose the game, the remaining red and white Knights charge and pound each other to keep them back.

But a Knight stabs Palamon in the side below his armor.

Palamon jolts. Not seeing, Arcite knocks him off his horse.

Palamon crashes to turf. Scrabbles for a weapon to keep fighting.

Marshals swarm Palamon to haul him away. Palamon resists, crumples in agony. He's hauled to the "out" stake.

## UP IN THE CLOUDS

The gods are puzzled. All turn to old Saturn.

## VENUS

I am disgraced.

## DIANA

You promised Palamon the lady.

## MARS

Nay. He promised Arcite victory.

## JUPITER

Which is it, then, Father?

Saturn raises a finger: Watch.

## ON THE FIELD

Arcite, still a-horse, exults.

Palamon, having lost, weak and bloody, despairs.

Theseus rises, points to Arcite.

THESEUS

Stop! No more! Arcite of Thebes  
wins Emily by his fortune!

Emily twists a handkerchief, terrified.

Arcite takes a victory lap. Crowd cheers. Music blares.

Arcite rides past Emily, and salutes her. She stands and  
smiles bravely. Maybe he'll work out.

Arcite enjoys his victory, galloping hard, as --

UP IN THE CLOUDS

Saturn makes a breaking gesture.

ON THE FIELD

The earth splits before Arcite's galloping horse.

A gush of red smoke -- a SPIRIT? -- Leaps into the air.

The horse balks, shies.

Arcite pitches from the saddle and crashes head-first. His  
breastplate shatters, his face covered in blood.

Crowd hushes.

Palamon, at the stake, rises painfully, lurches to Arcite.

PALAMON

Cousin!

Duke Theseus comes with Duchess and Emily.

Arcite is dying.

ARCITE

Alas, Emily. My heart's queen. I  
bequeath my ghost to thy service.

PALAMON

Arcite, don't go.

ARCITE

I must, alone. Farewell, world.  
(MORE)

ARCITE (CONT'D)

Farewell my company. Jupiter, I beg  
thee. In this world there is none  
so worthy as Palamon to be loved.  
Have mercy, Emily!

Arcite dies.

Emily shrieks. Palamon wails.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

"This world is nothing but a  
thoroughfare of woe / And we are but  
pilgrims, passing to and fro."

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The glade where Palamon and Arcite first fought.

Arcite lies atop a funeral pyre with shields, swords, helmets,  
jugs, rare herbs, furs, and sacrificed hounds and hawks.

Theseus and his royal party are gathered, with many red and  
white Knights with bandages and slings.

Palamon wears sackcloth, face smeared with ashes.

Emily wears black, hair undone and messy.

Theseus takes a torch and lights the pyre.

Emily swoons, and Palamon catches her tenderly.

Ladies throw jewels and rings onto the fire.

Knights mount horses and ride around the pyre, clash weapons  
on shields and chant to attract the gods' attention.

The fire roars as smoke rises --

UP IN THE CLOUDS

Where the Gods watch, then fade away...

SPRING

Same glade, now beautiful in spring. The burnt patch of the  
pyre is covered with wild flowers.

Theseus presides over a wedding between Palamon and Emily,  
both in white, and happy.

THESEUS

We gather again, where Arcite left  
this earth. But let us make of two  
sorrows one perfect joy.

(beat)

Jupiter, by his grace, made oaks to  
grow and wither, stones to crumble  
away, rivers to run dry. So too all  
things that live must die.

(beat)

Yet t'is wisdom to make virtue of  
necessity. Treat well the life we  
cannot escape. He who complains is  
a fool, and rebels against the gods.  
How much better to live in honor and  
happiness.

(beat)

So, Emily, take thy husband, who  
serves you with will, heart, and  
might. And Palamon, so come, and  
take your lady by the hand.

Palamon and Emily clasp hands. Everyone cheers.

KNIGHT (V.O.)

God, who this wide world wrought /  
Sent Palamon a love so dearly bought  
/ And thus with all bliss and  
festivity / Palamon has wedded Emily.  
/ And never a word between them went  
/ Of jealousy or vexious vent. /  
Thus endeth the story of Palamon and  
Emily / And, Amen! God save all  
this fair company!

END OF THE KNIGHT'S TALE

EXT. ON THE ROAD - DAY

Applause as the pilgrims ride. Some women sniffle.

HARRY

Now there's a tale to commit to memory  
/ Truly a gentle and worthy story /  
The bag is opened, the game goes  
well. / Let's see who the next tale  
shall tell. / You, Sir Monk, if you  
might / Tell us a tale to match the  
knight.

Monk looks humble, but willing to speak, but --



-- Miller is drunk. He snaps his hat in the Monk's face.

MILLER

By Christ's arms, by blood and bones,  
I know a noble tale, of chivalry in  
the streets and deviltry between the  
sheets!

HARRY

Robin, Miller, my dear brother. /  
Some better man shall tell us another.  
/ Wait, and act properly --

MILLER

By God's soul, I will not. I will  
speak or else go my way.

HARRY

Tell then, in the devil's name /  
Though thou art a fool, and thy wit  
overcame.

Chaucer nods at Miller.

CHAUCEUR

Let's hope he gets further than the  
Cook.

Cook, as if prompted, falls off his horse.

MILLER

Now, I'm drunk. So if I misspeak,  
blame it on the ale of Southwerk. I  
will relate a legend of a carpenter  
and his wife, and how a clerk stole  
the carpenter's cap off his head.

Reeve takes this as a personal insult.

REEVE

Hey! Stifle your ignorant ribaldry.  
It's sin and folly to slander and  
defame a man, and even more so a  
woman.

MILLER

Oswald, dear brother. Why so angry?  
You have no wife, so can't be a  
cuckold. Take your bounty and shut  
your mouth.

REEVE

Good advice from a sorry sod.

Miller shakes his head, ready to begin -- but freezes --

-- As does all the company. Except Chaucer.

CHAUCER

(sighs)

This churl will tell his sorry tale.  
I beg decent people to turn the leaf  
and choose another story. One of  
morality, or holiness, or nobility.

Chaucer waits for "decent people" in the audience to leave,  
then resumes.

CHAUCER

You who choose to stay, don't blame  
me. / And please don't take a joke  
too seriously.

Drat. He's rhyming again. He snaps his fingers --

-- The company un-freezes, and the Miller begins.

TITLE OVER

THE MILLER'S TALE

EXT. OXFORD - DAY

Establishing shot of medieval Oxford. But bright and cockeyed  
like a cartoon.

Citizens, workers, delivery people come and go. Male STUDENTS  
clutch books and argue or pontificate as they walk.

Students walk past a house.

EXT. JOHN THE CARPENTER'S HOUSE

A large house, well built and painted. With a barn in back.

The street level is a wood shop. JOHN works on a project.

John is older, a good carpenter, but suspicious, because...

He married young ALISON and worries she'll cheat.

Alison is 18, slim, dark-haired, with plucked eyebrows, saucy.  
Her hat and clothes are fine but scandalous.

MILLER (V.O.)

There dwelt in Oxford a carpenter  
named John, a rich man with a fine  
house. Rich, because he took in  
boarders: the first cause of his  
problems. So rich that he married a  
fine young girl: the second cause of  
his troubles.

John makes a wooden barrel. Alison flounces in with an empty  
basket, pecks his cheek, steals his purse, flounces out.

Alison sings as she goes.

ALISON

(sings a medieval  
love song)

Her merry affection worries John. He looks up --

PAN AROUND THE CORNER

-- To Nicholas's bedroom on the side street.

NICHOLAS lolls at the window, having heard Alison.

Nicholas is a handsome boyish rogue. He wears wizard-like  
clothing, since he's an astrologer.

Alison swishes by, checks on John, winks at Nicholas.

Nicholas feigns catching the wink to his heart.

MILLER (V.O.)

Alison was her name, and sauciness  
her game. She was nimble as a mink,  
soft as a lamb, spirited as a colt,  
and ripe as a jonette pear.

Alison sashays off. Nicholas watches, but senses --

-- John has come around the corner and glares.

Nicholas jumps back in his room, back to work.

INT. NICHOLAS'S ROOM - DAY

The bedroom is crammed with astrology equipment: astrolabe,  
mobile of planets, a chart of the human body with zodiac  
symbols, books.

MILLER (V.O.)

One such boarder was Nicholas, a  
clerk and astrologer, clever and sly  
and meek as a maid -- in appearance.

Nicholas casts a horoscope, scratches notes, sights his  
astrolabe at the sky --

-- Leans out the window, sees John is gone --

-- Hops out the window and runs after Alison.

EXT. ALLEY

An alley stacked with hay or cordwood, so partly secluded.

Alison passes, singing, yelps as she's yanked into the alley.

Nicholas grabbed her. She feigns astonishment.

He grabs her crotch, kisses her neck.

NICHOLAS

(kissing)

Alison, sweetheart, unless I have my  
will of thee, my secret love, I shall  
die, so help me God.

Playing, Alison squirms loose, dances away.

ALISON

By my faith, I say thee nay. I will  
not kiss thee, Nicholas. Take away  
thy hands. Or I will cry "Help" and  
"Alas".

Nicholas drops to knees, begs inaudibly, with grand gestures.

MILLER (V.O.)

Now I said he was clever. Nicholas  
pressed his suit so fast and so well,  
that at last she swore her oath, by  
Saint Thomas of Kent.

ALISON

But this is my commandment. We must  
await the right opportunity. Be  
patient and secretive. If my husband  
caught us, I'm as good as dead.

NICHOLAS

Have no care, my sweet dove.

(MORE)

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)  
 If a clerk can't outwit a carpenter,  
 I've wasted my time in study.

Nicholas embraces her, kisses her, but she pushes free.

ALISON  
 Study on a plan, then, and unhand  
 me. I'm late for Mass.

Alison swishes away saucily.

Nicholas beats his brains: He needs a plan to get laid!

INT. CHAPEL

A small chapel. Light through high windows. A small stage  
 with a podium accommodates the "music section", ABSOLON.

CONGREGATION stands: there are no benches or chairs.

Absolon is 20, angelic, with golden curls, a light blue tunic,  
 and red hose, a dandy.

Absolon plays the guitar well, a sweet merry tune.

But he hits sour notes as Alison enters. He's smitten!

DRUNK PRIEST enters. Swings an aspergillum of incense. He  
 clonks a man in the head, smacks a woman in the rear.

Priest staggers to podium. Absolon sits beside, playing.

DRUNK PRIEST  
*Asperges me C. Domine, hyssopo, et*  
*mundabor --*  
 (burps)

Priest turns his head to burp, always on Absolon, who recoils.  
 Congregation titters. Alison giggles.

DRUNK PRIEST  
*-- Lavabis me, et super nivem*  
*dealbabor. Misere mei, Deus,*  
 (burps)  
*-- Secundum magnam misericordiam*  
*tuam*  
 (burps)  
*... Egredientum de templo, a latere*  
*dextro, all-*  
 (burps)  
 Excuse me.

Priest, with stomach trouble, exits quickly.

Congregation slips out. Alison too.

Absolon touches her arm. She turns -- but he's struck speechless. She flirts for practice, teasing touches.

ALISON

Something, sir? Has the cat caught  
thy tongue? Or am I the mouse the  
cat would eat? Yea, nay? So handsome  
a cad yet so dumb. What a pity.

Alison goes. Absolon curses his clumsy tongue. Picks up his guitar. Gets an idea.

INT. JOHN THE CARPENTER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Their bedroom is above the shop.

John and Alison sleep, snore in harmony.

From the street comes guitar music and Absolon singing the sappy "The Angel to the Virgin".

ABSOLON (O.S.)

(sings)

*Angelus ad virginem, / Sub intrans  
in conclave, / Virginis formidinem /  
Demulcens, inquit: Ave! / Ave regina  
virginum; / Caeli terraeque Dominum  
Concipies / Et paries intacta /  
Salutem hominum; / Tu porta caeli  
facta, / Medela criminum...*

Alison wakes: What the hell? John wakes.

JOHN

Alison, do you hear singing?

ALISON

I do, dear husband. It sounds like  
Absolon, who sings in the chapel.

JOHN

Why is he singing outside our window?

ALISON

God knows, John.

John rises, opens the shutters.

Absolon's singing is louder.

ABSOLON (O.S.)

(sings)  
 ... A virgin most pure, as the  
 prophets do tell, / Hath brought  
 forth a baby, as it hath befell --  
 Ow!

John chucks a wooden shoe. Clonk! Ow! But Absolon resumes.

ABSOLON (O.S.)

(sings)  
 Ouch... To be our redeemer from  
 death, hell and sin, / Which Adam's  
 transgression has wrapped us in --

Alison giggles. John chucks the other clog, hits the guitar.  
 Blong!

ABSOLON (O.S.)

(sings)  
 Aye, and therefore be merry / Rejoice,  
 and be ye merry -- Bloody Hell!

Absolon goes away muttering. Alison applauds her brave  
 husband. John climbs into bed, smug.

JOHN

Thy doughty knight has banished the  
 dragon. Perhaps the fair maid might  
 bestow --

ALISON

(yawns)  
 Nay, my brave one. Good night.

Alison rolls over. John fumes and goes back to sleep.

MILLER (V.O.)

This goes on, day by day. Absolon  
 woos Alison in such a sorry state.  
 He combs his locks, he woos her with  
 go-betweens, he sings like a  
 nightingale, he sends her wine and  
 mead and wafers piping from the fire.

SERIES OF SHOTS

>> Absolon stops a FLOWER GIRL, pays, orders posies sent to  
 Alison. Flower Girl points out Absolon. Alison eats the  
 flowers with a smile.

>> Absolon stops a BOY, hands him coins for Alison, but the  
 Boy runs off with the coins. Absolon rages. Alison laughs.

>> Absolon saunters by the shop singing gaily. Alison watches. An OLD MAN trips Absolon with his cane to flop in mud. Alison laughs. Absolon stalks off.

MILLER (V.O.)  
But for all that effort, Absolon  
might go whistle. Alison loves  
Nicholas. For don't men say, "The  
sly guy nearby makes the far one  
loathed."

>> Absolon watches the shop. Nicholas comes by scrolls, tips his hat, drops one. Alison runs to scoop it up. Absolon seethes, sighs, goes: Alas!

Nicholas whispers a plan. Alison squeals for joy. Then ducks back in the shop as John glares.

MILLER (V.O.)  
As it befell, Nicholas and Alison  
agreed on a trick. So she could  
sleep in his arms all night, the  
prick.

INT. JOHN THE CARPENTER'S HOUSE - DAY

John works on a barrel. Alison does needlework, humming. John looks around.

JOHN  
Where is Nicholas? I haven't seen  
him all day.

ALISON  
Nor I, sweet husband.

JOHN  
Or yesterday.

ALISON  
Why, I believe you are right.

John goes to Nicholas's room at the back. Alison trails.

NICHOLAS'S DOOR

John knocks. No answer. Knocks louder.

Inside, Nicholas moans.

John, very superstitious, startles. Alison squeaks.



JOHN  
 Heard you that?

ALISON  
 I fear to say.

More knocks. More moans.

Alison peeks through a cat-hole. Gasps. Leery, John looks.

SHOT THRU CAT-HOLE: In his room, Nicholas sits by the window with his astrolabe. He looks skyward, slack, awaits doom.

JOHN  
 Help us, Saint Frideswide! He's  
 moon-mad from too much astronomy.

ALISON  
 Help him, for charity's sake!

Alison pushes John. Off-balance, John smashes down the door --

NICHOLAS'S ROOM

-- Flops on the broken door. Alison tumbles atop.

Nicholas never moves, only moans. John shakes him.

JOHN  
 What, Nicholas? Awake. Think on  
 Christ's passion. Here. I aroint  
 thee from elves and fairies.

John fumbles a charm hanging around his neck, runs around the four corners of the room, touching each corner.

JOHN  
 "Jesus Christ and Saint Benedict,  
 bless this house from every wicked  
 wight, and evil spirits of the night!"  
 There. Thou art safe.

NICHOLAS  
 (huge sigh)  
 Alas. Who can be safe when the world  
 is lost?

John is terrified. Alison squeaks.

JOHN  
 Lost? Lost? What sayest thou?  
 What have you seen?

Nicholas drags himself from the window and holds up --

CLOSE ON: An astrology chart marked is with scary runes and bloody images of death.

John and Alison genuflect. Gasp, quake.

NICHOLAS

John, my truest friend, I will not lie. I found in my astrology, as I gawked at the new moon, that on Monday night -- But no. I am no blabbermouth. This secret Christ keeps, and I cannot tell.

JOHN

Tell, tell, for Christ's sake! For the sake of poor Alison, I beg thee.

ALISON

Tell us. We swear secrecy!

NICHOLAS

Breathe not a word, by Christ's holy blood. But... Monday night, after midnight, shall fall a rain so wild and raging that Noah's flood never saw half so much -- water!

JOHN

Water!

ALISON

Not water!

NICHOLAS

So hideous a shower that all mankind shall drown.

John and Alison reel.

JOHN

Alas, my sweet Alison to die. Is there no remedy?

Nicholas only staggers out the door, despairing.

John and Alison follow to ...

JOHN'S SHOP

Where new barrels await.

NICHOLAS

Nay, no remedy. Solomon himself could not save us.

(MORE)

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Remember you the tales of how the world was destroyed by water.

ALISON

The great flood of Noah? The carpenter? Who built an ark? Of wood? That floated?

Nicholas leans on a barrel. Alison swoons on one. Nicholas kicks a hollow barrel. Alison drums on one, pushes it over. John grabs it --

JOHN

Wait. All the world was drowned, but Noah's family survived. In an ark of wood. That floated.

NICHOLAS

No time, John, to build an ark. Monday -- Doomsday -- looms.

John pulls three barrels together.

JOHN

But we could float. In barrels. I build them water-tight. We'd be saved!

Nicholas and Alison see a dim hope. Then sigh.

NICHOLAS

Nay. The barrels would float to the roof, and we'd drown like rats.

ALISON

We'd need to be somewhere high and dry and safe.

JOHN

I know the place! Hastily!

John runs out. Nicholas and Alison wink and follow.

INT. JOHN'S BARN - DAY

The barn has a high roof. The middle floor space is clear.

John points to high rafters. Nicholas and Alison mock-gawk.

JOHN

Here! There! We'd be safe.

ALISON  
I don't follow.

NICHOLAS  
All but astrology is a mystery to  
me.

John grabs a ladder and props it in the rafters. Climbs up.  
It's high and he teeters scarily.

JOHN  
Barrels, here. Suspended on ropes.  
With ladders to gain them. Then,  
when the world floods, we are high  
and dry.

NICHOLAS  
Ah... Nay. When the barn floods,  
we'll be trapped.

JOHN  
A hatchet, then. In each barrel.  
And as the water rises, we hack  
through the roof and set sail, safe  
as ducks on a barge.

Nicholas ponders.

NICHOLAS  
If we had sufficient victuals for a  
day... The water shall recede by  
nine the next morning... I'd bet my  
life on it. This will suffice.  
John, you have saved us!

John beams, lurches as the ladder creaks.

NICHOLAS  
But a word of warning. On the night  
we board, none may speak a word.  
Not a call, nor cry, nor prayer.

JOHN  
By God's own command.

NICHOLAS  
And you and Alison must hang apart,  
so there shall be no sin.

ALISON  
No sin.

NICHOLAS  
God give us success!

Happy, they clasp hands and dance a circle.

SERIES OF SHOTS

>> John hangs the new barrels in the rafters, far apart.

>> John fashions and ties a ladder for each.

>> Alison puts food and wine into each barrel.

>> John puts a hatchet in each barrel.

>> Nicholas compares the fix to his astrology chart, approves.

While...

JOHN'S SHOP

Absolon slinks by, peeks in for Alison. Not there.

He hears noise, creeps to...

OUTSIDE THE BARN

Absolon sees Nicholas and John clasp hands while Alison beams.

Absolon scratches his head, perplexed.

EVENING

John, Nicholas, and Alison gather in the barn.

John yawns, tired from all that work.

The three clasp hands, mount ladders, climb in barrels.

NICHOLAS

Now Pater-noster, let's save our  
lives. But mostly, quiet!

JOHN

Quiet.

ALISON

Quiet.

They scoot down in the barrels. John prays.

MILLER (V.O.)

Lords knows, a man can die from  
imagination... And so the devoted  
carpenter sits, awaiting the rain.

John settles. Falls asleep almost immediately.

MILLER (V.O.)

While others wait for another sign.

John snores. Nicholas and Alison pop up, giggle, and climb down the ladders.

They run into --

INT. NICHOLAS'S ROOM - NIGHT

For raunchy sex.

EXT. JOHN THE CARPENTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Absolon comes down the street, peeks all around.

Down the street, a hammer bangs iron.

Absolon sees light through shutters in Nicholas's room.

He leans to the crack, hears Alison giggle.

ABSOLON

(to himself)

Not in her room? Perhaps she's had  
a falling-out with her badger of a  
husband.

Absolon combs his hair, chews some sweets, preens.

Goes to the window and coughs.

ABSOLON

What do you, honey-comb, fair Alison,  
my turtledove, my spicy cinnamon?  
Awake, sweetheart, and speak to me.  
My mouth has itched all the day, a  
sure sign I'll be kissed.

INTERCUT conversation

IN NICHOLAS'S ROOM

By candlelight, Alison tussles with Nicholas in bed. He keeps grabbing her, stifling laughs.

ALISON

(calls)

Go away from my window, you idiot.  
So help me God, I will not kiss thee.

ABSOLON

Alas, and woe is me. That true love  
suffers in such circumstance.

ALISON

Fool. I love another well better.  
Now go forth, lest I cast a stone,  
in the name of twenty devils.

ABSOLON

Lackaday. Please kiss me, for Jesus's  
sake if not my own.

Exasperated, Alison goes to rise -- Nicholas bites her bum --  
and she gets an idea.

ALISON

If I grant a kiss, willst thou away?

ABSOLON

Yes, certainly, sweetheart, if that  
is thy wish.

ALISON

Than make ready. Here I come.

Nicholas pinches out the candle. It's black. Alison opens  
the shutters.

ABSOLON

I am a lord in every way, for after  
this I hope there comes more.

ALISON

Get done with it, then, lest the  
neighbors us spy. Close thine eyes  
and pucker up.

Alison sticks her bare bum out the window. Nicholas is  
suffocating with laughter.

Absolon closes his eyes, puckers up, and kisses her asshole.

ALISON

(laughs and laughs)

Absolon recoils, sputters.

Alison slams the shutters.

Absolon picks at his lips. Finds a pubic hair. Spits.

ABSOLON

A beard! A beard, by our Lord!  
Fie! Alas! What have I done?

In the room, Alison and Nicholas roar with laughter.

Furious, Absolon rubs his lips with dirt, his sleeve, water from a trough.

ABSOLON  
(to himself)  
My soul I would entrust to Satan if  
I am not avenged for this insult.

Down the street, a blacksmith hammers.

Absolon runs that way.

DOWN THE STREET

With no one around by night, a BLACKSMITH has built a fire mid-street to heat iron. He hammers red hot pokers.

Absolon runs up, snatches a red hot poker and runs.

NICHOLAS'S WINDOW

Back to Nicholas's window.

ABSOLON  
Alison, my beloved, my darling, I  
wish to thank thee for that kiss. I  
have brought thee a ring my mother  
gave me. For one more kiss, I'll  
give it thee.

INTERCUT

Nicholas, in the room, pisses in a chamber pot. Alison gestures: What shall we do? Nicholas signals: Watch.

Nicholas opens the shutters. Alison gets it and giggles.

ALISON  
(calls)  
Very well, my champion, pucker up  
again and receive thy bounty.

Absolon grins and readies his hot poker.

Nicholas sticks his butt out the window.

Absolon lean in --

-- As Nicholas farts like a thunderclap.

Absolon reels in horror, chokes, staggers --

-- But jams the red hot poker up his butt!



Nicholas screams. Wounded, he falls out the window, flops in the street. Hops up, still screaming.

NICHOLAS  
Water! Help! Water! For God's  
heart! Water!

INT. JOHN'S BARN

John, meanwhile, sleeps in the barrel hanging in the rafters.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)  
Water! Water!

John wakes, bleary.

JOHN  
Noah's flood! It comes!

John grabs his hatchet and chops the rope holding the barrel.

The barrel falls and shatters on the barn floor.

John is knocked out, his arm broken.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Nicholas runs in circles screaming. Absolon retches. Alison, naked, shrieks.

NEIGHBORS come. Dance around laughing. Some find John in the barn, and wave others in. Laugh and laugh.

And so it goes.

>> Nicholas runs through the barn whapping at his scorched ass. Alison runs after him. They trip over groggy John.

>> Absolon chases Nicholas with the poker. Trips over John.

>> Absolon runs back in, now chased by Nicholas with the poker. Alison runs after.

>> All trip over John as they go by.

Neighbors fall down laughing.

MILLER (V.O.)  
So John is served for marrying a  
girl too young. So Alison is served  
for whoring about. So Nicholas is  
served, scalded in the rump.  
(MORE)

MILLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
And Absolon is served with a kiss to  
his love's lower eye. So is my tale  
done, and God save every one.

END OF THE MILLER'S TALE

EXT. ON THE ROAD - DAY

Company laughs and applauds the story.

Miller bows dramatically --

-- But Reeve lunges, bowls him out of the saddle, and punches  
him repeatedly.

Company runs to see the fight, laughs harder.

Chaucer wipes his eyes.

CHAUCER  
(to Camera)  
Well, you can't please everyone.  
Join us soon, won't you, fine folk,  
and we'll hear more tales on the  
road to --

SHERIFF (O.S.)  
Oi, you lot, hold fast!

SHERIFF rides onto scene with two DEPUTIES.

Sheriff is a 30 YO former knight, no-nonsense, with sword.

His Deputies are big farmer types with clubs.

HARRY  
Sheriff Bodo? What ails thee? /  
And makes an end to pleasantry?

SHERIFF  
What ails me? Murder.

Even Chaucer is struck speechless.

FADE OUT

END OF SHOW