

sible to act more generously, it would not be hard to show the contrary, as I mean to show you in this little tale of mine.

In Friuli, a rather cold province but one which boasts of beautiful mountains, many rivers, and clear springs, there is a town called Udine, in which there once lived a beautiful and noble lady named Madonna Dianora, the wife of a very wealthy man named Gilberto, a very pleasant and amiable person. Such was this lady's worth that she was greatly loved by a famous and noble baron of high rank, whose name was Messer Ansaldo Gradense and who was known everywhere for his feats of arms and chivalry. And while Messer Ansaldo loved Madonna Dianora passionately and did everything he could to be loved in return by her, often sending her numerous messages with this end in mind, he labored in vain. And when the lady, having become weary of the knight's entreaties, realized that no matter how much she denied him everything he requested, he nevertheless continued to love her and to implore her, she decided to rid herself of him by making a strange and, in her judgment, impossible request.

And so she said the following to a woman who often came to her on his behalf:

"Good woman, you have assured me many times that Messer Ansaldo loves me above all other things, and you have, on his behalf, offered me marvelous gifts; he may keep these gifts, for they could never bring me to love him or to fulfill his pleasure. But if I could be certain he loved me as much as you say he does, I would be moved without a doubt to love him and to do whatever he wished. And so, whenever he is willing to provide me with proof by doing what I request, I shall be ready to do whatever he wants."

The good woman said: "What is it, my lady, that you wish him to do?"

The lady replied:

"What I desire is this: in the month of January which is soon to come, I want there to be on the outskirts of town a garden full of green grass, flowers, and leafy trees no different from one in the month of May; if he is unable to do this, he should never again send you or anyone else to me, for if he continues to bother me, just as until now I have completely concealed everything from my husband and my relatives, I shall, by complaining to them about him, seek to get rid of him."

When the knight heard his lady's request and offer, no matter how difficult or rather impossible a task he felt it was to fulfill, and in spite of the fact that he realized the lady had made this request for no other reason than to destroy his hope, nevertheless, he made up his mind to try to do what he could. He sent word to all parts of the world to find out if there was someone who might provide him with assistance or advice, and a certain man came to him who offered to do it by means of magic, provided he was well paid. Messer Ansaldo came to an agreement with him for an enormous sum of money and then happily awaited the time the lady had set for him. When it arrived and the weather was bitter cold and everything was covered with snow and ice,

The Franklin's Prologue and Tale

The story told in the *Franklin's Tale* appears twice in Boccaccio: first in Book 4 of the *Filocolo* as one of the questions of love debated by a group of young men and women at their leisure; second in the *Decameron*, in a shorter version told on the final day as one of the tales illustrating the theme of generosity. Critics have argued for Chaucer's indebtedness to one or the other, or both, of these stories. We print the *Decameron* version here, along with Boccaccio's description, at the start of the following tale, of the listeners' responses to the issues posed by the narrative. We also include as background to some of the Franklin's thinking about love and marriage a passage discussing these topics from a fourteenth-century English translation of a popular thirteenth-century Latin encyclopedia, Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*. Some of the biblical and antifeminist material printed above as background to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* is also pertinent to this one; for example, Dorigen's long soliloquy about women who have preferred death to dishonor is drawn from St. Jerome's *Against Jovinian*.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

From the *Decameron*, Tenth Day, Fifth Tale†

Madonna Dianora asks Messer Ansaldo to give her a garden that would be as beautiful in January as in May; by hiring a magician, Messer Ansaldo manages to grant her wish; her husband agrees that she must fulfill Messer Ansaldo's desires, but when Messer Ansaldo hears of her husband's generosity, he frees her from her promise, and the magician, refusing to accept anything from him, also frees Messer Ansaldo from his.

Every member of the merry company had already praised Messer Gentile to the skies, when the King ordered Emilia to continue, and she, longing to speak, self-confidently began as follows:

Tender ladies, no one can reasonably say that Messer Gentile did not act generously, but if anyone were to claim that it would be impos-

† From *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, translated by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella, pp. 623–27. Copyright © 1982 by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella. Used by permission of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. For texts and translations of both this tale and the *Filocolo* version, as well as other source material, see Robert R. Edwards' chapter in *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales*, Vol. 1, ed. Robert M. Corneale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 211–65.

in a most beautiful meadow near the town, the worthy man, on the night before the first day of January, employed his magic to such effect that on the following morning there appeared, according to the testimony of those who saw it for themselves, one of the most beautiful gardens that had ever been seen, with grass, trees, and fruit of every kind. As soon as Messer Ansaldo saw the garden, with great joy he had gathered some of the most beautiful fruits and flowers growing there and then secretly had them presented to the lady, inviting her to come and see the garden she had requested so that she would not only realize how much he loved her but would also recall the promise she had made to him, sealed with her oath, and in so doing would seek, as a woman of good faith, to keep her promise.

The lady had heard much talk about the marvelous garden, and when she saw the flowers and fruit, she began to regret her promise. In spite of her regret, curious as she was to see so unusual a thing, she went with many other ladies of the town to have a look at the garden; after praising it very highly, and not without amazement, she returned home the most sorrowful of women, thinking about what she was obliged to do because of it. So intense was her grief that she was unable to conceal it, and her husband, who could not help noticing it, insisted on knowing the cause of it. Out of shame, the lady kept silent for a long time; then, finally compelled to speak, she revealed everything to him.

When Gilberto heard all this, at first he was very much disturbed; but then, when he considered his wife's pure intentions, he put aside his anger and said:

"Dianora, it is not proper for a wise or virtuous woman to pay attention to messages of that sort or to fix a price on her chastity with anyone, under any circumstances. Words received by the heart through the ears have more power than many would believe, and almost everything becomes possible for lovers. Hence, you did wrong first by listening and then by bargaining, but since I know the purity of your heart, I shall allow you, in order to absolve you of the obligation of your promise, to do something which perhaps no other man would allow, being also moved by my fear of the magician, whom Messer Ansaldo, if we were to disappoint him, would perhaps have done us harm. I want you to go to him, and by any means possible, short of your chastity, seek to be released from this promise, and if that is impossible, then this one time you must give him your body, but not your heart."

When the lady heard her husband, she wept and refused to accept such a favor from him. But no matter how much the lady objected, Gilberto insisted that she do it, and so, the following morning, around daybreak, without dressing up too much, the lady, preceded by two of her retainers and followed by one of her maidservants, went to Messer Ansaldo's home.

When he heard that the lady had come to him, he was quite amazed, and so, rising, he sent for the magician, and said to him: "I want you to see how much good your art has procured me." And then he went to greet her, and with no display of unbridled passion, with

reverence he received her courteously, after which he had everyone go into a beautiful room where a big fire was burning, and after arranging for her to be seated, he said:

"My lady, I beg you, if the long love which I have borne you deserves any reward, be good enough to tell me the real reason why you have come here at such an hour and with such an escort."

Ashamed and with tears welling in her eyes, the lady replied: "Sir, neither because I love you, nor because of my promise do I come here, but rather, because of my husband's orders. Having more consideration for the labors of your unbridled passion than for his or my honor, he has made me come here; and it is at his command that I am disposed, this one time, to fulfill your every desire."

If Messer Ansaldo was astonished when she began speaking, he was even more so after she finished. Moved by Gilberto's generosity, his passion began to change into compassion, and he said:

"My lady, since things are as you say, God forbid that I should soil the honor of a man who has taken pity on my love, and so, as long as you wish to stay here, you will be treated just as if you were my sister, and whenever you like, you are free to leave, provided that you give your husband such thanks as you deem befitting such courtesy as his, and that henceforth you always consider me as a brother and your servant."

When the lady heard these words, happier than ever before, she said:

"Nothing could ever make me believe, considering your manners, that anything else could have resulted from my coming here than what I see you have made of it, and I shall always be obliged to you for this."

And having taken her leave, honorably escorted, she returned to Gilberto and reported to him what had happened; and as a result, a very close and loyal friendship grew up between Gilberto and Messer Ansaldo.

When Messer Ansaldo was ready to give the magician his promised fee, the magician, having witnessed the generosity of Gilberto toward Messer Ansaldo and that of Messer Ansaldo toward the lady, said:

"God forbid that having seen Gilberto so generous with his honor and you with your love, I should not be just as generous with my reward; and so, recognizing the justice of leaving the reward with you, it is my intention that you keep it."

The knight was embarrassed and tried to make him take if not all of the money, at least a part of it; but he labored in vain, and after the third day, when the magician had removed his garden and wanted to depart, Messer Ansaldo bid him Godspeed. And with his sensual passion for the lady extinguished in his heart, there remained the honest flame of affection.

What shall we say of this, loving ladies? Shall we place the lady who was almost dead and the love already grown lukewarm through lost hope above the generosity of Messer Ansaldo, who was more warmed with love than ever and kindled with even more hope, who held in his

very hands the catch he had pursued for so long a time? It seems foolish to me to believe that his kind of generosity could ever be compared to the other.

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Who could possibly recount in full the various discussions taking place among the ladies as to which man, Gilberto, Messer Ansaldo, or the magician, had shown the greatest generosity in Madonna Diana's regard? It would take too long. But after the King had allowed them to debate for a while, looking at Fiammetta, he ordered her to end their discussions by telling a story. Without further delay, she began.

BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS

[On Love and Marriage]†

De viro.

A man hatte° *vir* in latyn, and hath that name of° myght and vertu° and strengthe. So seith Isidre.¹ For in myght and strengthe a man passith° a womman, and a man is the hed of a womman, as the apostil seith.² Therefore a man is holde° to rule his wif, as the heed hath the cure° and reule of al the body. And a man hatte *maritus*, as it were wardinge° and defendinge the modir, for he taketh so the charge, the warde,° and the keepinge of his wif that is modir of children, and hatte *sponsus* also, and hath that name of *spondere*,° for a behotith° and oblegith himself. For in the contract of weddinge he plighth his treuthe,° and oblegith himself to lede his lif with his wif withoute departinge,° and to paye dettis to here° and to kepe to here feith and companie, and that pay his (sexual) dettis to her he schal leve hire for none othir. A man hath so gret love to his wif that because of here he aventurith him° to al perilus,° ande settith [here] love tofore his modir love,° and for to dwelle with his wif he forsaketh his fadir and modir and his contray, as oure lord seith: Herefore a man

is called
because of / power

surpasses

bound / care

keeping
guardianship

from "to betroth"
he promises
troth

parting from her /
pay his (sexual) dettis to her

himself / perils
love for his mother

† Text based on *On the Properties of Things*; John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus *de Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al. 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975), I. 307–309. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

1. Isidore of Seville (d. 636), author of a popular medieval encyclopedia, the *Etymologies*. The explanations of the meanings of the Latin words *vir* (man), *maritus* (husband), and *sponsus* (bridegroom) in this paragraph are based on Latin etymologies that the English translation cannot reproduce.

2. St. Paul, in Ephesians 5:23; see p. 383.