A widow poor, somewhat advanced in age,
Lived, on a time, within a small cottage
Beside a grove and standing down a dale.
This widow, now, of whom I tell my tale,
Since that same day when she'd been last a wife
Had led, with patience, her strait simple life,
For she'd small goods and little income-rent;
By husbanding of such as God had sent
She kept herself and her young daughters twain.
Three large sows had she, and no more, 'tis plain,
Three cows and a lone sheep that she called Moll.
Right sooty was her bedroom and her hall,
Wherein she'd eaten many a slender meal.
Of sharp sauce, why she needed no great deal,
For dainty morsel never passed her throat;
Repletion never made this woman sick;
A temperate diet was her whole physic,
And exercise, and her heart's sustenance.
The gout, it hindered her nowise to dance,
Nor apoplexy spun within her head;
Her board was mostly garnished, white and black,
Broiled bacon and sometimes an egg or two,
A yard she had, enclosed all roundabout
With pales, and there was a dry ditch without,
And in the yard a cock called Chanticleer.
In all the land, for crowing, he'd no peer.
His voice was merrier than the organ gay
On Mass days, which in church begins to play;
More regular was his crowing in his lodge
Than is a clock or abbey horologe.
By instinct he'd marked each ascension down
Of equinoctial value in that town;
For when fifteen degrees had been ascended,
Then crew he so it might not be amended.
His comb was redder than a fine coral,
And battlemented like a castle wall.
His bill was black and just like jet it shone;
Like azure were his legs and toes, each one;
His spurs were whiter than the lily flower;
And plumage of the burnished gold his dower.
This noble cock had in his governance
Seven hens to give him pride and all pleasance,
Which were his sisters and his paramours
And wondrously like him as to colours,
Whereof the fairest hued upon her throat
Was called the winsome Mistress Pertelote.
Courteous she was, discreet and debonnaire,
Companionable, and she had been so fair
Since that same day when she was seven nights old,
That truly she had taken the heart to hold
Of Chanticleer, locked in her every limb;
He loved her so that all was well with him.
But such a joy it was to hear them sing,
Whenever the bright sun began to spring,
In sweet accord, "My love walks through the land."
For at that time, and as I understand,
The beasts and all the birds could speak and sing.
So it befell that, in a bright dawning,
As Chanticleer 'midst wives and sisters all
Sat on his perch, the which was in the hall,
And next him sat the winsome Pertelote,
This Chanticleer he groaned within his throat
Like man that in his dreams is troubled sore.
And when fair Pertelote thus heard him roar,
She was aghast and said: "O sweetheart dear,
What ails you that you groan so? Do you hear?
You are a sleepy herald. Fie, for shame!"
And he replied to her thus: "Ah, madame,
I pray you that you take it not in grief:
By God, I dreamed I'd come to such mischief,
And all this caused my groaning, I confess.
Now God," cried he, "my vision read aright
And keep my body out of foul prison!
I dreamed, that while I wandered up and down
Within our yard, I saw there a strange beast
Was like a dog, and he'd have made a feast
Upon my body, and have had me dead.
His colour yellow was and somewhat red;
And tipped his tail was, as were both his ears,
With black, unlike the rest, as it appears;
His snout was small and gleaming was each eye.
Remembering how he looked, almost I die;
And all this caused my groaning, I confess."
"Aha," said she, "fie on you, spiritless!
Alas!" cried she, "for by that God above!
Now have you lost my heart and all my love;
All this caused my groaning, I confess."
That there is anything that you have feared?
Have you not man's heart, and yet have a beard?
Alas! And are you frightened by a vision?
Dreams are, God knows, a matter for derision.
Visions are generated by repletions
And vapours and the body's bad secretions
Of humours overabundant in a wight.
Surely this dream, which you have had tonight,
Comes only of the superfluity
Of your bilious irascibility,
Which causes folk to shiver in their dreams
For arrows and for flames with long red gleams,
For great beasts in the fear that they will bite,
For quarrels and for wolf whelps great and slight;
Just as the humour of melancholy
Causes full many a man, in sleep, to cry,
For fear of black bears or of bulls all black,
Or lest black devils put them in a sack.
Of other humours could I tell also,
That bring, to many a sleeping man, great wo;
But I'll pass on as lightly as I can.
"Lo, Cato, and he was a full wise man,
Said he not, we should trouble not for dreams?
Now, sir," said she, "when we fly from the beams,
For God's love go and take some laxative;
On peril of my soul, and as I live,
I counsel you the best, I will not lie,
That both for choler and for melancholy
You purge yourself; and since you shouldn't tarry,
And on this farm there's no apothecary,
I will myself go find some herbs for you
That will be good for health and pecker too;
And in our own yard all these herbs I'll find,
The which have properties of proper kind
To purge you underneath and up above.
Forget this not, now, for God's very love!
You are so very choleric of complexion.
Beware the mounting sun and all dejection,
Nor get yourself with sudden humours hot;
For if you do, I dare well lay a groat
That you shall have the tertian fever's pain,
Or some ague that may well be your bane.
A day or two you shall have digestive
Of worms before you take your laxatives
Of laurel, centuary, and fumitory,
Or else of hellebore purificatory,
Or caper spurge, or else of dogwood berry,
Or herb ivy, all in our yard so merry;
Peck them just as they grow and gulp them in.
Be merry, husband, for your father's kin!
Dread no more dreams. And I can say no more."
"Madam," said he, "gramercy for your lore.
Nevertheless, not running Cato down,
Who had for wisdom such a high renown,
And though he says to hold no dreams in dread,
By God, men have, in many old books, read
Of many a man more an authority
That ever Cato was, pray pardon me,
Who say just the reverse of his sentence,
And have found out by long experience
That dreams, indeed, are good significations,
As much of joys as of all tribulations
That folk endure here in this life present.
There is no need to make an argument;
The very proof of this is shown indeed.
"One of the greatest authors that men read
Says thus: That on a time two comrades went
On pilgrimage, and all in good intent;
And it so chanced they came into a town
Where there was such a crowding, up and down,
Of people, and so little harbourage,
That they found not so much as one cottage
Wherein the two of them might sheltered be.
Wherefore they must, as of necessity,
For that one night at least, part company;
And each went to a different hostelry
And took such lodgment as to him did fall.
Now one of them was lodged within a stall,
Far in a yard, with oxen of the plow;
That other man found shelter fair enow,
As was his luck, or was his good fortune,
Whatever 'tis that governs us, each one.
"So it befell that, long ere it was day,
This last man dreamed in bed, as there he lay,
That his poor fellow did unto him call,
Saying: 'Alas! For in an ox's stall
This night shall I be murdered where I lie.
Now help me, brother dear, before I die.
Come in all haste to me.' 'Twas thus he said.
This man woke out of sleep, then, all afraid;
But when he'd wakened fully from his sleep,
He turned upon his pillow, yawning deep,
Thinking his dream was but a fantasy.
And then again, while sleeping, thus dreamed he.
And then a third time came a voice that said
(Or so he thought): 'Now, comrade, I am dead;
Behold my bloody wounds, so wide and deep!
Early arise tomorrow from your sleep,
And at the west gate of the town,' said he,
A wagon full of dung there shall you see,
Wherein is hid my body craftily;
Do you arrest this wagon right boldly.
They killed me for what money they could gain.
And told in every point how he'd been slain,
With a most pitiful face and pale of hue.
And trust me well, this dream did all come true;

For on the morrow, soon as it was day,
Unto his comrade’s inn he took the way;
And when he’d come into that ox’s stall,
Upon his fellow he began to call.
"The keeper of the place replied anon,
And said he: ‘Sir, your friend is up and gone;
As soon as day broke he went out of town.’
This man, then, felt suspicion in him grown,
Remembering the dream that he had had,
And forth he went, no longer tarrying, sad,
Unto the west gate of the town, and found
A dung-cart on its way to dumping-ground,
And it was just the same in every wise
As you have heard the dead man advertise;
And with a hardy heart he then did cry
Vengeance and justice on this felony:
‘My comrade has been murdered in the night,
And in this very cart lies, face upright.
I cry to all the officers,’ said he
‘That ought to keep the peace in this city.
Alas, alas, here lies my comrade slain!’
"Why should I longer with this tale detain?
The people rose and turned the cart to ground,
And in the center of the dung they found
The dead man, lately murdered in his sleep.
"O Blessed God, Who art so true and deep!
Lo, how Thou dost turn murder out alway!
Murder will out, we see it every day.
Murder’s so hateful and abominable
To God, Who is so just and reasonable,
That He’ll not suffer that it hidden be;
Though it may skulk a year, or two, or three,
Murder will out, and I conclude thereon.
Immediately the rulers of that town,
They took the carter and so sore they racked
Him and the host, until their bones were cracked,
That they confessed their wickedness anon,
And hanged they both were by the neck, and soon.
"Here may men see that dreams are things to dread.
And certainly, in that same book I read
(I spoof not, as I may have joy and bliss),
Of two men who would voyage o’ersea,
For some cause, and unto a far country,
If but the winds had not been all contrary,
Causing them both within a town to tarry,
Which town was builded near the haven-side.
But then, one day, along toward eventide,
The wind did change and blow as suited best.
Jolly and glad they went unto their rest.
And were prepared right early for to sail;
But unto one was told a marvelous tale.
For one of them, a-sleeping as he lay,
Where dreams have sometimes been (I say not all)  
Warnings of things that, after did befall.  
Consider Egypt's king, Dan Pharaoh,  
His baker and his butler, these also,  
Whether they knew of no effect from dreams.  
Whoso will read of sundry realms the themes  
May learn of dreams full many a wondrous thing.  
Lo, Croesus, who was once of Lydia king,  
Dreamed he not that he sat upon a tree,  
Which signified that hanged high he should be?  
Lo, how Andromache, great Hector's wife,  
On that same day when Hector lost his life,  
She dreamed upon the very night before  
That Hector's life should be lost evermore,  
If on that day he battled, without fail.  
She warned him, but no warning could avail;  
He went to fight, despite all auspices,  
And so was shortly slain by Achilles.  
But that same tale is all too long to tell,  
And, too, it's nearly day, I must not dwell  
Upon this; I but say, concluding here,  
That from this vision I have cause to fear  
Adversity; and I say, furthermore,  
That I do set by laxatives no store,  
For they are poisonous, I know it well.  
"But let us speak of mirth and stop all this;  
My lady Pertelote, on hope of bliss,  
In one respect God's given me much grace;  
For when I see the beauty of your face,  
You are so rosy-red beneath each eye,  
It makes my dreadful terror wholly die.  
For there is truth in In principio  
Mulier est hominis confusio  
(Madam, the meaning of this latin is,  
Woman is man's delight and all his bliss).  
For when I feel at night your tender side,  
Although I cannot then upon you ride,  
Because our perch so narrow is, alas!  
I am so full of joy and all solace  
That I defy, then, vision, aye and dream."  
And with that word he flew down from the beam,  
For it was day, and down went his hens all;  
And with a clutch he them began to call,  
For he had found some corn within the yard.  
Regal he was, and fears he did discard.  
He feathered Pertelote full many a time  
And twenty times he trod her ere 'twas prime.  
He looked as if he were a grim lion  
As on his toes he strutted up and down;  
He deigned not set his foot upon the ground.  
He clucked when any grain of corn he found,  
And all his wives came running at his call.  
Thus regal, as a prince is in his hall,  
I'll now leave busy Chanticleer to feed,  
And with events that followed I'll proceed.  
When that same month wherein the world began,  
Which is called March, wherein God first made man,  
Was ended, and were passed of days also,  
Since March began, full thirty days and two,  
It fell that Chanticleer, in all his pride,  
His seven wives a-walking by his side,  
Cast up his two eyes toward the great bright sun  
(Which through die sign of Taurus now had run  
Twenty degrees and one, and somewhat more),  
And knew by instinct and no other lore  
That it was prime, and joyfully he crew,  
"The sun, my love," he said, "has climbed anew  
Forty degrees and one, and somewhat more.  
My lady Pertelote, whom I adore,  
Mark now these happy birds, hear how they sing,  
And see all these fresh flowers, how they spring;  
Full is my heart of revelry and grace."  
But suddenly he fell in grievous case;  
For ever the latter end of joy is woe.  
God knows that worldly joys do swiftly go;  
And if a rhetorician could but write,  
He in some chronicle might well indite  
And mark it down as sovereign in degree.  
Now every wise man, let him hark to me:  
This tale is just as true, I undertake,  
As is the book of Launcelot of the Lake,  
Which women always hold in such esteem.  
But now I must take up my proper theme.  
A brant-fox, full of sly iniquity,  
That in the grove had lived two years, or three,  
Now by a fine premeditated plot  
That same night, breaking through the hedge, had got  
Into the yard where Chanticleer the fair  
Was wont, and all his wives too, to repair;  
And in a bed of greenery still he lay  
Till it was past the quarter of the day,  
Waiting his chance on Chanticleer to fall,  
As gladly do these killers one and all  
Who lie in ambush for to murder men.  
O murderer false, there lurking in your den!  
O new Iscariot, O new Ganelon!  
O false dissimulator, Greek Sinon  
That brought down Troy all utterly to sorrow!  
O Chanticleer, accused be that morrow  
When you into that yard flew from the beams!  
You were well warned, and fully, by your dreams  
That this day should hold peril damnably.  
But that which God foreknows, it needs must be,  
So says the best opinion of the clerks.  
Witness some cleric perfect for his works,
That in the schools there's a great altercation
In this regard, and much high disputation
That has involved a hundred thousand men.
But I can't sift it to the bran with pen,
As can the holy Doctor Augustine,
Or Boethius, or Bishop Bradwardine,
Whether the fact of God's great fore
knowing
Makes it right needful that I do a thing
(By needful, I mean, of necessity);
Or else, if a free choice he granted me,
To do that same thing, or to do it not,
Though God foreknew before the thing was wrought;
Or if His knowing constrains never at all,
Save by necessity conditional.
I have no part in matters so austere;
My tale is of a cock, as you shall hear,
That took the counsel of his wife, with sorrow,
To walk within the yard upon that morrow
After he'd had the dream whereof I told.
Now women's counsels oft are ill to hold;
A woman's counsel brought us first to woe,
And Adam caused from Paradise to go,
Wherein he was right merry and at ease.
But since I know not whom it may displease
If woman's counsel I hold up to blame,
Pass over, I but said it in my game.
Read authors where such matters do appear,
And what they say of women, you may hear.
These are the cock's words, they are none of mine;
No harm in women can I e'er divine.
All in the sand, a-bathing merrily,
Lay Pertelote, with all her sisters by,
There in the sun; and Chanticleer so free
Sang merrier than a mermaid in the sea
(For Physiologus says certainly
That they do sing, both well and merrily).
And so befell that, as he cast his eye
Among the herbs and on a butterfly,
He saw this fox that lay there, crouching low.
Nothing of urge was in him, then, to crow;
But he cried "Cock-cock-cock" and did so start
As one that could no treason there espy,
So was he ravished by this flattery
Alas, you lords! Full many a flatterer
Is in your courts, and many a cozener,
That please your honours much more, by my fay,
Than he that truth and justice dares to say.
Go read the Ecclesiast on flattery;
Beware, my lords, of all their treachery!
This Chanticleer his wings began to beat,
As one that could no treason there espys,
So was he ravished by this flattery
Alas, you lords! Full many a flatterer
Is in your courts, and many a cozener,
That please your honours much more, by my fay,
Than he that truth and justice dares to say.
Go read the Ecclesiast on flattery;
Beware, my lords, of all their treachery!
This Chanticleer stood high upon his toes,
Stretching his neck, and both his eyes did close,
And so did crow right loudly, for the nonce;
And Russel Fox, he started up at once,
And by the gorget grabbed our Chanticleer,
Flung him on back, and toward the wood did steer,
For there was no man who as yet pursued.
O destiny, you cannot be eschewed!
Alas, that Chanticleer flew from the beams!
Alas, his wife recked nothing of his dreams!
And on a Friday fell all this mischance.

Since he did serve thee well, this Chanticleer,
And to the utmost of his power here,
More for delight than cocks to multiply,
Why would'st thou suffer him that day to die?
O Gaufred, my dear master sovereign,
Who, when King Richard Lionheart was slain
By arrow, sang his death with sorrow sore,
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