

Anonymous French Fabliau (13th Cent.)

The Priest and the Lady

He who composed this fiction
Has made it altogether new.
It happened on a Thursday
That a priest, near Lardi,
Went off to Etampes to amuse himself;
But his amusement came close to harming him,
As you will now hear me tell.

But I want to tell you first of all
How a merchant's lovely wife,
Who was attractive and courteous,
Sent word to this priest -- it is no lie --
That her husband one day
Had to be out of town on business;
Indeed, she told him her whole situation.
What more should I tell you?
The priest rushed so fast
And came so quickly to the lady
That he was at the house before prime,
Where he was received without any coyness.
The maidservant started to get dinner --
Meat cooked in a stew, pies with pepper,
And good clear wine, healthy to drink.
And the bath water was already heated
When a devil, a misbegotten spirit,
Brought the husband home to the wife,
Since he had already finished his business.
The horse that gently carried him
Brought him right to the gate,
Which he found closed fast,
For the bar was locked tight.

Then he spoke and said, "Open
Quickly and don't delay in there!
Why have you shut the gate on me?"

And the wife was greatly upset,
For she had to open the gate;
But first she had the pies
Covered with a towel,
And then she worked fiercely
To hide the priest,

Who was very afraid for himself
She advised and urged the parson
To get into a wicker basket
That was set behind the gate,
And he, who was in despair,
Did not refuse this advice,
But got in there, without any help,
For he wanted to get out of this mess;
But he left his cape behind.

They hid nothing more nor did anything else,
But straightway opened the door
For the merchant, who was wasting his time.
He came in and looked about
Until he saw the bathtub,
Where the lady was, stark naked;
But he saw no harm in that.
Then he got down from his horse,
And had it quickly taken to the stable.
And he who had no desire to tell tales
He who was resting in the basket
Where he could neither snooze nor sleep
He trembled so violently from fear
That he and the basket together
Tumbled onto the ground.
Those in the house did not see him.
When he realized that he had fallen
And had not been seen,
He went straight into the house.
Boldly he spoke out these words,
And he did not sound as though he were desperate;
Said the priest, "God be in this house!
I have brought you back your basket."

The merchant was greatly surprised
When he saw the parson like this,
And the lady made him believe
That she had loaned it to him;
She was as self-assured as you please.
"Certainly, I have had a good pledge for it."

"Lady, you do wrong,"
Said the merchant, "when for this you ask
His pledge, as if you would not get it back."

Now the priest is bold in turn,
"Lady," he said, "my black cape,

If you please, since you made me give it;
I have no need to wait any longer,
And give me back my towel and my pies."

"Sir Priest, you are too hasty;
You should have dinner with my husband,
If you would do him so great an honor."

And the priest said, "I grant it,"
And he was very glad at the outcome:
He stayed without much resistance.
Next they went to wash themselves and then to eat.
The table rested on two cushions;
Upon the table were two candlestick holders
Where there were two silver candlesticks;
Everything was noble and elegant.

Then they cut up pies and handed them around;
The lady and the priest busied themselves
In pouring out wine in great abundance;
To the lord of the house
They gave so much wine to drink
And so many pies with pepper to eat
That quickly he was dead drunk.
He was worth a thousand pounds
More than he was in the morning.
Then he began to speak Latin
And gibberish and German
And then Dutch and Flemish,
And he boasted of his generosity,
And of the terrible deeds of prowess
That he used to do in his younger days;
The wine had made him the King of France.

Then the priest said, as I have heard,
That he could pick up three people at once.
But the merchant denied this
And said, "You speak fantasies.
Indeed, it could not be done here;
You speak fantasies, Sir Priest."

Said the priest, "I will bet on it."

"And what will you bet?" he said.

"A goose," said the priest, "if you are willing."

"That is foolish, when you talk like that,"
Said the merchant, who accepted the challenge.
This speech was agreeable to the parson,
And it greatly pleased and satisfied him.
Then he went to the merchant, and he arranged him
All stretched out on the floor;
And then he went to get the maidservant,
And he placed her upon her lord;
To the lady he did such honor
That he lifted her dress
After he had stretched her out
And he entered between her thighs.
Through the little opening he entered the belly;
There he put his own special ferret;
It would be straight to the stew-pot
For the poor little hare that this ferret chased.
It is very tricky to chase such a hare;
It would be easier to catch two rabbits,
For this hare is so clever
That it could put on a good front
If it had a ferret in its nest.
From this I return to the merchant,
Who was very eager to get up,
Since, when the priest pushed and pulled,
The merchant said that he was squashing them
And that there were two stones upon him,
And that the priest was tolling two bells
When he did his business.
At last he said to the merchant,
"Get up, for I could not
Lift these three for anything that I could try,
And I have worked so hard at it
My balls are all sweaty
From the labor and the effort."

Said the lady, "You are not so strong
For one who should be as strong or stronger.
Now hand over the goose, for that was agreed."

"Lady," he said, "by a happy chance,
If you will wait until tomorrow,
You will have a fat one, by my faith."

Said the merchant, "And I agree,
If you will buy it at the market;
I have carried a heavy burden.
Go with God's blessing."

Straightway he went to his house,
He who had succeeded so cleverly;
It is a matter of buying and selling.

From this fabliau you can learn
That many women are very clever;
There are women like this of great trickery.
A woman knows much of foxiness
When she has served in this way
Her good husband by means of her lover.

Here ends The Priest and the Lady.