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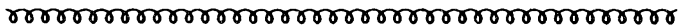
# What Women Want Most

A One-Act Play  
Based on  
Geoffrey Chaucer's  
WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

By  
THOMAS J. HATTON



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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WHAT WOMEN WANT MOST  
*A Play In One Act*  
For Two Women and Six Men

C H A R A C T E R S

KING ARTHUR

QUEEN GUINEVERE

SIR HAROLD PENDRAGON

SIR GALAHAD THE TRUSTY

LADY LEONORE,  
The Fair Maid of the Tower

A BAILIFF

TWO GUARDS  
(optional non-speaking parts)

TIME: A day in May during the reign of King Arthur.

PLACE: The throne room of King Arthur's  
palace at Camelot

## WHAT WOMEN WANT MOST

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: KING ARTHUR and QUEEN GUINEVERE are seated on their thrones. The BAILIFF is seated at his table writing.

KING. Well, another day in court. Guinevere, my love, of all the reforms I've instituted in this barbaric country, I find making myself the head of the judicial system the most satisfying.

QUEEN. I'm glad you think so, Sire. Frankly, I find most of these court days exceptionally dull.

KING. How can you say that? Here we sit, the power of life and death in our hands, representatives of Divine justice to a rude and ignorant people.

QUEEN. But the cases are usually so petty – an acre of disputed land, somebody's serf running off or claiming freedom. I doubt if God even cares about such little things.

KING. My dear! God cares about everything. Well, what's on the docket today, Bailiff?

BAILIFF. Only one case, Your Majesty. It's rather delicate.

KING. Delicate? How can a case of law be delicate?

BAILIFF. Well, it involves the new kissing law, Your Majesty.

QUEEN (suddenly interested). The kissing law?

BAILIFF. Yes, Your Majesty. Sir Harold Pendragon is accused of kissing the Lady Leonore, the Fair Maid of the Tower, against her will. According to the ordinance His Majesty the King just recently decreed, the penalty for unauthorized

kissing is death.

QUEEN. I still think you made that penalty too stiff, Arthur.

KING. Nonsense, my dear. If we're going to have a civilized society, my knights have got to respect ladies. Besides, I'm not too sure but that indiscriminate kissing doesn't spread the plague. It passes around bad air or something. Well, let's get on with it. Open the court, Bailiff.

BAILIFF (rising). Hear ye! Hear ye! The court of the Most Noble, Most Worthy, Most Wise, Most Just, and Most Merciful Arthur, King of Britain and Knight of the Round Table, is now in session. Any man having complaint let him appear now or be silent forever. Are there suitors before this court?

(SIR GALAHAD and LADY LEONORE enter, escorted by the GUARDS, who exit after the couple has entered.)

GALAHAD. There are.

KING. Let the suitors approach the throne. (GALAHAD and LEONORE walk to the thrones and kneel.) You may arise and be sworn. (GALAHAD and LEONORE rise.)

BAILIFF. Your names?

GALAHAD. Sir Galahad the Trusty.

LEONORE. The Lady Leonore, the Fair Maid of the Tower.

BAILIFF. Do you swear on your honors as knight and lady that all that you tell this court will be true?

GALAHAD and LEONORE. We do.

BAILIFF. You may state your case.

GALAHAD. Your Most Gracious Majesties, my name is Galahad the Trusty. I am the son and sole heir of Lionel the Light-hearted. My mother, God rest, was Rosemond the Reticent. Your Majesties may also remember my grandfather, Fredrick the Futile, who in the days of the attacks by the Norsemen . . .

KING. Come, come, man. I'm not interested in your family tree. Why have you come before my court?

GALAHAD. I'm sorry, Sire. I thought it necessary to explain

that I am not just an ordinary suitor. (He draws himself up.) I have come to this court in the true and rightful manner of a knight as the champion of this fair, and to this time unsullied maiden, my fiancée, the Fair Maid of the Tower. This lady has been most frightfully abused by the scoundrel, Sir Harold Pendragon, a knight of your round table.

KING. I know Sir Harold. He's always been a good knight. And how has he mistreated this maiden?

GALAHAD. Your Majesty, I hesitate to describe his heinous crime in the presence of ladies. He – he forced his attentions upon her. He sullied her honor. He . . .

QUEEN. Oh, for heavens sake! He kissed her, right?

GALAHAD. Alas so, Your Majesty.

KING. Well, how did this happen? I've known Pendragon since he was a boy. I've never seen him be discourteous to women. Oh, he used to crib on his Latin grammar now and then, but . . .

GALAHAD. Your Majesties will shudder as I describe the wretched action. The suffering this poor girl has been through! You can hardly conceive of her shame and terror.

QUEEN. The longer you talk, the harder time I have of conceiving of anything. Sire, couldn't we have the maiden speak for herself?

KING. Good idea! After all, she was the one who got the kiss . . . My dear, if you can bring yourself to describe the ordeal, would you tell us what happened in your own words?

LEONORE. Must I?

QUEEN (impatiently). Yes, you must, girl. Come now, if you want justice, you must provide us with the facts.

LEONORE. Well, it was terrible, just terrible.

GALAHAD. Abominable, simply abominable.

KING. Sir Galahad, please. Go on, Maiden. We've got to know more than that it was terrible.

LEONORE. Well, I was out picking wild flowers, you know. It was May Day, and we always pick flowers on May Day. I had

just found a big patch of daisies – they go so well with my eyes, you know – and I had picked at least a dozen when I came on this man, and he . . . he . . . Oh, I can't talk about it.

QUEEN. Force yourself. What did he do?

LEONORE. Well, he was lost, and he asked me the way to Camelot. And then he jumped up, and he grabbed me . . . and, oh, it was terrible.

QUEEN. You didn't encourage him in any way?

GALAHAD. Your Majesty, what a suggestion!

KING. Quiet! Did you encourage him, girl?

LEONORE. Of course not. I was friendly and polite, but that's all. I'm a nice girl.

KING. Well, it seems like an open and shut case. Obviously the scoundrel took advantage of the situation and acted like a mad dog. The penalty for unauthorized kissing is death. Fair Maid, you shall have your justice, and I'll have this man's head.

QUEEN. But, Sire, you haven't given the defendant a chance to tell his side of the story.

KING. Why should I? It's obvious he's guilty. It's as plain as the nose on your face . . . if you'll pardon the expression, love.

QUEEN. That may be, but you've called this a court of justice. You can't go chopping off a man's head without even giving him a chance to defend himself. That's not what a representative of Divine justice would do.

KING. Oh, very well. Let the scoundrel come in and tell his story. Then we'll chop off his head! Bailiff!

BAILIFF (rising, to GALAHAD and LEONORE). Be seated, please. (GALAHAD and LEONORE sit UC.) Let the defendant, Sir Harold Pendragon, be brought in.

(SIR HAROLD is brought in by the GUARDS. They pause just on stage.)