STORY OF THE PLAY

Geoffrey Chaucer introduces us to a group of pilgrims staying at an inn south of London preparing for their journey to Canterbury the next day. He proposes that each of the pilgrims tells a story going to and from the shrine, but the group is so anxious to hear the stories they begin immediately.

The Physician begins with the tale of Alison, who falls in love with Nicholas, a court scribe for the wicked Judge Appius. Appius, however, desires Alison for himself and devises a trick to force Alison to become his wife. Will Nicholas save Alison from this unwanted marriage?

The Pardoner tells the next tale. Three thieves find out a friend has been slain by Death, so they plan to find Death and kill him. Their greed leads them directly to him.

The Nun tells the story of Chanticleer the rooster, who has the most beautiful singing voice in the barnyard, and the Fox who would make him his dinner.

The second act contains the final and longest story: The Knight's Tale. King Theseus locks two prisoners of war in the tower overlooking the palace gardens. The two young men fall madly in love with Emily, Theseus's sister. The two escape and profess their love, but are caught by Theseus. At Emily's behest, he agrees to allow one of them to marry Emily – the one who at the end of a year's time brings her the finest present.

The timeless appeal of Chaucer, combined with easy staging, flexible casting, and special optional passages, make this show appealing for audiences of all ages.

SETTING
The Tabard Inn south of London, 1380s, and in the imaginations of the players and the audience. There is a series of platforms or boxes upstage so that some players can climb to a height above the others. A sign reading “Tabard Inn” hangs upstage, and perhaps an old diamond-glass window or two. One or two small, rough-hewn tables sit on stage, with equally rough-hewn benches for the patrons. These tables and benches become the furniture used in all the tales. A trunk, right or left, holds the necessary props.
CAST OF CHARACTERS
(22 female, 17 male, 8 either, doubling possible)

In the Tabard Inn:
GEOFFREY CHAUCER: a pilgrim heading to Canterbury
INNKEEPER: owner of the Tabard Inn
NUN: another pilgrim
PHYSICIAN: another
PARDONER: another
KNIGHT: another
PLAYERS: ONE-TWELVE (dressed as pilgrims, they will
play characters in other segments)
WORKMAN

In the Physician’s Tale:
SIR ROBERT: a famous knight
LADY AGNES: his wife
ALISON: their daughter
NICHOLAS: a court scribe
JUDGE APPIUS: cruel man who desires Alison
JANE WEEKS: a poor old peasant
MOTHER: of Judge Appius
GUARDS
SHERIFF

In the Pardoner’s Tale:
WAITRESS: at the inn
THIEF ONE
THIEF TWO
THIEF THREE
OLD MAN
APOTHECARY: provides a poison
In the Nun’s Tale:
WIDOW
BEULAH: her cow
OSWALD: her donkey
MOLLY: her sheep
CHICK ONE: a wife of Chanticleer
CHICK TWO: another
CHICK THREE: another
CHANTICLEER: a rooster with a beautiful singing voice
PARTLET: Chanticleer’s favorite wife
FOX: a wiley animal ready for Chanticleer as his dinner

In the Knight’s Tale:
THESEUS: King of Athens
HIPPOLYTA: Queen of the Amazons, Theseus’s wife
WOMAN ONE
WOMAN TWO
WOMAN THREE
CREON: conqueror of Thebes
ARCITE: defender of Creon
PALAMON: defender of Creon
EMILY: Theseus’s sister
SERVANT ONE
SERVANT TWO
GUARD ONE
GUARD TWO
CHILD
MOTHER
DOCTOR: in Thebes
JENNY: a young bride

*See additional notes at the end of the script.
ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: CHAUCER enters through curtains, standing before them, or is lit by spot separately with the rest of the stage in darkness.)

CHAUCER: When April with its gentle showers has pierced the March drought to the root and bathed every plant in moisture to hasten flowering, folks long to go on pilgrimages to visit foreign shores and distant shrines. And from every shire's end of England, they go to Canterbury to seek the blessed martyr who helped them when they were sick.

(The curtain opens, revealing the PLAYERS standing about, frozen. They are dressed in various medieval costumes, some rich, some poor. We see a table, several benches, a tree in the background, and a trunk full of props.)

CHAUCER: (Continued.) One day in that season, I stopped at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, and met up with a group of pilgrims who were headed for Canterbury. (CHAUCER moves through the crowd of frozen PLAYERS.) They were men and women of various ranks who had come together by chance. A knight, a nun, a pardoner, a physician, a miller, a reeve, a lawyer, a monk, a merchant, a wife, a sailor. Unfortunately, a terrible storm the night before had washed out a bridge two miles hence, and no travelers could leave. So our host, the innkeeper, tried to make all merry and comfortable.

(PLAYERS come to life, laughing and talking. INNKEEPER stands atop the bench.)

INNKEEPER: The workmen have told me it won't be long before the bridge is fixed.
NUN: Saints be praised!
PHYSICIAN: But long is a highly relative term. What is long to a fly is very short to a turtle.

KNIGHT: The Physician speaks true!

PARDONER: I did not bargain for any such delay! There must be an alternate route!

(Grumbles from the PLAYERS.)

CHAUCER: I assure you, good people, there is not.

KNIGHT: And what, sir, do you know about it?

CHAUCER: I’ve ridden to Canterbury on business many times. (Disbelief and more grumbling from PLAYERS.) Allow me to make a proposal to lighten our wait and our trip. Each of us will tell a tale going to Canterbury and each will tell a tale coming back.

NUN: Praise be! A noble thought.

PHYSICIAN: Tales from which we may learn about life.

PARDONER: And the wages of sin!

KNIGHT: Of course, I shall have the finest tale, for my adventures are the boldest and most exciting.

INNKEEPER: Indeed my appetite is whetted for a good story, Master Chaucer.

NUN: Let us begin our tales tonight. Right now.

PHYSICIAN: They will wile away our wait.

PARDONER: And we may profit from our listening.

CHAUCER: (To audience.) So it was determined that the Physician should tell the first tale. For he was a learned man, who knew medicine, surgery, and most importantly, astrology.

PHYSICIAN: I thank you, Master Chaucer, and here begins my tale. There once was a knight whose name was Sir Robert.

(ROBERT steps to center.)

PHYSICIAN: (Continued.) He was as brave and courageous a knight as the realm ever knew. (ROBERT flexes.) He was married to a beautiful lady named Lady Agnes.
(AGNES steps to the center, smiling coyly.)

PHYSICIAN: (Continued.) She was graced with household wisdom and skilled in needlepoint. (AGNES holds up a sampler that reads "Bless This Castle.") And their union was blessed with one child. But what a child! Their daughter Alison was the most beautiful girl in the entire kingdom.

(ALISON steps to center and holds up a mirror, fixing her hair.)

PHYSICIAN: (Continued.) Pygmalion himself, not if he had chipped, beaten, or coaxed his marble, could have fashioned a more beautiful face. Word had it that the goddess Venus was jealous of Alison's beauty, but that would be another story. (ROBERT and AGNES step US. ALISON picks up basket of flowers.) One day, as Alison was picking flowers in a field near her house, a young man named Nicholas almost ran into her.

(NICHOLAS runs to center, almost hitting ALISON, who drops basket and flowers.)

NICHOLAS: Oh, I beg your pardon!
ALISON: My flowers!

(NICHOLAS and ALISON look at one another. We hear chimes tinkling.)

PHYSICIAN: It was love at first sight.
NICHOLAS: Your beauty is right excellent. (Alternate: Wow! I've never seen a slicker chick than thee!) ALISON: You, too, are wondrous fair. (Alternate: And you're just plain hunkamonka!) NICHOLAS: Do you have a name?
ALISON: I'm Alison, daughter of Sir Robert and Lady Agnes.
End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
http://www.histage.com/PlayDetails.asp?PID=1128

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children’s theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!