

Cymbeline

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One Banished

One of the most powerful lords in ancient Britain's realm nods in agreement with his friend's observation. "You do not meet a man but who *frowns!* Yet our blood obeys, and we courtiers must *seem* as does the king: in *heaviness.*" The tall nobleman clearly dislikes such pretense.

His guest, an aging earl visiting here at King Cymbeline's palace, has seen the sovereign's gloomy anger. "But what's the matter?"

"His *daughter* and heir of 's kingdom, whom he purposed to wed to his wife's sole son—she's a widow that of late he married—hath instead *proffered herself* unto a poor but worthy gentleman!"

The princess's action—refusing her new step-brother in favor of a commoner—has perturbed the monarch.

"She's *wedded!*—her husband *banished!*—she *imprisoned!*" says the duke. "All is *outward* sorrow—though I think only the *king* be chafed at very heart."

"None but the king?"

The duke amends: "He that hath lost her, too; so is the *queen*, who *most* desired the match!

"But not a *courtier*, although they wear their faces to the bent of the king's looks, hath a *heart* that is not *glad* about the thing they scowl at!"

"And why so?"

As they stroll through the flowery formal garden, the younger nobleman frowns. "He that hath missed having the princess is a thing *too bad for report!* And he that hath her—I mean, that *married* her—a *good* man and, alas, therefore *banished!*—is such a creature that, though one search through the regions of the earth for his like, *something* would be found failing in any that should compare! I do not think so fair an *outward* and such strong stuff *inward* endows any man but *he!*"

"You speak him *fair!*" says the graybeard.

"I do extend him, sir, *within himself!*—crush him together, rather than *unfold* his measure duly."

"What's his name and birth?"

"I cannot delve him to the root." The duke thinks for a moment, then recounts what he does know of the gentleman's family, which is new to gentility. "His father was called *Sicilius*, who did gain his *honour* against the Romans with Cassibelan, but was awarded his *titles* by Tenantius, whom he served with glory and admirèd success, and so gained the sur-addition *Leonatus*"—lion-born. Some years ago, the Britons' King Cassibelan and his general, Tenantius, led successful battles against two Roman incursions from Gaul by the western forces of Julius Caesar.

"And he had, besides this in question, *Leonatus*, two other sons, who in the wars o' the time died with their swords in hand—for which their father, old and devoted to his issue, took such sorrow as to *quit being!* And his gentle lady, big with *this* gentleman, our theme, deceased as he was born.

"The king, he takes the babe to his protection, calls him *Posthumus Leonatus*,"—Leonati's survivor, "raises him, and makes him of his bed-chamber,"—a trusted member of the royal household, "puts to him all the learnings that his time could make him the receiver of!

"Which *he* took as we do *air!*—fast as 'twas administered!

"And from that *spring*, he became a *harvest!*—lived in court, most praised and most *loved!*—which rare it is to do!—*example* to the youngest; to the more mature a mirror that *fêted* them; and to the graver, a child that *guided* dotards!

"As for his mistress, from whom he now is banished, her own choice proclaims how *she* esteems him and his virtue: by her election may be truly read what kind of man *he* is!"

The earl is impressed. “I honour him even from your *report!* But, pray you tell me: is she sole child to the king?”

“His only child. He *had* two sons. If this be worth your hearing, mark it: the *elder* of them, i’ swathing-clothes at three years old, and the other from their nursery were *stolen!*—and to this hour, no guess or knowledge which way they went.”

“How long is this ago?”

“Some twenty years.”

The visitor is surprised. “That the *king’s* children should be so slackly guarded, so conveyed!—and the search so slow that it could not trace them!”

“Howsoe’er ’tis strange, or that the negligence may well be laughed at, yet is it true, sir.”

“I do well believe you.”

His companion spots movement at the garden doors. “We must forbear; here come the gentleman, the queen, and the princess.” The two noblemen step discreetly behind some tall green shrubs and return in silence to the castle.

The queen speaks reassuringly to Princess Imogen. “No, be assured you shall not find *me*, daughter, after the slander to most stepmothers, evil-eyed unto you! You’re my prisoner—but your jailer shall deliver you the keys to *unlock* your restraint!

“As for you, Posthumus, so soon as I can win over the offended king, I will be known as your *advocate!* Marry, the fire of rage is yet in him!—and ’twere good you leaned unto his sentence with what patience your wisdom may inform you.”

Posthumus Leonatus bows. “Please it Your Highness, I will go from hence today.”

“You know the peril,” sighs the queen. She regards the couple sadly. “Though the king hath chargèd you should not speak together, I’ll fetch a turn about the garden, pitying the pangs of barrèd affections.” She moves away, and walks along the paved path.

Imogen watches her go. “Oh, *dissembling* courtesy! How finely this tyrant can *caress* where she *wounds!*”

“My dearest husband, my father’s wrath I fear as *nothing*, for what his rage can do to *me*—my holy *duty* always reservèd.” Tears well in her eyes. “But *you* must be *gone!*—and I shall here abide the hourly shot of angry eyes, not comforted to *live* but that there is this jewel in the world that I may see *again!*”

Leonatus takes her hand. “My queen! My mistress! Oh, lady, weep no more, lest I give cause to be suspected of more tenderness than doth become a man! I will remain the loyal’st husband that did e’er plight troth!

“My residence in Rome—at one Philario’s, who to my father was a friend, to me known but by letter—thither *write*, my queen, and with mine eyes I’ll *drink* the words you send, though the ink be made of gall!”—however bitter the news.

They embrace, and kiss tenderly—then ardently.

The queen passes by. “Be brief, I pray you! If the king come, I shall incur I know not how much of his displeasure!” Her thoughts are quite different: *Yet I’ll move him to walk this way! I never do him wrong but that he does pay dearly for my offences!—buying my injuries so as to be friends.* Again she moves away—this time toward the palace.

Leonatus holds the princess close. “Would that our *leave-taking* were as long a term as yet we have to *live!* The loathness to depart still *grows!*” He kisses her hand. “Adieu!”

“Nay, *stay* a little!” she pleads. “Were you but riding forth to air yourself, such parting were too petty!” She slips a golden ring from her right hand. “Look here, love—this diamond was my *mother’s.* *Take* it, my heart!—and keep it till you woo another wife, when Imogen is dead.”

“What, *what?*—*another?* You gentle gods, give me but this one I *have*, and seal up my embracements from a *next* with bonds of death!” He slides the ring onto a finger, and closes his hand tightly, saying, “*Remain!*” He tells her, earnestly, “So long as my *senses* can keep it on, they’ll remain here with *thee!*”

“And, sweetest, fairest, as I my poor *self* did exchange for you, to your infinite *loss*, so in our gifting I still win from you”—benefit more. He pulls from his wrist a silver bracelet inlaid with a small ruby. “For my sake wear this: it is a *manacle of love*—I’ll place it upon this fairest prisoner!”

Imogen clasps her other hand to it, now on her wrist. “Oh, the gods,” she moans, “when shall we *see* again?”

“*Alack!*—the *king!*” cries Leonatus, as Cymbeline, with two of his attendants, emerges from the castle and strides angrily to his adopted child—the man who is now his daughter’s banished husband.

“Thou basest thing, *avoid!*” growls the monarch. “*Hence from my sight!* If after this command thou affront the court with thy unworthiness, thou *diest!* Away! Thou’rt *poison* to my blood!”

Leonatus bows. “May the gods protect you, and bless the good remainers of the court. I am gone.” He heads into the palace where he spent his youth to fetch his few possessions.

Imogen sobs, watching him go. “There cannot be a pinch in *death* more sharp than this is!”

“O *disloyal thing!* You shouldst restore my *youth*,” groans Cymbeline, “but thou heap’st a year’s *age* on me!”

Says Imogen defiantly, “I beseech you, sir, harm not *yourself* with your vexation! *I* am senseless of your wrath: a touch *more rare* subdues all pangs, all fears!”

Cymbeline glares. “Past *grace? Obedience?*”

“Past *hope*, and into *despair*—that way I passèd grace!”

“That mightst have had the sole son of my *queen!*”

“Oh, *blest* that I might *not!* I chose an *eagle*, and did avoid a *puttock!*”—a lowly bird of prey.

“Thou took’st a *beggar!*—wouldst have made my *throne* a seat for *baseness!*”

“*No!*” cries Imogen, “I rather added a *lustre* to it!”

“O thou *vile* one!”

“Sir, it is *your fault* that I have loved Posthumus!—you raised him as my *playfellow*. And he is a man worth *any* woman—almost *overbuys* me in the sum he pays!”

Cymbeline is livid with frustration. “What, art thou *mad?*”

“*Almost*, sir! Heaven *restore* me!—I would that I were a *neat-herd’s* daughter, and my Leonatus our neighbour *shepherd’s* son!”

“Thou foolish thing!”

His wife arrives. “They were *again* together!” the king tells her. He turns back to Imogen. “You have not done after our command!” He tells the servants, “*Away* with her, and pent her up!”

The queen goes to comfort the weeping princess. “*Beseech* you, *patience*,” she tells the king. “Peace, dear lady!—daughter, *peace!*”

“Sweet sovereign, leave us to ourselves; and make yourself some comfort out of your *best* deliberation.”

“Nay, let her *languish*, by a drop of blood a *day!*—and being agèd, *die* of this folly!” Still fuming, King Cymbeline returns with his men to the throne room.

“*Fie!*” says the queen, frowning. “You must *give way!*” She sees someone hurrying from the castle. “Here is your servant.” She is privately annoyed; Pisanio, fifty, had been Leonatus’s man before the marriage. “How now, sir. What news?”

“My lord your son *drew on my master!*” the gray-haired man tells the queen.

“No *harm*, I trust, is done?” she asks, hoping otherwise.

“There *might* have been, but that my master rather *played* than fought, and had no help from anger! They were parted by gentlemen at hand.”

“I am very glad on’t,” mutters the queen.

Imogen is indignant. “My father’s *your son’s* friend—he takes *his* part!” And she is disgusted: “To *draw* upon an *exile!*—oh, a *brave* sir! I would they were both in *Afric* together—and myself by with a *needle*, that I might *prick* the goer-back!”

“Why came you *from* your master?” she asks Pisanio.

“On his command! He would not suffer me to take him to the haven,”—the port for his voyage to Italy, “but left these notes of what demands I should be subject to, when’t please *you* so to employ me.” He gives her a folded paper.

“This hath been a faithful servant,” says the queen. “I dare lay mine honour he will remain so.”

Pisanio is surprised; the queen has never been cordial to him. But he bows. “I humbly thank Your Highness.”

“Pray, walk awhile,” the queen tells Imogen, heading out into the fragrant garden.

Imogen whispers to Pisanio. “About some half-hour hence, I pray you, *speak with me!* You shall at least *go see my lord aboard!*”

“For this time leave me....” She follows the queen.

Lord Cloten, the new queen’s inept son, the sweat of fear still on him, pants in angry frustration over failing to kill Leonatus—and at having been humiliated, then restrained by noblemen.

“Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt,” says one of the two courtiers with him in a corridor near the palace entrance.

Thinks the other, taller lord, *The violence of action hath made you reek like a sacrifice!*

The younger noble sees Cloten’s frown forming. “Where air comes in, *fair* comes out!” he says hastily. “There’s none abroad so wholesome as what *you* vent!”

“If my shirt were *bloody*, then to shift it!” says Cloten. “Have I hurt him?”

No, ’faith—not even so much as his patience! thinks the taller courtier.

“*Hurt* him?” exclaims the portly lord. “If he be not *hurt*, his body’s a passable *carcass!* It is a *thoroughfare* for *steel*, if it be not hurt!”

But the tall man saw the attack. *His steel was in debt; it went o’ the backside the town!* Cloten had approached Leonatus stealthily, from behind.

“The villain could not ’stand me!”—withstand, Cloten argues.

No, thinks the silent lord wryly, *so he* fled forward, *always toward your face!*

“*Stand* you?” The other man offers a jest on *stand* as property, like a stand of trees: “You have land enough of *your own*, but he *added* to your having: *gave you some ground!*”

As many inches as you have oceans! thinks the older lord, watching the fop and his sycophant with scorn. *Little curs!*

“I would they had not come *between* us!” claims Cloten

So would I, thinks the courtier, *till you had measured how long a fool you are upon the ground!*

Cloten paces, vexed again by Imogen’s choice. “And that she should love this *fellow*, and refuse *me!*”

With difficulty, the tall man suppresses a harsh laugh. *If it be a sin to make a true election, she is damned!*

“Sir, as I’ve told you always, her beauty and her *brain* go not together,” the smaller lord assures Cloten. “She’s a good *sign*, but I have seen small reflection in her *wit!*”

She shines not upon fools, lest the reflection should hurt her eyes!

Cloten motions for the others to follow. “Come, I’ll to my chamber. Would there had been some hurt done!”

I wish not so, unless it had been the fall of an ass!—which is no great hurt.

“You’ll go with us?” asks Cloten, noting their stillness; he really does need a fresh shirt.

Only the paunchy man moves. “I’ll *attend* Your Lordship!”

“Nay, come, let’s go *together.*”

“Well, my lord,” says the tall man, and he yields to unpleasant necessity.

Imogen tells Pisanio, “I would thou *grew’st* upon the shores o’ the haven, and questioned’st *every sail!* If he should write and I not *have* it, ’twere paper *lost* as a deferrèd *mercy* is!”—as pointless as a pardon arriving after an execution. “What was the last that he spake to thee?”

“It was his ‘*queen,*’ his ‘*queen!*’”

“Then waved his handkerchief?”

“And *kissed* it, madam!”

“Senseless *linen* happier therein than *I!* And that was all?”

“No, madam!—for so long as he could make me out with his eye or ear he did keep to the deck!—distinguished him from others with glove or handkerchief or hat ever *waving*, as if the fits and stirs of ’s hand could best express how slowly his *soul* sailed on, how swiftly his *ship!*”

“Thou shouldst have made him as little as a crow, or *less*, ere left off eyeing him!”

“Madam, so I *did,*” Pisanio assures her.

“I would have broken mine *eye-strings*—*cracked* them, but to look upon him till the diminution of space had pointed him sharp as my needle!—nay, followed him till he had melted from the smallness of a *gnat* into *air*—and then have turned mine eyes, and *wept!*”

“But, good Pisanio, when shall we hear from him?”

“Be assured, madam, with his next vantage.”

Imogen moans, wringing her hands. “I did take my leave of him, but had more pretty things to *say!* Ere I could tell him how I would think on him at *certain hours* such thoughts, and such—ere I could make him swear the *shes* of Italy should not betray mine interest and his honour—or have charged him, at the *sixth* hour of morn, at *noon*, at *midnight*, to encounter me in *orisons,*”—pray with her, “for then I am in *heaven* for him! Or ere I could give him that parting *kiss* which I’d have set betwixt two charmèd wards,”—his lips, “*comes in my father!*—and like the tyrannous breathing of the *north wind*, shakes all our buds from growing!”

Imogen stands taller and composes her expression; she sees one of the queen’s waiting-gentlewomen approaching.

The lady curtsays. “The queen, madam, desires Your Highness’ company....”

The young princess tells Pisanio, in a studiously humdrum manner, “Those things I bid you do, get them dispatched. I will attend the queen.”

He bows as she goes. *Madam, I shall!*

Chapter Two Schemers

Believe it, sir. I have seen him, in *Britain*; he was then of a crescent note,”—young and rising, “*expected* to prove so worthy as since he hath been allowed the *name* of,” the skeptic tells his host. “But I could look on him then without the help of *admiration*. The catalogue of his endowments tabled by his side, I perused him by *items,*” says Lord Giacomo—contemptuously.

Notes Lord Philario, in defense of his wartime friend’s widely praised son, “You speak of him when he was less furnished than he is now with that which *makes* him, both without and *within.*”

The nobleman has invited several acquaintances, members other countries’ legations, to join him here in his mansion in Rome for the arrival of the exile from the remote and backward island nation. A fine supper awaits them.

Says a haughty Parisian knight, “I have seen him in *France*. We had very *many* there could behold this ‘sun’ with as firm eyes as he!” He and Giacomo disdain newly acquired gentility.

Giacomo continues. “This matter of marrying his king’s daughter, wherein he must be weighed rather by *her* value than his own, *awards* him, I doubt not, a great deal!”

“As does his *banishment,*” adds the knight.

“*Aye*,” says Giacomo. “The approbation of those who weep over this *divorce*—lamentable under *her* colours!—they are wonderfully extending to him, be it but to fortify *her* judgment—which else an easy battery might *lay flat* for taking a beggar without quality!”—a poor commoner.

“But how comes it he is to sojourn with you?” he asks Philario. “How creeps acquaintance?”

Philario is annoyed by his tone. “His *father* and I were *soldiers* together—to him I had often been bound for no less than my *life!*” he says sharply. He sees that the exile is being greeted by servants at the entrance to the hall. “Here comes the Briton! Let him, a stranger of *quality*, be so entertained amongst you as suits with *gentlemen* of your knowing.”

The other foreign guests exchange glances; the islander’s gentility is very much in question.

Lord Philario returns the formal bow of Posthumus Leonatus, then grips his hand, as both beam. He turns to the guests. “I beseech you all, be better known to this gentleman, whom I commend to you as a noble friend of mine! How worthy he is I will leave to appear hereafter, rather than story him within his own hearing!”

“Sir, we have known together in Orléans,” the knight tells Leonatus.

The newcomer replies politely. “Since then I have been debtor to you for courtesies which I will be ever to pay, and yet pay still.”

The Frenchman smiles. “Sir, you o’er-rate my poor kindness; I was *glad* I did atone my countryman and you! It had been pity you should have been put together with so *mortal* a purpose as then each bore, upon the portance of so slight and trivial a nature.” He had intervened to stop a duel.

“By your pardon, sir, I was then a *young traveller*; being guided in my every action by *others’* experiences, I rather shunned proceeding, even given what I heard. But upon my amended judgment—if I offend not to say it is *mended*—my quarrel was not altogether *slight!*”

The knight disagrees. “Faith, *yes!*—to be put to the arbitrement of *swords!*—and by such two that would by all likelihood have confounded one the other, or have fallen *both!*”

Giacomo is curious. “Can we, with manners, ask what *was* this difference?”

“Safely, I think,” the Parisian allows. “’Twas a contention in public, which the reporter may offer without contradiction. It was much like an argument that fell out *here* last night, where each of us spoke in praise of our countries’ *mistresses*—this gentleman at that time vouching—and upon warrant of *bloody* affirmation!—*his* to be more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified—and less *temptable*—than any the rarest of our ladies in *France!*”

Giacomo craves contention. “*That* lady is not now living,” he says casually, “or this gentleman’s opinion is by now worn out....”

Says Leonatus firmly, “She holds her virtue still—and I my mind.”

Giacomo speaks before the knight can comment: “You must not so far prefer her ’fore ours of *Italy!*”

“Even being so far provoked as I was in *France*, I would abate her *nothing!*—though I profess myself her *adorer*, not her friend!” says Leonatus.

“*As* fair and *as* good—a kind of hand-in-hand comparison—had been something *too* fair and *too* good for any lady in *Britain!*” says the Italian. He looks at Leonatus’s ring. “If she went before others I have seen as that *diamond* of yours outlustres those I have beheld, I could believe she excelled *many*; but I have not seen the *most precious* diamond that *is*—nor *you* the *lady!*”

“I praised her as I rated her, as I do my stone,” insists Leonatus, fondly regarding the ring his wife gave him.

“What do you esteem *it* at?”

“More than the *world* enjoys!”

“Either your unparagoned mistress is dead,” says Giacomo, “or she’s outprized by the trifle”—worth less than the diamond.

“You are mistaken,” says Leonatus. “*This* one may be sold, or given, if there were *wealth* enough for the purchase, or *merit* for the gift; the *other* is not a thing for sale—and a gift for only the *gods!*”

“Which the gods have given *you?*”

Leonatus nods, unabashed. “Which, by their graces, I will *keep.*”

Giacomo sniffs. “You may wear her in *title* yours; but, you know, strange fowl light upon neighbouring ponds—and your *ring* may be stolen, too!

“So, as for your brace of ‘unprizable’ estimations, the one is but *frail*, and the other *casual*: a that-way accomplished courtier or a cunning thief would hazard the winning of *both*, first and last!”

Leonatus only laughs. “Your *Italy* contains none so accomplished as to convince the *honour* of my mistress—if, in the holding or loss of *that*, you term her *frail!*”

“I do nothing doubt you have a store of *thieves,*” he tells the Italian. “Notwithstanding, *I* fear not for my ring.”

Philario wants no further friction among his guests. “Let us leave here, gentlemen.”

“Sir, with all my heart!” says Leonatus. “This worthy signior, I thank him, makes no stranger of me: we are *familiar* at first!” he adds—rebuking the belligerent presumption.

But that spurs the cocky Giacomo further. “With few times so much *conversation*, *I* should get ground of your fair mistress—make her go back, even to the *yielding!*—had I admittance and opportunity to befriend.”

Leonatus merely laughs at the affront. “No, no.”

Giacomo flushes. “I dare thereupon pawn the moiety”—a half—“of *my estate* against your *ring!*—which, in my opinion, *o’ervalues* it somewhat,” he adds dryly. He sees Lord Philario’s glare. “But I make my wager rather against *your confidence* than her reputation—and, to bar your offence herein, I durst attempt it, too, against *any* lady in the *world!*”

“You are a great deal abused in too bold a persuasion,” Leonatus replies calmly, “but I doubt not you’d sustain what you’re worthy of by your attempt.”

“What’s that?”

“A *repulse!*—though your ‘attempt,’ as you call it, deserve *more*: a *punishment* too!”

Philario is alarmed. “Gentlemen, enough of this! It came on too *suddenly!*—let it die as it was born, and, I pray you, be *better acquainted!*”

“I would I had put my estate *and my neighbour’s* on the approbation of what I have spoken!” insists Giacomo.

Leonatus is equally defiant. “What lady would you choose to assail?”

“*Yours!*—whom in constancy you think stands so *safe!*”

“I will lay you *ten thousand ducats* to your *ring*, that—commend me to the court where your lady is, and with no more advantage than the opportunity of a second conference—I will bring from thence that *honour* of hers, which you imagine so reserved!”

“I will wager against your *gold*, gold to it!” says Leonatus. “My *ring* I hold dear as my finger—’tis *part* of it!”

Giacomo sneers. “You are *afraid!*—and therein the *wiser*; even if you buy ladies’ flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from *tainting!* And I see you have some reversion in you, that you *fear—*”

Says the Briton, waving aside the feint, “This is but a custom in *your tongue*”—Italian arrogance. “You bear a graver *purpose*, I hope.”

“I am the master of my speech, and would *undergo* what’s spoken, I swear!”

“Will you?” Leonatus shrugs. “I shall but *lend* my diamond till your return. Let there be covenants drawn between us. My mistress exceeds in *goodness* even the hugeness of *your unworthy thinking!*”

“I *dare* you to this match! Here’s my ring!” He hands it to their host.

Lord Philario would forbid the wager: “I will have it no lay!”

“By the gods, *it is one!*” cries Giacomo—enjoying the ill-chosen *lay*. “If I bring you not sufficient testimony that I have enjoyed the dearest bodily part of your mistress, my ten thousand ducats are yours!—so is your *diamond*, too! If I come away and leave her in such honour as you have trust in, she, your *jewel*, *this* your jewel, and *my gold* are yours!

“Provided I have your *commendation*, for my more free entertainment.”

“I embrace these conditions; let us have articles betwixt us,”—terms set down in writing, says Leonatus gravely. “Only, thus far you shall *answer*: if you make your voyage and give me directly to understand you have prevailed upon her, I am no further your enemy, and she is not worth our debate; if she remain unsexed—you not make it clear otherwise—for your ill opinion and the assault you have made against her chastity, you shall *answer me with your sword!*”

“Your hand!” cries Giacomo, “a *covenant!*” They shake hands to confirm the bet. “We will have these things set down by lawful counsel—and I’ll straight away for Britain, lest the bargain should catch cold and starve! I will fetch my gold, and have our two wagers recorded.”

“Agreed,” says Leonatus, and they head for the door together—oblivious of their dismayed host.

“Will this hold, think you?” asks the Frenchman.

“Signior Giacomo will not back from it,” says Lord Philario, regretting having invited his quarrelsome countryman. “Pray, let us follow ’em!”

The queen is sending her waiting-gentlewomen on an apparently urgent task—to take them well away from her. “Whiles yet the dew’s on ground, gather those flowers—make haste! Who has the note of them?”

“I, madam!” replies the one with the list.

The queen nods. “Dispatch!” Her attendants hurry into the garden, and she turns to the court physician. “Now, Master Doctor, have you brought those drugs?”

“Pleaseth Your Highness, aye. Here they are, madam.” He shows her a string-tied parcel of small boxes. “But I beseech Your Grace, without offence—my conscience bids me ask—wherefore you have commanded of me these most *poisonous* compounds, which are the movers of a *languishing* death—though slow, *deadly*.”

She is annoyed. “I wonder, doctor, thou ask’st me such a question! Have I not been thy pupil long? Hast thou not taught me how to make *perfumes*?—to *distil*?—to *preserve*?—yea, so that our great king himself doth oft woo me for my confections?

“Having thus far proceeded, unless thou think’st me *devilish*, is’t not meet that I did amplify my judgment in *other* conclusions?”—procedures. “I will try the forces of these thy compounds on such creatures as we count not worth the hanging—but none *human*,” she adds, setting aside what in her view is a sizeable class—“to try the vigour of them, and apply *allayments* to their action, and by them gather their several virtues and effects.”

The physician frowns. “Your Highness shall from *this* practise but *make hard your heart!* Besides the *seeing*, these effects will be both noisome and *infectious!*”

“Oh, content thee.” She sets the package of chemical preparations on a table. As she unties the pasteboard containers, she sees Pisanio entering the room. *Here comes a flattering rascal!—he’s for his master, an enemy to my son; upon him will I first work.* She smiles brightly. “How now, Pisanio!

“Doctor, your service for this time is ended; take your own way.”

Master Cornelius bows. *I do suspect you, madam; but you shall do no harm....*

The queen motions Pisanio forward. “Hark thee, a word.”

The doctor watches. *I do not like her! She doth think she has strange, lingering poisons; but I do know her spirit, and will not trust one of her malice with a drug of such damnèd nature! Those she has will stupefy, and dull the senses awhile—which first, perchance, she’ll prove on cats and dogs, then afterward up higher.*

But there is no danger in what show of death it makes: no more than a locking-up of the senses for a time, only to be more fresh upon reviving.

She is fooled with a most-false effect—and I am the truer, so to be false with her!

The queen waves him away. “No further service, doctor, until I send for thee.”

“I humbly take my leave.” Cornelius bows again and goes.

The queen seems concerned about Pisanio’s mistress. “Weeps she *still*, say’st thou? Dost thou not think in time she will *quench*, and let *instruction* enter where folly now possesses?”

“Do *thou* work!” she urges. “When thou shalt bring me word she loves *my son*, I’ll tell thee on the instant thou art then as *great* as is thy *master!*—*greater*, for *his* fortunes all lie speechless, and his name is at last gasp! Return he cannot, nor continue where he is; to shift, *his being* is to *exchange* one misery with *another!*—and every day that *comes* comes to *decay* a day’s work in him.

“What shalt *thou* expect, being a depender on a thing that *leans?*—who cannot be new-built, nor has no friends to do so much as but prop him up!”

She selects one of the little boxes and hands it to Pisanio. “Thou takest up thou know’st not what; but take it for thy labour!” she says generously. “It is a thing I made, which hath the king five times *redeemed from death!* I do not know what is more cordial!”

Pisanio tries to hand back the gift, clearly intended to suborn him.

“Nay, I prithee, *take* it!” says the queen. “It is an earnest of *further* good that I mean to thee! Tell thy mistress how the case stands with her—do’t as if from thyself.

“Think what a *change* thou chancest on! Just *think!*—thou hast thy *mistress* still!—and to boot, *my son*, who shall take *notice* of thee! I’ll move the king to any shape of thy preferment as thou’lt desire!—and then myself, I chiefly, who set thee on to this deserving, am bound to load thy merit *richly!*

“Call my women,” she orders, ignoring his silence. “Think on my words,” she tells him, as he goes into the garden. *A sly and constant knave, not to be shaped!—the agent for his master, and the remembrancer of her to hold the hand-fast to her lord!* —keep a wife’s promise to be faithful.

I have given him that which, if he take, shall quite unpeople her of liegers for her sweet!

And which she after, except she bend her mood, shall be assurèd to taste of too!

Pisanio returns, bringing the ladies and their dewy flowers.

“So, so! Well done, well done!” cries the queen merrily. “The violets, cowslips and the primroses, bear to my chambers.” She leads the women away. “Fare thee well, Pisanio; think on my words.”

Her words have alarmed him; he bows to the queen. “And *shall* do!”

He thinks, watching her, *But when to my good lord I prove untrue, I’ll choke myself! There’s all I’ll do for you!*

Imogen paces in her chambers, imprisoned in luxurious frustration, a powerless princess bemoaning her state: *A father cruel, and a step-dame false; a foolish suitor to a wedded lady that hath seen her husband banishèd!*

Oh, my banished husband! That supremely crowns my grief, in these repeated variations on it! Had I been thief-stol’n, as my two brothers, happy!—but most miserable in the desire that’s imploring me!

Blest be those who have their honest wills, howe’er so common, which can comfort their seasons!

Her ruminating on what she misses is disturbed by footsteps in the corridor. *Who may this be? Fie!*

Pisanio has brought a visitor. “Madam, a noble gentleman of Rome comes *from my lord*—with letters!”

Lord Giacomo sees the traces of her tears. “*Change* you, madam!” he says, pushing past the servant and bowing. “The worthy Leonatus is in *safety*, and greets Your Highness dearly!” He gives her a letter.

Imogen smiles, delighted to receive new word from her husband. “*Thanks*, good sir! You’re kindly *welcome!*”

As she reads, he studies the lady’s appearance. *All of her that is ‘out of door’ is most rich!*

He frets: *If she be furnished with a mind so rare, she is alone—the Arabian bird!—and I have lost the wager!* The phoenix, a singular, mythical firebird, cannot be captured.

Boldness, be my friend! Arm me, Audacity, from head to foot—or, like the Parthian, I shall fight flying! Parthia’s cavalry troops are known for shooting arrows back toward pursuers while fleeing. But he finds Imogen enchantingly attractive; he steadies himself. *Rather, directly fly!*

She looks up from the missive and reads out its final lines: “He is one of the noblest nation to whose kindnesses I am most infinitely tied”—imperial Rome. “Reflect upon him *accordingly*, as you value your trust. —*Leonatus.*”

“So far I read aloud,” she says. “But even the very *middle of my heart* is warmed by the rest!—and takes it *thankfully!*” She smiles at the Italian. “You are as welcome, worthy sir, as I have words to bid you—and shall find it so in all that I can do!”

“Thanks, fairest lady.” But then, looking perplexed, he turns to Pisanio. “What, are men *mad?*” He looks admiringly at Imogen, then shakes his head as if puzzled. “Hath nature given them *eyes*—to see this vaulted arch,”—the earth, “and the rich scope of sea and land—eyes which can distinguish ’twixt the fiery orbs *above* and the twinned *stones* numbered upon the beach—yet can we not distinction make—with *example so precious*—’twixt fair and foul?”

She is startled by his sudden vehemence. “What makes your wonderment?”

Giacomo is apparently still pondering. “It cannot be in the *eye*: for *apes* and *monkeys* ’twixt two such shes would chatter happily *this* way, and contemn with *mows*”—mocking looks—“the other!”

She watches the handsome, charming nobleman’s meditation, one seemingly delivered *extempore*.

He continues, pacing. “Nor in the *judgment*—for *idiots* in *this* case of faces would be wisely *definite!*”

“Nor in the *appetite*: sluttery, opposed to such clear *excellence*, should make desire *vomit to emptiness!*—not so allure it to *feed!*”

“What is the *matter*, now?” asks Imogen.

He pursues his carefully chosen topic—debauchery. “The *cloyèd will!*—that *tub*, both filled and *running!*—*satiate* yet *unsatisfied desire!*—which, ravening first the *lamb*, longs *after* for *garbage!*”

She stares. “What, dear sir, thus wraps you? Are you *well?*”

Giacomo sees that his malicious musing—flattery laden with dark hints—has her attention. He speaks quietly now. “Thanks, madam; well.” He turns to Pisanio. “I beseech you, sir, acquire for my man his abode; I did leave him strange and peevish”—ill at ease after long travel.

Pisanio bows. “I was going, sir, to give him welcome.” He goes to provide for the foreign visitors’ lodging.

Imogen is eager for news of Leonatus. “Continues well my lord?—his *health*, beseech you.”

“Well, madam.”

“Is he disposed to mirth? I hope he is,” she says—half-heartedly.

Giacomo tells her, falsely, “*Exceedingly* pleasant!—none a stranger there so *merry* and so *gamesome!* He is called ‘the Briton *reveller!*’”

Says the forlorn lady, “When he was *here* he did incline to graveness, but oft-times not knowing why....”

“I never saw *him* serious! There is a Frenchman, his companion—an eminent *monsieur* who, it seems, much loves a Gallian girl at home. He *furnaces* forth from him thick *sighs*, whiles the

jolly Briton—your lord, I mean—*laughs from 's lungs!*—cries, ‘*Oh, can my sides hold, to think that a man who knows by history—by report of his own proof, what Woman is!—yea, what she cannot choose but must be!—will in his free hours languish for assurèd bondage!*’”

Imogen raises an eyebrow. “Will my lord say *so?*”

“*Aye, madam!*—with his eyes in *flood* with laughter! It is a *recreation* just to be nearby and hear him mock the Frenchman!

“But, heaven knows, *some men are* much to blame!”—foolish.

“Not *he*, I hope.”

“Not... he.” Giacomo looks concerned. “And yet, heaven’s *bounty* towards him might be used more *thankfully*—for *you*, whom I account beyond all credits, as much as for himself.” He sighs. “Whilst I am bound to wonder, I am bound to *pity*, too.”

“What do you pity, sir?”

“*Two* creatures, heartily!”

“Am *I* one, sir?” asks Imogen. “You look on me; what wreck discern you in me that deserves your pity?”

Giacomo shakes his head sadly. “Lamentable. *What?*—to hide from the radiant *sun*, and take solace i’ the dungeon with a *snuff?*”—one who extinguishes a taper to do her work.

She challenges his implication: “I pray you, sir, deliver with more *openness* your answers to my demands! Why do you *pity* me?”

“For that *others* do... I was about to say, ‘*enjoy your*’ ...” He looks down sadly. “But it is an office of the *gods* to *avenge* it, not mine to speak it.”

“You do seem to know something of me or what concerns me. Pray you—since *suspecting* things go ill often hurts more than being *sure* they do, for certainties are either *past* remedies, or, timely known, the *remedy* then born—*reveal* to me what both spurs and stops you!”

Giacomo moves closer. “Had *I* this cheek to place my lips upon; this hand, whose touch, whose *every* touch, would force the feeler’s *soul* to the oath of loyalty!—this object which *takes prisoner* the wild motion of mine eye, affixing it only *here!*—”

He turns away angrily. “Would I *slaver* with lips as *common* as the stairs that mount to the *Capitol!*—*join grips* with hands made hard in hourly *falsehood*, as if with *labour!*—be peeping with an eye as *base* and *illustrious* as the smoky light that’s fed with stinking *tallow?* *Damnèd* then!—’t were fit that such revolt should encounter *all the plagues of hell at one time!*”

She frowns. “My lord, I hear, has *forgot Britain.*”

“And *himself?*” Giacomo regards her warmly. “It is not *I*, *burdened* with this intelligence, who pronounce the beggary of his change, but ’tis *your graces* that from my muted conscience to my tongue charm out this report!”

“Let me hear no more.” She is thinking.

“*Oh, dearest soul!* Your cause doth *strike my heart* with pity that doth make me *sicken!*—a lady so *fair*—who, fastened to an *empery*, would make the *great ’st* king *double!*”

He sputters with indignation over her husband’s alleged waywardness: “To be partnered with *tomboys*”—whores—“hired with that same commission which *your own coffers* yield!—with diseasèd *venturers* who play with *all* infirmities for *gold!*—whose *rottenness* can lend *Nature* such broilèd stuff as well might poison *poison!*”

He waits for her to absorb the accusations, then cries, “Be *revenged!*—or she that bore you was no *queen*, and you *recoil* from your great *stock!*”

Imogen looks at him coldly. “Revenged? How should I be *revengèd?* If this be true—and I have such a heart that mine *ears* must not in haste *abuse*—if it be true, how should I be revengèd?”

The Roman would make use of her own needs. “Should he make *thee* lie like *Diana’s* priestess—betwixt *cold sheets!*—whiles *he* is *vaulting* various *tramps*, in your despite, upon your purse?” demands Giacomo. “*Revenge* it!”

He kneels. "I dedicate *myself* to your sweet pleasure!—more *noble* than that *renegade* from your bed!—and will *continue*, ever fixed to your affection, as *sure* as *close!*"—secret.

Imogen calls: "What ho, Pisanio!"

Giacomo rises and moves toward her. "Let me my service tender on your lips. . . ."

"*Away!*" She steps back. "I do *condemn* mine *ears* that have so long attended thee!

"If thou wert *honourable*, thou wouldst have told this tale for *virtue*, not for such end as *thou* seek'st—as *base* as *strange!*

"Thou *wrong'st* a gentleman who is as far from thy report as *thou* from *honour!* And thou solicit'st here a lady who disdains *thee* and the Devil *alike!*

"*What ho, Pisanio!*"

"The *king* my father shall be made acquainted of thy assault! If he shall think it fit a saucy stranger in his court to *mart* as in a Romish *stew,*"—brothel, "and to expound his *beastly* mind to *us*, he hath a court he little cares for!—and a *daughter* whom he respects *not at all!*

"What, ho, *Pisanio!*"

"O *happy* Leonatus!" cries Giacomo—looking very pleased. "I may say the credit that thy lady hath from thee *deserves* thy trust!—and *thy* most perfect *goodness*, her assured *credit!* Blessed *live you long*, worthiest sir that ever country called its own! And with a lady—*you*, his mistress—for only the *most* *worthiest* fit!"

He kneels again. "Give me your pardon! I have spoken thus to know if your affianced were deeply rooted—and shall make your *lord* know that which he is o'er!—one *truest* mannered—as *he* is!—such a *holy* sorcerer that he enchants *societies* unto him! Half all men's hearts are *his!*"

Imogen eyes him carefully. "You make amends. . . ."

"He sits 'mongst men like a descended *god!*—he hath a kind of *honour* sets him off more than a *mortal* seeming!

"Be not angry, most mighty princess, that I have adventured to try your taking of false report—which hath honoured with *confirmation* your great judgment, which I know cannot err, in the election of a sir so rare!

"The *love* I bear him bade me to fan you thus,"—as in winnowing wheat, "but *the gods* made you unlike all others: *chaffless!*"—grain without husk. "Pray, your *pardon!*"

Imogen smiles. "All's well, sir; take my power i' the court for yours."

Giacomo rises and bows deeply. "My humble thanks!"

He starts to go, then turns back. "I had almost forgot to entreat Your Grace in but a small request—and yet of moment, too, for it concerns your lord, myself, and other noble friends who are partners in the business."

"Pray, what is't?"

"Some dozen Romans of us, and *your lord*—the best feather of our wing!—have mingled sums to buy a *present* for the *emperor*—which I, as factor for the rest, have done, in France. 'Tis *gold plate*, of rare device and jewels of rich and exquisite form! Their value's great, and I am somewhat concerned, being a stranger, to have them in safe stowage. May it please you to take them in protection?"

"Willingly," says Imogen, "and pawn mine honour for their safety! Since my husband hath interest in them, I will keep them in my bedchamber."

"They are in a trunk, attended by my men. I will make bold to send them to you—only for this night; I must aboard tomorrow."

"Oh, no, *no!* . . ." Imogen still wants to hear about Leonatus—the truth this time.

"Yes, I beseech, or I shall short my *word* by lengthening my *return!* From Gallia I crossed the seas for purpose, and on promise to see Your Grace."

"I thank you for your pains, but not away *tomorrow!*" pleads Imogen.

"Oh, I *must*, madam! Therefore I shall beseech you, if you please to greet your lord with *writing*, do't to-night! I have outstod my time, which is material to the tender of our gift."

Imogen nods, already gathering her loving thoughts. "I will write!"

“Send your trunk to me; it shall safe be kept, and truly yielded you.”
She smiles at the Italian. “You’re very well come!”

Chapter Three Assailed

Was there ever man had such luck?” complains Lord Cloten. “When I kissed the jack,”—
positioned a ball well in a game of bowls, “to be *hit away* upon an up-cast! I had a
hundred pound on’t!

“And then the whoreson jackanapes must take me up for *swearing!*—as if I *borrowed* mine
oaths from *him*, and might not spend them at my pleasure!”

“What got he by *that?*” asks his pudgy companion. “You have *broken his pate* with your
ball!”

Thinks the taller lord who is with them, *If his wit had been like his that broke it, it would all
have run out!*

Cloten turns to him for approval. “When a gentleman is disposed to swear, it is *right* for any
standers-by to *curtail* his oaths, *eh?*”

“No, my lord.” *Nor for you to curse their ears!*

“Whoreson *dog!*” mutters the bully. “*I—give him* satisfaction?” he sniffs; he ignored a
challenge to duel—and left in haste. “Would that he had been one of *my rank!*”

The tall man notes another sense for *rank*: *Smelling like a foot!*

“I am not *more* vexèd at anything on the *earth!*” whines Cloten. “A pox on’t!—I had rather
not be so noble as I am! They dare not fight with me, because of the queen, my mother! Every
Jack-slave hath his bellyful of fighting, but *I* must go up and down like a cock that nobody can
match!”

You are a cock, and too a capon!—a prick and a castrate. *And you crow with your comb on!*
A cloth cock’s-comb, *coxcomb*, is the emblem of a court fool.

Cloten notices the lord’s silence. “Sayest thou?”

The taller nobleman replies carefully. “It is not fit Your Lordship should undertake every
companion that you give offence to.” There are too many.

“No, I know *that*,” says Cloten testily. “But is it not fit I *should* commit offence to my
inferiors?”

“Aye, it is fit for Your Lordship only”—because Cloten is superior to no one.

“Why, *so I say!*”

The short lord has learned of the Roman’s visit. “Did you hear of a stranger that’s come to
court last night?”

Cloten is peeved. “A *stranger*—and *I* not know of’t?”

He’s a strange fellow himself, *and knows it not!*

“There’s an *Italian* come—and, ’tis thought, one of Leonatus’s friends....”

“*Leonatus!*—the banished *rascal!*” cries Cloten. “And *here’s another*, whatsoever he be!
Who told you of this stranger?”

“One of Your Lordship’s pages.”

“Is it fit I went to look upon him?” wonders Cloten. “Is there no derogation in’t?”—no loss of
standing.

The tall man looks down at him. “*You* cannot be derogated, my lord,” he says dryly.

Cloten nods. “Not easily, I think!”

You are known to be a fool; therefore your comments, being foolish, do not derogate.

“Come, I’ll go see this Italian!” says Cloten. “What I have lost today at bowls I’ll win tonight
from *him!* Come, go.”

The tall man tells him, “I’ll attend Your Lordship,” as the other two start down the stairs.

He shakes his head. *That such a crafty devil as is his mother should yield the world this ass! A woman that bears all down with her brain—and this, her son, cannot for all his art take two from twenty and leave eighteen!* Cloten thus loses at even the simplest card games.

Alas, poor princess, thou divine Imogen! What thou endurest, betwixt a father by thy step-dame governed, a mother-in-law hourly coining plots, and a wooer more hateful, in the foul expulsion of thy dear husband, for the horrid crime he'd make of divorce!

He knows that Cloten's would like to murder her husband.

May the heavens hold firm the walls of thy dear honour, keep unshaken that temple, thy fair mind, so that thou mayst withstand!—to enjoy thy banished lord, and this great land!

In her quarters, sitting at the table on which she has been writing to Leonatus, Imogen now reads. She hears someone, and looks up. "Who's there? My woman Helen?"

That gentlewoman comes in from a side room. "So please you, madam."

"What hour is it?" She rises and yawns.

"Almost midnight, madam."

Imogen goes to the bed and removes her robe. "I have read three hours, then; mine eyes are weak! Fold down the leaf where I have left. To bed!" says the princess. "Take not away the taper; leave it burning—and if thou canst awake by four o' the clock, I prithee, call me." While bringing Giacomo's trunk, the servants advised of his very early departure. "Sleep hath seized me wholly."

Helen curtsies and leaves; she will ask the night-watch to summon her just before the appointed hour.

Imogen pauses to pray. *To your protection I commend me, gods. From fairies and the tempters of the night, guard me, beseech ye.* She kisses her silver bracelet, slides under the cover, and is soon asleep.

For a while, all is still. Then, in a dark corner of the room, the top of a heavy trunk opens—just a crack. After a moment, Giacomo, clad all in black, slowly raises it, and climbs out carefully, silently. He peers around the lady's bedchamber, listening. *The crickets sing, and man's o'er-laboured sense repairs itself by rest.*

He tiptoes to the table, thinking of a legendary Roman—a rapist. *Our Tarquin thus did softly press the rushes, ere he wakened the chastity he wounded.* He looks at the princess. *Cytherea, how bravely thou becomest thy bed, fresh as lily, and whiter than the sheets!* He watches Imogen, sleeping peacefully like the goddess of beauty also known as Venus.

That I might touch!—kiss! He regards her lips. *But one kiss!—rubies in parting, how dearly they do't! 'Tis her breathing that perfumes the chamber thus! The flame o' the taper bows toward her, and would peep under her lids to see th'enclosed lights, now canopied in those windows—white and azure, laced with the blue of heaven's own tinct!*

But to my design: noting the chamber! I will write all down: such and such pictures; there the window; such the adornment of her bed; the arras, figures. He smiles, amused. *Why, 'such and such' are the contents o' the story!* Giacomo intends to make full use of details in his false report to Leonatus.

He moves closer to Imogen.

Ah, but some notes about her natural body would testify, above ten thousand meaner moveables, to enrich mine inventory! O sleep, thou ape of death, lie dull upon her! And be her sense but as a monument, thus in a chapel lying!

He leans over the bed and reaches to her wrist. *Come off, come off!* The bracelet, large enough for a man's wrist, slides off without her awakening. *As slippery as the Gordian knot was hard! 'Tis mine!—and this will witness outwardly as strongly as awareness does within!—to the madding of her lord!*

He moves closer, staring at the sleeping form. *On her left breast a mole, five-spotted like the crimson drops i' the bottom of a cowslip! Here's a voucher stronger than ever law could make! This secret will force him to think I have picked the lock, and ta'en the treasure, of her honour!*

He straightens, steps back to look around. *No more. To what end?—why should I write this down, that's riveted*—he stifles a laugh—screwed to my remembrance?

He examines her book. *She hath been reading late... the tale of Tereus—here the leaf's turned down, where Philomel gave up....* She, too, was a victim of rape.

I have enough! To the trunk again, and shut the lock of it.

He eases himself in and lowers the lid.

Swift, swift, you dragons of the night, that dawning may bear the raven away! I lodge in fear! Though she's a heavenly angel, hell is here!

Later, as a distant tower-bell ring, the sleepless intruder, crouched in waiting for his escape, counts the chimes. *One... two... three...*

Time.... Time....

As they walk toward the quarters where the princess is being confined, Cloten's heavy companion offers him consolatory flattery. "Your Lordship is the most *patient* man in loss—the most coldest that ever turned up an ace!"

"It would make any man cold to *lose*."

"But not every man *patient* after the noble temper of Your Lordship!—*you* are most hot and furious when you *win*!"

"Winning will put *any* man into courage," says Cloten churlishly. They stop at the lady's door, and he rubs his eyes after a night of playing—losing—at cards. "If I could get this foolish Imogen, I should have gold enough." He yawns. "It's almost morning, is't not?"

"Aye, my lord."

Cloten stares, his expression blank, down the empty corridor. "I would this morning would come," he says petulantly; it is nearly six—six hours before he usually rises. "I am advised to give her *music* o' mornings; they say it will mediate."

Soon musicians, a lutenist and two men with hautboys, climb the stairs, approach the nobles, and bow.

"Come on, *tune*!" demands Cloten. "If you can penetrate her with your *fingering*, do so! *We'll* try with *tongue*, too," he adds, crudely. Behind him, the tall old lord's eyes roll. "If none will do, let her remain *here*! But I'll never give o'er!"

"First," he tells the players, "a very excellent, good-conceited thing; after, a wonderful, sweet air, with admirable, rich words to it. And then let her consider."

As the wooden instruments lilt along, the lutenist, a tenor, plucks the strings and begins his lilting song of sunrise:

*"Hark, hark!—the lark
At heaven's gate now sings,
And Phoebus 'gins again to hie
His steeds to water at those high springs!
Here a chalice'd flower lies,
As sleeping marigolds begin
To ope their golden eyes;
With every other pretty thing,
My lady sweet, arise!—arise!"*

The musicians play a gentle refrain, but the door stays closed.

"So, get you gone," Cloten tells them sourly. "If this *persuades*, I will think *better* of your music. If it do not, it is a fault in *her ears*, which horse-hairs and calves'-guts—nor the voice of unpavèd *eunuch*, to boot—can never mend!"

Listening to the boor, the tall lord frowns, which Cloten takes for concurrence.

Despite the gibe about his lacking *stones*, testicles, the singer bows and gladly takes the money.

As the musicians leave, the older lord looks down the passage. "Here comes the king."

Yawning again, the degenerate dunce tells his companions, "I am glad I was up so *late*, for that's the reason I am up so *early*." He watches King Cymbeline. "He cannot choose but take *fatherly* this service I have done."

He bows as the king and his queen arrive, with their train following. "Good morrow to Your Majesty, and to my gracious mother."

"Attend you here the door of our stern daughter?" asks Cymbeline. "Will she not forth?"

Cloten shrugs. "I have assailed her with *music*, but she vouchsafes no notice."

"The exile of her *minion* is too new; she hath not yet forgot him," says Cymbeline. "Some more time must wear the print of his remembrance out, and then she's yours."

The queen tells her son, "You are most *bound* to the king, who lets go by no vantages that may recommend you to his daughter!"

She notes his bloodshot eyes and unkempt evening clothes, and offers advice: "Frame yourself to *orderly* soliciting, and be friended with aptness of the *season*!"

"Let denials *increase* your services! *Seem* inspired to do those duties which you tender to her, as if in all you obey *her*!—save when command to your *dismission* tends, and therein you are senseless"—seem *unable to hear*.

"*Senseless!*" cries Cloten. He hears the epithet often. "Not *so!*"

A messenger comes with news for the king, and bows. "So please it you, sir, ambassadors from Rome. The chief one is Caius Lucius."

The emissary is an old friend, but Cymbeline frowns; he knows what the emperor's demand will be. "A worthy fellow, albeit he comes on angry purpose now. But that's no fault of his; we must receive him according to the honour of his sender—and towards himself; his goodness forespent on us, we must extend our notice of it.

"Our dear son, when you have given 'Good morning' to your mistress, attend the queen and us; we shall have need to employ you toward this Roman.

"Come, our queen." The royal party proceeds down to the throne room to meet the imperial visitors.

Cloten turns to the door. "If she be up, I'll speak with her; if not, let her lie, still, and dream of me." He knocks. "By your leave, *ho!*"

He has an idea. "I know her women are about her; what if I do line one of their hands?"

"'Tis *gold* which buys admittance, *oft* it doth!—yea, and makes Diana's rangers"—the goddess's protectors of other virgins—"falsify themselves, yield up their deer to the stand o' the stealer! And 'tis gold which makes the *true* man killed, and saves the *thief!*" He laughs. "Nay, sometimes hangs both thief *and* true man!

"What can it *not* do?" He winks at the fat lord—"And *undo!*"

"I will make one of her women *lawyer* for me, for I do not yet understand the case myself."

The tall nobleman concurs with the rare perception, if not the intent.

Cloten knocks again. "By your leave," he says, as a gentlewoman opens the door.

"Who's there that knocks?" she asks.

"A gentleman."

Helen knows who he is. "No more?"

"Yes—and a *gentlewoman's* son."

She looks askance at his slovenly appearance. "That's more than some whose tailors are as costly as *yours* can justly boast of. What's Your Lordship's pleasure?"

"Your lady's *person*; is she ready?"

The lady notes his gracelessness—or worse. "Aye: to keep to her chamber."

Cloten edges closer, a hand reaching forward. "There is *gold* for you; sell me your good report."

She laughs. “What?—*my* good name? Or to report of *you* what I shall think is *good!*”—clearly, not much. She hears movement behind her. “The princess,” she says, turning to curtsy to the lady, and going back into the room as Imogen comes to the door.

“Good morrow, fairest!” says Cloten. “Sister, your sweet *hand*,” he says, seizing it, and managing to kiss her nails as she pulls away.

“Good morrow, sir. You lay out too much pains for purchasing but *trouble*; the thanks I give is telling you that I am *poor* of thanks, and scarce can spare them.”

“I swear I love you!” he insists, yet again.

“’Twere as deep with me if you but *said* so; if you *swear*, your recompense is still that I regard it not.”

“This is no answer!” he protests.

She is obviously exasperated. “I would not even *speak*, but that you could say I *yielded*, being silent! I pray you, *spare* me!—or ’faith I shall unfold *discourtesy* equal to *your* best ’kindness!’ Then *your great knowing* might learn, being taught, *forbearance!*”

He misses the sarcasm. “’Twere my sin to leave you in your *madness*. I will not!”

Says the dejected prisoner sadly, “Fools are not mad folks.”

Cloten frowns. “Do you call me *fool?*”

“As I am mad,”—angry, “I *do!* If you’ll be *patient*,”—a play on both *behave* and *accept treatment*, “I’ll no more be *mad*; that cures us *both!*”

“I *am* much *sorry*, sir—that by being so verbal, you put me to *forget* a lady’s *manners!*”

“And learn, *now for all!* I who know my *heart* do here pronounce the very *truth of it: I care not for you!* And, to recuse myself, as I am so near a lack of charity: *I hate you!*”

She raises a small fist menacingly. “Which I had rather you *felt* than make’t my *boast!*”

Cloten backs away. “You sin against obedience which you owe your father! As for the contract you *pretend* with that *base wretch*—one bred of *alms*, and fostered with cold dishes, with scraps o’ the court!—it is *no* contract, *none!*”

“And though it be ’allowèd’ in *common* persons, with those where lies no more dependency than *brats* and *beggary!*—and who is more lowly than *he?*—to knit in self-figurèd knot their *hopes*, yet *you* are curbed from that dissipation by the consequence o’ the *crown*, and must not soil the precious regard of it with a *base slave!*—a *hilding* fit for a *livery*, for a *squire’s* cloth, a *pantler’s*—not even *so* eminent!”

“*Profane fellow!*” cries Imogen, eyes flashing. “Wert thou the son of *Jupiter* and what thou *art* besides, thou wert too *base* to be *his groom!* Thou art dignified enough by *thy* virtues to be styled, if ’twere made a competition, the *under-hangman* of *his* kingdom!—and *hated* for being preferred *so well*, even to the height of *envious malevolence!*”

“The *south-fog!*”—sultry Rome—“*rot* him!”

“He never can meet more mischance than to come to be *but namèd* along with *thee!* His *meanest garment* that hath ever but clasped his body”—his drawers—“is dearer in my respect than all the hairs *above* thee, were they *all* made into *such men as thou!*”

But suddenly she turns away, alarmed, having noticed her bare wrist. “How now, *Pisanio!*” she calls. He hurries to meet her at the door.

- “His *garment!*” sputters Cloten, picturing it with disgust. “Now, the *devil!*—”

“To Dorothy my woman hie thee presently!” she tells Pisanio.

- “His *garment!*”

“I am *haunted* by a *fool!*—once *frighted*, now worse *angered!*” she tells the serving-man. But Imogen has another concern. “Go bid my woman search for a jewel that too casually hath left mine arm!—it was thy *master’s!* Beshrew me if I would *lose* it for the revenue of any king who’s in *Europe!*”

“I do *think* I saw’t this morning; confident I am ’twas on mine arm *last night!*—I *kissed* it! I hope it be not gone to tell my lord that I kiss aught but *he!*” she laughs, sure it’s still in her bedchamber.

“Twill not be lost,” Pisanio assures her.
 “So I hope! Go and search!” Pisanio bows and returns to the rooms.
 Cloten fumes. “You have abused me! ‘His meanest garment!’”
 “*Aye, I said so, sir! If you will make’t an action,*”—a case at law, “I’ll call *witnesses to’t!*”
 “I will inform your *father!*”
 “*Your mother, too!*—she’s ‘my good lady,’” says the princess sourly, “and will conceive, I expect, but the *worst* of me! And so I leave *you, sir: to the worst of discontent!*”
 She shuts the door in his face.
 “I’ll be *revenged!*” mutters Cloten. “‘His meanest garment!’ *Well....*”
 The others follow as he stalks away grumbling.

Chapter Four All at Odds

Fear it not, sir,” the British exile tells his Roman host. “I would I were so sure to win over the *king* as I am bold her honour will remain *hers.*”
 “What means do you make to him?” asks Lord Philario. He remembers a proud but reasonable ruler, satisfied with the peace negotiated with Rome some years back, during which talks Philario and Leonatus’s father, once enemies, reaffirmed their friendship.
 “Not any but to *abide* the changes of *time*—shiver in the present wintery state, and wish that *warmer* days would come,” says Leonatus. “In these sere hopes, I barely gratify your love; they failing, I must die much your debtor.”
 “Your very goodness and your *company* o’erpay all *I* can do!
 “By now your king hath heard from great Caesar *Augustus*”—the title bestowed upon Julius’s nephew Octavian as Rome’s first emperor. “Caius Lucius will do his commission thoroughly; and I think Cymbeline will grant the *tribute*, send the *arrears*—or look upon our Roman soldiers, whose remembrance is *yet fresh* in their grief!”
 “Statist though I am none—nor likely to be,” says the banished gentleman dryly, “I do believe that this will prove a *war!*—and that you shall sooner hear that the legions now in Gallia have landed in our not-fearing *Britain*, than have tidings of any *penny* paid in *tribute!*
 “Our countrymen are now more ordered than when Julius Caesar smiled at their lack of *skill*, but found them *audacious!*—worthy his *frowning* at! Their skills *now*, wingèd with their *courage*, will make known to their confronters they are such people that *wend upon the world!*”—have imperial ambitions of their own.
 Philario looks past him, surprised. “See—*Giacomo!*” he says, as he enters the hall.
 Leonatus greets that traveler wryly; “The *swiftest* arts have posted you by land, and winds of *all the corners* kissed your sails to make your vessel nimble!” There has been little time for the Italian’s attempt, and the Briton is eager to hear his admission of failure—and to fight their duel.
 “Welcome, sir,” says Lord Philario glumly; neither outcome of the wager can please him.
 Says Leonatus, “I trust the *briefness* of your *answer* made the speediness of your return.”
 “Your lady is *one* of the fairest that I have looked upon,” says Giacomo.
 “And therewithal *the best!*—or let her beauty look through a *casement*, to allure false hearts and be false with them!”—offer itself from a brothel.
 “Here is a letter for you.” Giacomo received it from Imogen not long after his men had removed the trunk from her quarters.
 Leonatus unfolds the paper. “The tenor *good*, I trust.” He glances over the content—his wife’s earnest expressions of love.
 “’Tis very likely.”
 Philario is concerned about the prospect of war. “Was *Caius Lucius* in Britain’s court when you were there?”

“He was expected then, but had not approachèd.”

All is well yet, thinks Leonatus; Giacomo is not even mentioned in the letter. He points to the ring, now being held in Lord Philario’s hand. “Sparkles this stone as it was wont?” he asks Giacomo. “Is’t now too dull for *my* good wearing?” he challenges.

“If I had *lost* it, I should have lost the worth of it in *gold*,” the Roman replies. “But I’d make a journey twice as far to enjoy a *second* night of such short *sweetness* which was mine in Britain!—for *the ring is won!*”

Leonatus shakes his head. “*This* stone’s too hard to come by.”

“Not a whit, your lady being so easy.”

A hand grasping the hilt of his sword, Leonatus warns, “Make not, sir, your *loss* your *sport!* I hope you know that we may not continue as if *friends!*”

“Good sir, we *must*—if you keep *covenant!* Had I *not* brought the knowledge of your mistress home, I grant we were to question further; but I now profess myself the winner of her *honour*, together with your *ring*—and not the wronger of her *or* you, having proceeded but by *both* your wills.”

Leonatus contains his rising anger. “If you can make’t apparent that you have tasted her in bed, my ring and *hand* are yours. If *not*, the foul opinion you had of her pure honour gains or loses your *sword* or mine!—or leaves *both* blades masterless, to whomever shall find them!”

“Sir, my circumstances”—articles of testimony—“being, as I will state them, so *clearly the truth*—and whose strength I will confirm with *oath!*—which, I doubt not, you’ll give me leave to spare, when you shall find you need it not—*must* persuade you to believe!”

“Proceed.”

“First, her *bedchamber*,” says Giacomo, “where I confess I *slept* not, but profess it had that which was well worth *watching!*” Leonatus’s face turns scarlet as Giacomo continues: “It was hung with tapestry of silk and silver thread: the story of proud Cleopatra when she met *her* Roman on Cydnus”—the river where she first met Antony. “It swelled above its banks under the press of boats—or from pride!—a piece of work so bravely done, so rich, that workmanship and value did *strive* in it—at which I wondered it could be so rarely and exactly wrought, since the true life of’t was—”

“That is true,” says Leonatus, “but this you might have heard of *here*, by way of me or some other.”

Giacomo nods. “More particulars must justify my *knowledge*.”

“So they *must*, or do your *honour* injury!”

The Italian continues. “The hearth is south in the chamber; and by the chimney-piece, chaste Diana, bathing! Never saw I *images* so likely to report *themselves!* The stone-cutter was as another *Nature!*—but, motion and breath left out, silently *outwent her!*”

Leonatus scoffs. “This is a thing which you might from *relation* likewise reap, being, as it is, much spoken of.”

“The roof o’ the chamber with golden cherubim is fretted.

“Her andirons—I had forgot them—were two closed-eye Cupids of silver, each standing on one foot, their brands neatly depending”—burning logs, resting on a grate between.

“This is her *honour!*” cries Leonatus angrily. “Let it be granted you have seen *all* that—then praise be given to your *memory*. But nothing in the description of what is in her chamber saves the stake you have wagered!”

“Then *be pale at what can!* I beg but leave to air *this jewel!*” Giacomo raises a hand to display the silver bracelet and its ruby. “*See!* And, now ’tis *off* again, it must be *married*—to that, *your diamond!*” He smirks: “I’ll keep them.”

Leonatus is stunned. “*Jove!* Once more let me behold it! Is it that which I left with her?”

Giacomo hands it to him. “Sir—I thank her—*that!* She *stripped* it from her arm; I see her yet—her pretty *action* did outsell her *gift!*—and yet *enriched* it, too: she gave it me, then said she *prized* it... once.”

“It may be she plucked it off to send it to *me*...”

“She *writes* to you so, doth she?”

“*Oh, no!*—no, *no!*” cries Leonatus. “’Tis *true!*” Impetuously he grabs the ring from Philario. “Here, take *this*, too! It is a *basilisk* unto mine eye!—*kills* me to *look* on’t!

“Let there be no *honour* where there is *beauty*, *truth* where is *semblance*—*love* where there’s *another man!*”

“Let the vows of *women* hold no more bondage to where they are made than *they* are bound to their *virtues*—which is *nothing!*”

“*Oh, false* above *measure!*”

“Have *patience*, sir!” insists old Lord Philario, “and take your ring again!—’tis not yet *won!*” He knows Giacomo well. “It may be, probably *is*, that she *lost* it!—or, who knows if one of her women, being corrupted, hath *stolen* it from her?”

“*Very true!*” says Leonatus. *And I hope he so came by’t!* “*Back* my ring!” he demands. “Render to me some *corporal* sign about her, more evident than this—or this *was* stolen!”

Giacomo is genuinely indignant. “By Jupiter, I had it *from her arm!*”

Young Leonatus moans. “Hark you, he *swears!*—by *Jupiter* he *swears!*” The supreme god is Rome’s patron. “’Tis *true!*—nay, *keep* the ring—’tis *true!* I am sure she would not *lose* it! Her attendants are all *sworn* and *honourable!*—they, induced to *steal* it?—and by a *stranger?*”

“*No!*—he hath *enjoyed* her!” He stares at the bracelet. “The *cognizance* of her inconstancy is in this; and she hath bought the name of ‘*whore*’ thus dearly!”—at this price.

“*There*, take thy *hire*,” he growls, thrusting it at Giacomo. “And *all the fiends of Hell* divide themselves *between* you!”

Philario protests. “Sir, be *patient!* *This* is not strong enough to be believed by one persuaded well of—”

“Never speak of’t!” cries Leonatus, turning away. “She hath been *bolted* by him!”

Giacomo seems offended by their host’s doubt. “If you seek for further *satisfying*: under her *breast*—worthy the *pressing!*—lies a mole, rightly proud of that most-delicate lodging! By my life, I *kissed* it!—and it gave me immediate hunger to *feed* again, though full!

“You do *remember* this stain upon her?”

“*Aye*—and it doth confirm *another* stain!” groans Leonatus, “as big as *Hell can hold*, were there no more but *it!*”

“Will you hear more?”

“Spare your *arithmetic!* Never count the *turns!*—once—*and a million!*”

“I’ll be sworn—”

“No *swearing!* If you swear you have *not* done’t, you *lie!*—and I will *kill thee* if thou dost deny thou’st made me *cuckold!*”

“I’ll deny nothing.”

“Oh, that I had her *here*—to *tear her to pieces!*” Leonatus is livid. “I will go *there* and do’t!—i’ the *court*—before her *father!* I’ll do...” He sobs, “*Something!*” He storms away.

Philario is dismayed. “Quite *beyond* the government of *patience!*” He regards Giacomo with disgust. “You have won.

“Let’s *follow* him, and prevent the present wrath he hath against himself!” He hurries off to find Leonatus.

“With all my heart,” murmurs Giacomo, as he pockets the ring and bracelet.

He will enjoy assuring that the Briton’s pain persists.

Alone, Posthumus Leonatus fulminates.

Is there no way for men to be but that women must be half-workers?

We are all bastards!—and that most venerable man whom I did call my father was I know not where when I was stamped!—some coiner made me with his tool—a counterfeit!

Yet my mother seemed the Diana of that time!—so doth my wife the nonpareil of this!

Oh, vengeance, vengeance!

Me from lawful pleasure she restrainèd, and oft prayed my forbearance!—did it with a modesty so rosy that the sweet view of't might well have warmed cold Saturn!—such that I thought her as chaste as unsunnèd snow. But—oh, all the devils!—this callow Giacomo, within an hour!—was't not?—or less!

At first perchance he spoke not, but, like a full-acornèd boar, as men are now, cried, 'On!' and mounted!—found no opposition but what he looked for to oppose!—but which she should against encounter guard!

He paces. Oh, could I find out the woman's share in me!—for there's no motion that tends to vice in man but I affirm it is the woman's part! Be it lying, flattering, deceiving, lust and rank thoughts, revenges, ambitions, covetings chargèd with pride's disdain, nights' longing, slanders, mutability—all faults that may be namèd, nay, that Hell knows!—why, hers, all or in part!

But rather all!—for even to Vice they are not constant, but are ever exchanging one vice but a minute old for one not half so old as that!

I'll write against men, detest them, curse them! Yet 'tis greater skill in true hate to pray they have their will!—the very devils cannot plague them better!

Now say: what would Caesar Augustus with us?" Cymbeline sits upon his throne; his queen is on hers beside him, and their court is in attendance, along with lords from the island's farther reaches.

Caius Lucius stands before the king. "When Julius Caesar—whose remembrance yet lives in men's eyes, and will to ears and tongues be hearing and theme *ever!*—was in this Britain and conquered it, *Cassibelan*, thine uncle—famous in Caesar's *praise*, nor a whit less in his feats *deserving* it—from him and his succession granted Rome a *tribute*, yearly three thousand pounds. Which by thee lately is left *untendered*," he adds—as if surprised.

"And, to kill thy marveling, shall be so *ever!*" says the queen harshly.

Cloten is standing beside her. "There'll be *many* Caesars ere another *Julius*. Britain is a world by *itself!*—and we will nothing pay for wearing our *own* noses!"—a gibe; Romans' coins show the feature as distinctive.

"That which he had opportunity to *take* from's, to *retain* have we again!" says the queen.

She turns to Cymbeline. "*Remember*, sir my liege, the kings your *ancestors!*—together with the natural splendor of your isle, which stands as *Neptune's park*, ribbed and palèd-in with *oaks unscalable, sands*"—shoals—"with roaring waters that will not bear your enemies' boats, but *suck them down*, even to the topmast!

"A *kind* of conquest Caesar made here—but made *not* here his brag of *came* and *saw* and *overcame!* With *shame*—that *first* that ever touchèd him!—was he carried from off our coast, *twice beaten!* And his ships—poor, ignorant *baubles* on our terrible seas!—upon their surges *cracked* as easily as *egg-shells* 'gainst our rocks!

"For *joy* whereof the famèd *Cassibelan*, who was once at the point of *mastering* Caesar's sword!—oh, *harlot Fortune!*—made Lud's Town"—earliest London—"bright with *rejoicing fires*, and made Britons *strut* with *courage!*"

As the British courtiers applaud the spirited encomium, Cloten says flatly: "Come, there's no more tribute to be paid. Our kingdom is *stronger* than it was at that time; and, as I said, there is no more such *Caesars*. Others of them may have crooked *noses*, but owning such strength in *arms*, *none.*"

Cymbeline frowns. "Son, let your mother end."

But Cloten persists: "We have yet *many* among us can grip as hard as *Cassibelan!* I do not say *I* am one—but I have a *hand!*" He means for weapons, of course, but among those who know him, the comment prompts grins.

“Why tribute?” asks Cloten. “Why should we pay *tribute*? If Caesar can *hide the sun* from us with a blanket, or put the *moon* in his *pocket*, we will pay him tribute—for *light!*” he tells the ambassador. “Else, sir, *no more tribute*, pray you know.”

Cymbeline rises—finally. “As you *must* know,” he tells Lucius, “till the injurious Romans did *extort* this tribute from us, we were *free*. Caesar’s *ambition*, which swelled so much that it did almost *stretch the sides o’ the world*, against all colours here”—despite the many British clans—“did put a yoke upon us. Which *to shake off* becomes a *warlike* people, whom we reckon ourselves to be!”

The lords of Britain concur vocally and heartily: “*We do!*”

The monarch continues: “Say, then, to Caesar: *our* ancestor was that *Mulmutius* who ordained our *laws*—whose use the sword of Caesar hath too much *mangled*, and whose *repair* and *franchise* shall, by the power we hold, be *our good deed*, though Rome be therefore angry! *Mulmutius* who made our laws was but the *first* of Britain who did put his brows within a golden crown and call himself *a king!*”

Caius Lucius listens to the court’s vigorous approbation. “I am sorry, Cymbeline, that I am to pronounce Caesar Augustus—*Caesar*, who hath more *kings* as his servants than thyself *domestic* officers!—thine *enemy!* Receive it from me, then: in Caesar’s name I pronounce ‘gainst thee *war and devastation!* Look for a fury not to be resisted!”

Then the Roman bows politely. “I *thank* thee, thus defied, for myself.”

“*Thou* art welcome, Caius,” says Cymbeline kindly. “Thy Caesar knighted me; my youth I spent much under him; from him I garnered *honour*—which he *to take back perforce* behooves me *to resist utterly!*”

He is well aware of the other rebellions now challenging the Roman Empire. “I am perfect that Pannonia and Dalmatia for *their* liberties are now in arms—a precedent which not to read would show the Britons cold. So Caesar shall not *find* them!”

The ambassador is confident. “Let proof speak.”

Cloten sneers. “His majesty bids you welcome; make pastime with us a day or two, or longer. If afterwards you seek us in *other* terms, you shall find us within our salt-water sash. If you beat us *out* of it, it is yours; if you *fall* in the adventure, our *crows* shall *dine the better* for you! And there’s an end.”

Caius Lucius sees the discomfiture the dolt is causing the noble sovereign, and will not protract it. “So, sir.”

King Cymbeline goes to the Roman. “I know your master’s pleasure, and he mine.

“All that remains is, ‘*Welcome!*’” he says cordially.

They will share reminiscences, and talk further, over supper.

Pisanio reads a letter, one of two newly arrived from Rome—and is dismayed by the topic. *What? Of adultery! Wherefore write you not what a monster is her accuser?*

Leonatus, oh, master, what strange infection is fall’n into thine ear! What false Italian, as poisonous tongued as handed, hath prevailed on thy too-ready hearing? Italians are thought to be especially treacherous—and prone to use poison for political gain.

He reads further. *Disloyal! No!—she’s punished for her truth!—and undergoes, more goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults as are aimed to take in some of that virtue!*

Oh, my master, thy mind toward her is now as low as are thy fortunes!

He is appalled by the next passage: *What?—that I should murder her! Under the love and truth in vows which I have made to thy command?—I? Her?—her of royal blood!*

If to do so be good service, never let me be counted serviceable!

How look I, that I should so much seem to lack humanity as to come to this crime?

He reads Leonatus’s words: ‘*Do’t! The letter that I have sent her shall by her own command give thee opportunity.*’

O damnèd paper!—dark as the ink that’s on thee! Senseless bauble, art thou a feodary for this act, yet look’st so virgin-like outside?

He sees Imogen. *Lo, here she comes.* He intends to shield her: *I am ignorant of what I am commanded....*

“How now, Pisanio!”

He gives her the other missive. “Madam, here is a letter from my lord.”

“Who?—*thy* lord?” cries Imogen, delighted. “That is *my* lord—*Leonatus!*”

“Oh, learnèd indeed were that astrologer who knew the *stars* as I *his* characters! He’d lay the future open!” she says, admiring her husband’s handwriting on the folded paper. “You good gods, let what is here containèd relish of *love*, of my lord’s *health*, of his *being content!*”

Hastily she amends: “But not that we two are *asunder!*—let *that* grieve him! Some griefs are *medicinal*; that is one of them, for it doth physic *love!* Of his contentment in all but that!

“Good wax, thy leave!” she says happily, breaking the signet-impressed red seal. “Blest be you bees that make these locks of counsel! You play not alike for men in dangerous contracts and lovers: though *forfeiters* you cast in *prison,*”—by confirming failed agreements, “yet you clasp the young to *Cupid’s* tables!”

Imogen holds the letter close to her heart for a moment. *Good news, gods!* she prays.

She reads: ‘*Injustice of your father’s wrath, should I be taken in his dominion,*’—caught in Britain, ‘*could not be so cruel as you, O thou costliest of creatures, if you would never renew me with your eyes.*

‘*Take notice that I am in Cambria, at Milford Haven.*

‘*What your own love will out of this advise you, follow.*

‘*He who wishes you all happiness remains loyal to his wish for your increasing love.*

‘—*Leonatus Posthumus.*’

The writer’s last bitter line—about Giacomo—cost him the most; but his innocent wife has no reason to look for irony or sarcasm.

“Oh, for a horse with *wings!* Hear’st thou, Pisanio!—he is at *Milford Haven!* Read, and tell me how far ’tis thither!” Elated, she hands him the letter. “If one of *plain* affairs may plod it in a week, why may not *I* glide thither in a *day,* true Pisanio?—one who long’st as I do to see thy lord!”

She smiles, blushing. “Let me abate: *not* as *I* do!—thou long’st, but in a *fainter* kind. Oh, not like *me!*—for mine’s beyond *beyond!*

“Speak, and say *headily!*—*love’s* counsel should *fill* the bores of hearing, to the *smothering* of the sense!—how far it is to this same *blessèd Milford!*

“And, along the way, tell me how Wales was made so happy as to inherit such a haven!

“But first, how may we *steal from hence?*—and then *excuse* the gap that we shall make in time between our going and our return.”

Imogen is annoyed; she is, after all, a princess. “Why should *excuse* be bourn?

“Or e’er *begot?*” she laughs, at the play on *born.* “We’ll talk of that hereafter.

“But first of all, *how get thence!*” She is giddy with eagerness. “Prithee, *speaking:* how many miles may well be ridden ’twixt hour and hour?”

“’Twixt *sun* and *sun,* one score,”—twenty, “madam, is enough for you,” Pisanio tells her. He thinks, sadly, *And too much, too!*

“Why, man, one that rode to ’s *execution* could never go so slow! I have heard of riding *wagers* where horses that run at the hourglass’s behest have been *nimbler than the sands!*

“But this is foolery! *Go,* bid my woman feign a sickness—say she’ll home to her father! And provide me immediately with a riding-suit no costlier than would befit a *franklin’s* housewife”—the spouse of a property-owning commoner; Imogen will disguise herself.

“Madam, you’d best consider—”

“*I see before me,* man!—neither here nor there nor what *ensues* has a fog on it that *I* cannot look through!

“Away, I prithee! Do as I bid thee!”

He bows and goes, folding up her letter.

She sighs happily. “There’s no more to say! Accessible is *none but Milford way!*”

Chapter Five In Hiding

In the mountainous lands along the coast of western Wales, bright sunrise draws a leathery old hunter, clad in faded black, to peer from within a sheltered cave. A rough, sunburnt hand slides along the rocky side of the low entrance as Belarius ducks down, then cautiously emerges and looks around at the narrow green valley.

“A goodly day not to keep house, for such whose roof’s as low as ours!” Inside, two strong young men with bows are approaching. “Stoop, boys; *this gate bows you to a morning’s holy office—and instructs you how to adore the heavens!* The gates of *monarchs* are archèd so high that *giants* may jaunt through and keep their impious turbans on, without a ‘Good morrow’ to the sun.

“Hail, thou fair *heaven!* We house i’ the *rock*—yet use thee not so *hardly* as prouder livers do!”

“*Hail, heaven!*” says the elder brother, standing at the dark opening.

“*Hail heaven!*” cries the younger, beside him.

“Now for our mountain sport,” says Belarius, rubbing his hands together eagerly. “Up to yond hill! Your legs are young; I’ll tread these flats.

“Consider, when from above you perceive me as a *crow*, that it is *place* which lessens or sets off!—and so you may resolve what I have told you in tales of *courts*, of *princes*, of the tricks in *war*.

“*This service so done is not ‘service!’* Being thus allowed but to *apprehend* draws us a profit from all things we *see!*”

“And often shall we find, to our comfort, that the sharded *beetle* is in a safer hold than the full-wingèd *eagle!*”

“Oh, this life is *nobler* than waiting for *rebuke*, *richer* than doing *nothing* for a *bauble*, *prouder* than rustling in unpaid-for *silk!* What the *cap* one gains to make him *fine* keeps his *book* yet *unglossèd!*”

“*No life, compared to ours!*”

“Out of your proofs ”—experiences—“*you speak!*” complains Guiderius. “*We poor unfledgèd* have never winged from view of the nest, nor know not what air is away from *home!* Haply this life *is best*, if *quiet* life be best—*sweeter* to you that have known one *sharper*, and corresponding well with your stiff age.

“But unto *us* it is a *cell of ignorance!*—a *prison* for a debtor who dares not stride past a limit!—*travailing a-bed!*”—only dreaming.

His brother concurs. “What should *we* speak of when we are as old as you? When we shall hear the rain and wind beat dark December, how, in this our pinching cave, shall we discourse the freezing hours away? We have seen nothing!

“We are *bestly*: clever as the *fox*—for game; warlike as the *wolf*—for what we *eat!* Our *valour* is to chase what *flees!* In our cage we make a choir as doth a prisoner bird, and sing *freely*—of *bondage!*”

Belarius scoffs. “How you *speak!*” He crouches, tugs at the tall grass still sparkling with dew to gain a blade to chew, and looks down beyond the lower hills toward the sea. “Did you but know the *city’s usuries*—and *feel* them knowingly!

“The arts o’ the *court*, as hard to *leave* as keep, whose *top* to climb is a *certain falling*—or so slippery that the *fear* is as *bad* as falling!

“The pain of *war*: toil that seems to *seek out* danger i’ the name of *fame* and *honour*—which but die i’ the *search*—and hath as oft a *slandrous epitaph* as record of *fair act*! And, many times, ‘doing well’ doth *ill deserve*.

“What’s worse, *courtesy* must shown during a *censure*!

“Oh, boys, this story the world may read in *me*!

“My body’s *markèd* by Roman swords, and my report was once *first* with the best of note! *Cymbeline* loved me, and when *soldier* was the theme, *my* name was not far off! Then was I as a *tree* whose boughs did *bend* with fruit!

“But *in one night*, a storm—or *robbery*, call it what you will—*shook down* my mellow hangings, nay, even my *leaves*, and left me bare to the weather!”

Says the older brother sadly, “*Uncertain* favour.”

“My fault being *nothing*!—as I have told you oft! But two *villains*, whose *false oaths* prevailed before my perfect *honour*, swore to *Cymbeline* I was *confederated* with the *Romans*!

“So followed my *banishment*! And these twenty years this rock and these demesnes have been my world, where I have lived in *honest freedom*—paid more pious debts to heaven than in all the fore-end of my time.”

He rises. “But this is not *hunters’* language! Up to the mountains! He that strikes the venison first shall be the *lord o’ the feast*!—to him the other two shall minister! And *we* will fear no *poison*, which attends in places of greater state.

“I’ll meet you in the valleys.”

And so begins their day of hunting again for food.

The grizzled man muses, watching as the youths climb, skillfully and silently. *How hard it is to hide the sparks of Nature! These boys little dream they are sons to the king—nor does Cymbeline know that they are alive!*

They think they are mine; and though trained-up thus meanly i’ the cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit the roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them, even in simple and low things, to prince-it much beyond the trick of others!

*This Polydore, the heir of Cymbeline and Britain, who the king his father called Guiderius—*He laughs. *Jove! When on my three-leg stool I sit and tell the warlike feats I have done, his spirits fly out into my story!—says he, ‘Thus mine enemy fell, and thus I set my foot on ’s neck!’ And then the princely blood flows in his cheek! He sweats, strains his young sinews, and puts himself in posture that acts my words!*

The younger brother, Cadwal, once Arviragus, in as like a figure strikes life into my speech—and shows much more his own conceiving!

He looks up. *Hark!—the game is rousèd!*

He gazes eastward. *O Cymbeline! Heaven and my conscience know thou didst unjustly banish me! Whereon I stole those babes, at three and two years old, thinking to bar thee of succession as thou bereft ’st me of my land!*

He remembers, tearfully, his wife. *Euriphile, thou wast their nurse; they took thee for their mother.*

He watches the climbers. *And every day they do honour to her grave.*

Myself—Belarius, that am ‘Morgan’ callèd—they take for natural father. He stands in a high hill’s shadow, ruminating.

A clatter—of a startled deer’s hooves, kicking up stones as it runs, and the cries of two excited young men racing in pursuit—brings him back.

As morning sunlight slants closer, he again ponders the future of the young princes he loves as sons.

Slowly he nods, and sighs. *The game is up....*

Thou told’st me, when we left the horses, the place was *near at hand*!” protests Imogen, looking around eagerly; the seaport town of Milford Haven lies ahead, in the Welsh

valley far below. “Ne’er longèd my *mother* to see me *first* as I long *now*, Pisanio! Man, where is *Posthumus*?”

They have traveled fast, she disguised as a freeholder’s young wife. But now she is surprised to see that the servant is perturbed. “What is in thy mind, that makes thee stare thus?” she asks. “Wherefore breaks that sigh from the inward of thee? One but *painted* thus would be interpreted a thing perplexed beyond self-explication! Put thyself into a havior of less *fear*, ere wildness vanquish *my* staid senses!”

Pisanio reaches into his coat.

“What’s the matter? Why tender’st thou that paper to me with a look untender? If’t be summer news, *smile* to’t before; if *winterly*, thou need’st but keep *that* countenance still!”

She looks at the letter with foreboding. “My husband’s hand! That drug-damnèd *Italy* hath out-*craftied* him, and he’s at some hard point! *Speak*, man!—thy tongue may take off some extremity which to read would be even *mortal* to me!”

He blanches at the phrasing. “Please you, *read!*—and you shall find me, wretched man, a thing the most disdainèd by Fortune!”

Imogen reads: *‘Thy mistress, Pisanio, hath played the strumpet in my bed!—the testimonies whereof lie in me, bleeding! I speak not out of weak surmises but from proof as strong as my grief—and as certain as I expect my revenge!*

‘That part thou, Pisanio, must act for me, if thy faith be not tainted with the breach of hers.

‘Let thine own hands take away her life!

‘I shall give thee opportunity at Milford Haven—she hath my letter for the purpose—where, if thou fail to strike and to make me certain it is done, thou art the pandar to her dishonour, and equally to me disloyal!’

Pisanio sees her hands fall, her face drained pale. *Why would I need to draw my sword? The paper hath cut her throat already!*

No, t’was the slander!—whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue outvenoms all the serpents of Nile, whose breath rides on the posting winds, and doth belie, in all corners of the world, kings, queens and states, maids, matrons!—nay, the secrets of the grave this viperous Slander uninters!

He looks at her, sadly. “What cheer, madam?”

Imogen is angry. “*False* to his *bed!* What *is* it to be false?—to lie in *watch* there, and to *think* on *him?* To *weep* ’twixt ’clock and ’clock?—if nature demands *sleep*, to *break* it with a fearful dream of him, and cry myself *awake?* That’s *false* to’s bed, is it?”

“*Alas*, good lady—”

“*I*, false? My *perception* is *witless!* Giacomo, when thou didst accuse *him* of inconstancy, thou looked’st like a *villain*; now methinks thine acuity was *good* enough!” The princess paces, thinking. “Some *she* of *Italy* whose mother was her *painting*”—a creature born of cosmetics—“hath *betrayed* him!”

Her anger rises. “*I* am, poor *stale*, a garment *out of fashion!* Because I am richer than to hang by the walls,”—too costly for display alone, “*I* must be *rippèd!*—to *pieces* with me!”

“*Oh*, men’s *vows* are women’s *traitors!* By *thy* revolt, O husband, all seeming *good* shall be thought *put on* for *villainy!*—not *born* where’t grows, but *worn*—as *ladies-bait!*”

“*Good* madam, hear me—”

“*Honest* men like Aeneas, being heard in his time, were thought *false*, while Sinon’s *weeping*”—as he betrayed Troy—“did scandal up many a holy *tear*—*steal* *pity* from a wretchedness most *true!*”

“*So* *thou*, Posthumus, wilt betray the leaven”—halt the rise—“of all *proper* men: *false* and *perjured* shall be *goodly* and *gallant*, following *thy* great call!”

Furious, she turns to Pisanio. “*Come*, fellow, be *thou* honest!—*do* thou thy master’s bidding! And when thou see’st him, witness a little my *obedience!*”

“Look!—I draw the sword *myself!*” she cries, jerking his blade from its sheath. “*Take it, and hit the innocent mansion of my love, my heart!*”

“Fear not!—’tis *empty* of all things but *grief!* Thy *master* is not there, who was indeed the riches of it. Do his bidding!” she demands, proffering the hilt. “*Strike!*”

He stands motionless.

She chides: “Thou mayst be valiant in a *better* cause, but *now* thou seem’st a coward!”

Pisanio knocks the sword from her hand. “*Hence, vile instrument!* Thou shalt *not* damn my hand!”

“Why, I must *die!*” protests Imogen. “And if I do *not* by thy hand, thou art no servant of thy master’s!”

He turns away.

“Against *self*-slaughter there is a prohibition so divine that it cravens *my* weak hand,” she tells him. “Come—here’s my *heart!*” Imogen moves a hand to her bosom. “Something’s afore’t. Soft, soft... we’ll have no *defence!*—*obedient* as a *scabbard!*”

She pulls several letters from her bodice. “What is here? The *scriptures* of the loyal *Leonatus*, all turned to *heresy!*” She tears them in half and lets the pieces fall beside his crumpled message to Pisanio. “Away, *away*, corrupters of my faith! You shall no more be companions to my heart! Thus may poor *fools* believe *false teachers!*”

“Though those that are betrayed do feel the treason sharply, yet the *traitor* stands in *worse case of woe!* Thou, Posthumus, thou that didst stir up my disobedience ’gainst *my father the king*, and made me put into contempt the suits of *princely* fellows, shalt find it is no *common* act”—a dig at his not being a noble—“of passage toward the hereafter, but a strain of *rareness!*”

“And *I myself* grieve to think of how—when thou shalt be *dislodged* by her that now thou thrust upon—thy memory will then be *panged* by *me!*”

Fighting the urge to retch, Imogen turns furiously to Pisanio. “Prithee, *dispatch!* The lamb *entreats* the butcher! Where’s thy *knife?*—thou art too slow to do thy master’s bidding, when *I* desire it, too!”

He is frantic. “*Oh, gracious lady*, since I *received* command to do this business I have not *slept one wink!*”

“*Do ’t!*—and to bed then.”

“I’ll make mine eye-balls *blind* first!”

“Wherefore then didst *undertake* it? Why hast thou abused so many miles—mine action and thine own, our horses’ labour—with a *pretence?* Is the *time?*—with war imminent—“inviting thee to this place to *perturb the court*—whereunto I purpose never to *return!*—by my being absent?”

“Why hast thou gone so *far*, only to be *unbent?*”—like a hunter’s lowered bow—“when thou hast ta’en thy stand, and the elected doe is before thee?”

“But to *win* time to *lose* so bad employment!—for the which I have considered of a *course!*” Pisanio tells her. “Good lady, *hear* me with *patience!*”

“*Speak!*—talk thy tongue *weary!* I have heard that I am a *strumpet!*—mine *ear*, struck *falsely* therein, can take no *greater* wound—nor bandage to the depth of *that!* But speak.”

“Then, madam, as I thought you would not go *back* again—”

“Most *likely,*” cries Imogen bitterly, “bringing me here to *kill* me!”

“*Not so*, neither: if I were but as wise as *honest*, then my purpose would prove *well!*”

“It cannot *be* but that my master is *abusèd!* Some *villain!*—aye, one singular in his *art!*—hath done you *both* this cursèd injury!”

“Some Roman *courtezan!*”

“*No*, on my life!” cries Pisanio, retrieving the sent letter to him.

He faces her, and speaks urgently. “I’ll give him but a *notice* you are dead, and send some bloody sign of it; for ’tis commanded I should do so. You shall be missed at court, and that will well confirm it!”

“Why, good fellow, what shall I *do* the while? Where abide? How *live*? Or find in my life what *comfort*, when I am dead to my *husband*?”

“If you’ll back to the court—”

“No *court!*—no *father!*” Imogen is adamant. “Nor no more ado with that harsh, notably simple *nothing*, that *Cloten!*—whose love-suit hath been to me as dreadful as a *siege!*”

“If not at court, then *not in Britain* must you bide.”

Imogen nods, slowly. “Wherein hath *Britain* all the sun that shines? *Day, night*—are they but in Britain? In the *world’s* volume, our Britain seems *of’t*, but not *all* of it!—in a great pool, a *swan’s* nest! Prithee, think there’s livers out of *Britain!*”

Pisanio picks up the sword and sheathes it. “I am most glad you think of *other* places: Lord Lucius, the ambassador from Rome, comes through Milford Haven tomorrow. Now, if you should bear a *mind* as stark as your fortune is, and *disguise* that which must not yet appear as *itself*, for danger, you could tread a course readily and in full view—yea, haply near the *residence* of *Posthumus!*—*so* nigh at the least that, though his actions were not visible, yet *report* should render him truly to your ear as hourly he moves!”

“Oh, for such *means!* Though at *peril* of my modesty, but not the death of’t, I would *adventure!*”

“Well then here’s the point: you must forget to be a *woman!*

“*Change!* *Obedience, fear* and *softness*—the handmaids of all women—or, more truly, *Woman* its pretty *self*—conceal in a waggish *courage!* Be ready with *gibes!*—quick to *answer, saucy*—and as *quarrelsome* as a weasel!

“Nay, you must *forgo* that rarest treasure, your *pale cheek*, exposing it—but, woe thy hardy heart, alack, no remedy!—to the greedy touch of common-kissing Titan!”—sunlight, destroyer of delicate skin tones. “And forget the laboursome and dainty *trims* wherein you made great *Juno* angry!”—aroused envy even in Jupiter’s queen.

She demands, rudely, “Nay, *be brief!*” She notes that he is taken aback—and grins. “I see unto thy end, and am almost a *man* already!”

He laughs. “First make yourself but *look* like one. Fore-thinking this, I have already fitted apparel to thee; ’tis in my cloak-bag: doublet, hat, hose—all that will answer!

“I would that you—in their styling, and with what imitation you can borrow from such as is man’s in season of *youth*—’fore noble Lucius present yourself! Desire his service; tell him wherein you’re skilled—which *you’ll* make him know, if his head have ear for music!” Her voice is melodious. “Doubtless with *joy* he will embrace you, for he’s honourable—and, *doubling* that, most *holy!*

“As for means abroad, you have rich... meed”—only great deserving, he admits. “But I will never fail—beginning, nor supplyment!”

Imogen’s eyes glisten. “*Thou* art the comfort the gods will diet me with.

“Prithee, away! There’s more to be considered, but we’ll keep even with all that good Time will give us!” Lord Lucius will soon return to Rome, and she hopes to sail there with him. “This attempt I am *soldier* to, and will abide it with a *prince’s* courage!” She looks down at the harbor. “Away, I prithee.”

Pisanio is pleased. “*Well*, madam! We must take a *short* farewell, lest, being missed, I be suspected of your carriage from the court.” He reaches into a pocket. “My noble mistress, here is a box; I had it from the queen. What’s in’t is *precious*: if you are sick at sea, or stomach-qualmed on land, a dram of this will drive away distemper.”

He smiles, handing her the bundle of clothes. “To some shadows, and fit you to your *manhood!* May the gods direct you for the best!”

“Amen.” She says, touching his hand, “I thank *thee.*”

Chapter Six Pursuer and Pursued

The king and queen halt at the castle's main entrance. "Thus far; and so farewell," Cymbeline tells the Roman ambassador.

"Thanks, royal sir," Caius Lucius replies. "My emperor hath wrote; I must from hence—and am right sorry that I must report ye my master's enemy."

"Our subjects, sir, will not endure his yoke; and for ourself to show less sovereignty than *they* must needs appear *unkinglike*."

"So, sir. I desire of you a conduct overland to Milford Haven." Lucius bows courteously to the queen. "Madam, all joy befall Your Grace."

Says the hostile queen curtly, "And you."

"My lords," Cymbeline tells two of his courtiers, "you are appointed for that office; the due of honour in no point omit!

"So farewell, noble Lucius!"

The ambassador turns to Cloten. "Your hand, my lord..."

"*Receive* it friendly—but from this time forth I wear it as your *enemy!*"

"Sir, the event is yet to name the winner," says the emissary gravely. "Fare you well."

Cymbeline cautions, as the courtiers go, "Leave not the worthy Lucius, good my lords, till he have crossed the Severn." The river's mouth is between Britain and Wales. "Happiness!" he calls—almost wistfully—as his friend departs.

"He goes hence frowning," the queen observes, "but it *honours* us that we have given him *cause!*"

"'Tis all the better," says Cloten. "Your *valiant* Britons have their *wishes* in it!"

But the peaceable monarch is pensive. "Lucius hath written to the *emperor* how it goes here and had a reply; it befits us, therefore, that our chariots and our horsemen be in readiness. The powers that he already hath will soon be drawn to head in Gallia, from whence he moves his war for Britain."

The queen frowns, concerned. "'Tis not sleepy business, but must be looked to *speedily* and *strongly!*"

"Our expectation that it would be thus hath made us move forward," the king tells her calmly. "But, my gentle queen, where is our daughter? She hath not appeared before the Roman, nor to us hath tendered the duty of the day! She looks at us like one made more of *malice* than of duty—we have *noted* it!

"Call her before us," he tells an attendant, "for we have been too slight in our sufferance!"

The queen appears to feel sympathy for the princess. "Royal sir, since the exile of Posthumus, most *retirèd* hath her life been—the cure whereof, my lord, 'tis *time* must do. Beseech Your Majesty, forbear sharp speeches! She's a lady so tender of rebuke that words are *strokes*, and strokes *death* to her!" She has reason to think the princess might soon fall deathly ill.

The attendant returns, alone.

"Where *is* she, sir?" demands Cymbeline, annoyed. "How can her contempt be answered?"—defended.

"Please you, sir, her chambers are all *locked!*—and there's *no* answer that will be given to the loudest noise we make!"

The queen speaks soothingly. "My lord, when last I went to visit her, she prayed me to *excuse* her keeping close,"—staying in her quarters, "whereto constrained by her *infirmity*, she should that duty leave unpaid to you which daily she was bound to proffer. This she wished me to make known; but our great court made me to blame in memory."

"Her doors *locked?* Not *seen* of late?" cries Cymbeline. "Grant, heavens, that what I fear prove false!" He hurries down the corridor, quickly trailed by his startled attendants.

“Son, follow the king I say!”

Cloten frowns. “That man of hers—Pisanio, her old servant—I have not seen these two days....”

“Go, look after!” orders the queen. He goes.

She thinks of the serving man. *Pisanio, who stand’st so for Posthumus! He hath a drug of mine; I pray his absence proceed from swallowing that, for he believes it is a thing most precious.*

But as for her, where is she gone? Haply despair hath seized her!—or, wingèd with fervor of her love, she’s flown to her desired Posthumus! Gone she is—to death or to dishonour.

And my end can make good use of either! She being down, I have the placing of the British crown!

She sees Cloten returning—alarmed. “How now, my son?”

“’Tis certain she is *fled!* Go in and cheer the king—he *rages!*—none dares come about him!”

“All the better! May *this* night forestall him from the coming *day!*” She strides away, hoping to find a mortally stricken king—and prepared, if not, to strike.

Cloten frets again in his festering anger toward Imogen. *I love and hate her!*

For that she’s fair and royal, and hath all courtly parts more exquisite than lady—ladies—Woman! From every one, the best she hath; and she, of all compounded, outsells them all! I love her therefore.

But disdainning me and throwing favour on the low Posthumus so slanders her judgment that what’s else rare is choked!—and on that point I will conclude hating her!—nay, indeed being revenged upon her! For when fools shall—

Who is here? He sees Pisanio peeking into the hall from a side door. Cloten calls: “*What?*—are you *backing*, sirrah? Come *hither!* Ah, you precious *pander!*” He has no doubt that the princess has gone to meet her husband. “Villain, where is thy *lady?*—*in a word*, or else thou art straightway *with the fiends!*”—dispatched to Hell, he warns, grabbing the front of the man’s coat.

“Oh, good my lord—”

“Where is thy *lady?* Oh, by *Jupiter*, I will not ask *again!* Silent villain, I’ll have this secret from thine art, or rip thy *heart* to find it! Is she with *Posthumus?*—from whose so-many weights of *baseness* cannot a dram of *worth* be drawn!” He shoves the smaller man away.

Pisanio spreads his hands. “*Alas*, my lord, how can she be with *him?*—he is in *Rome!* When was she missed?”

“Where *is* she, sir? Come nearer; no further halting!—*satisfy me home!* What is become of *her!*”

Pisanio hesitates: “Oh, my all-worthy lord—”

“All-worthy *villain!* Reveal where thy mistress is *at once*, at the next *word!* No more of ‘worthy lord!’” He draws his sword. “*Speak*, or thy silence on the instant is thy condemnation and thy death!” He touches the sharp steel point to the servant’s throat.

Pisanio swallows, trembling. “Then, sir, this *paper* is the history of my knowledge touching her flight.” He offers Leonatus’s letter summoning Imogen to Wales.

Cloten seizes the paper. “Let’s see’t! I will pursue her even to Augustus’ throne!”

Thinks poor Pisanio, *Either this or perish! She’s far enough—and what he learns by this may prove to be his travail, not her danger!*

She is disguised, and Lucius should soon set sail.

Cloten sheathes his sword, and peers at the writing. “*Hmh....*”

Pisanio wants to proceed. *I’ll write to my lord she’s dead. O Imogen, safe mayst thou wander, safe return again!*

Cloten glares at him. “Sirrah, is this letter true?”

“Sir, as I think—”

“It is *Posthumus*’ hand!—I *know*’t!

“Sirrah, if thou wouldst *not* be a villain, do *me* true service: undergo those employments wherein I should have cause to use thee with a serious *industry!* That is, what villainy soe’er I bid

thee do, *perform* it directly and truly, and I would think thee an honest man! Thou shouldst neither want my means for thy relief, nor my voice for thy preferment!”

Pisanio is urged to *honest villainy*—again. His left hand touches his neck, which was nicked by the blade. “My good lord—”

“Thou wilt serve me *well!* For, since patiently and constantly thou hast stuck to the *bare* fortune of that *beggar* Posthumus, thou canst not, in the course of gratitude, be a but diligent follower of *mine!* Wilt thou serve me?”

Pisanio’s fingers are slick with blood; he holds a kerchief to the cut on his neck. “Sir, I will.” Will serve him as he deserves.

“Give me thy hand; here’s my purse.” Pisanio accepts the pouch of coins. “Hast any of thy late master’s *garments* in thy possession?”

“I have, my lord, at my lodging, the same suit he wore when he took leave of my lady and mistress....”

Cloten is pleased. “The first service thou dost me, *fetch that suit hither!* Let it be thy first service; go.”

Pisanio bows. “I shall, my lord.” He hurries to the servants’ quarters.

I forgot to ask him one thing; I’ll remember’t anon. Cloten blinks. *Meet thee at Milford Haven!—even there, thou posthumous villain, will I kill thee!*

He paces. *I would those clothes were come! She said, upon a time—the bitterness of it I now belch from my heart!—that she held the very garment of Posthumus in more respect than my noble and natural person, together with the adornment of my qualities!*

With that suit upon my back will I ravish her!

First, kill him—and before her eyes!

Then shall she see my ‘valour!’—which, commended to her, will be a torment!

He on the ground, my ‘speech of insultment’ endeth on his dead body!

And when my lust hath dined—which, as I say, to vex her I will execute in the clothes that she so praised!—to the court I’ll kick her back!—foot her home again!

She hath despised me rejoicingly—and I’ll be merry in my revenge!

Pisanio returns, with the clothing.

“Be those the garments?”

“Aye, my noble lord.”

Cloten remembers his question. “How long is’t since she went to Milford Haven?”

Pisanio equivocates. “She can scarce be *there* yet....” He hopes she’s gone—aboard a ship sailing for Italy.

“Bring this apparel to my chamber. That is the second thing that I have commanded thee; the third is that thou wilt be a voluntary *mute* to my design. Be but duteous and true, preferment shall tender itself to thee.

“My revenge is now at Milford—would I had *wings* to follow it! Come—and be *true!*”

Pisanio follows the fop. *Thou bid’st me to my loss!—for true to thee were being false—which I will never be!—to him that is most true! To Milford go—and find not her whom thou pursuest!*

Flow, flow upon her, you heavenly blessings! May this fool’s speed be crossed with slowness; labour be his meed!

Cloten heads to his rooms in the palace. After an hour’s cursing and muttering of vile vows, he will ride—galloping toward Cambria.

A gentleman, quite young and not very tall, is passing down through a verdant Welsh valley as the afternoon sun sinks lower. He pauses to rest at a bend in his path.

I see that a man’s life is a tedious one! groans Imogen. She looks back, up the stony slopes. *I have tired myself, yet for two nights together have made the ground my bed! I should be sick, but that my resolution helps me!*

Milford, when from the mountain-top Pisanio showed me thee, thou wast within a ken!

She has lost sight of the town while walking down between the hills. *O Jove, I think foundations fly from the wretched!—such, I mean, as should be relieved! Two beggars told me I could not miss my way! Why would poor folk that have afflictions on them lie, knowing 'tis a punishment or a trial?*

Yet no wonder, when rich ones scarce tell true! To lapse while in fullness is sorer than to lie for need! Then falsehood is worse in kings than in beggars.

Imogen pictures Leonatus. *My dear lord, thou art one o' the false ones. Now that I think on thee, my hunger's gone; but just before, I was at point to sink for lack of food!*

But what is this? She has noticed the mouth of a cave, nearly hidden by brush. Here is a path to 't; 'tis some savage's hold! I were best not to call....

With great caution, she moves closer, peering into the darkness beyond the low entrance. *I dare not call—yet famine, ere it can o'erthrow a nature, makes it valiant! Plenty and peace breed cowards—hardness is ever mother of hardness!*

“Ho! Who's here?” she calls. “If any thing that's civil, speak; if savage, take or defend!

“Ho!”

No answer? Then I'll enter. Best draw my sword.... Hefting the long blade, the princess is sharply aware of knowing nothing about using such weapons. *If mine enemy fear me as much as I this sword, he'll scarcely face us!* The gleaming steel quivers before her. *Such a foe!—good heavens!*

But she moves, slowly, carefully, into the cool dimness.

The princess has crept well inside, feeling her way along the rock wall with her left hand, when at the entrance Lord Belarius approaches, returning from the day's hunt with Guiderius and Arviragus.

“You, Polydore, have proved best woodman, and are master of the feast!” he tells the elder prince, as they near the cavern. *“Cadwal and I will play the cook and servant! 'Twas our match—the sweat would dry, and industry die, but for the end it works toward!*

“Come; our stomachs will make what's homely savoury! Weariness can snore upon flint, while rested sloth finds the down pillow hard!

“Now peace be here, poor house, that keep'st thyself,” says Belarius, as they reach the servantless home. He crouches to duck beneath the rocky ledge, and goes inside.

“I am thoroughly weary!” confesses Guiderius.

“I am weak with toil—yet strong in appetite!” laughs Arviragus, who has carried the game.

“There is cold meat i' the cave,” says his brother. *“We'll nibble on that whilst what we have killed be cooked.”*

Belarius comes out—wide-eyed. *“Stay!—come not in! But that it eats our victuals, I should think here were a fairy!”*

“What's the matter, sir?” asks Guiderius.

“By Jupiter, an angel!—or, if not, an earthly paragon!” He points, as the disguised Imogen emerges—sheepishly, with the sword back in its sheath. *“Behold divineness—no elder than a boy!”*

“Good masters, harm me not!” she cries. *“Before I entered here, I called!—and thought to have begged or bought what I have took! In good troth, I have stol'n nought, nor would not, though I had found gold strewed on the floor!*

“Here's money for my meat! I would have left it on the board so soon as I had made my meal—and parted with prayers for the provider!”

Guiderius scoffs. *“Money, youth?”*

“Gold and silver, rather, ill-turned to dirt,” scowls Arviragus. *“'Tis reckoned no better but by those who worship dirty gods!”* The recluses have little use for coins.

“I see you're angry,” says Imogen. *“Know, if you'd kill me for my fault: I should have died had I not made it!”*

Belarius steps closer, and asks, sternly, *“Whither bound?”*

“To Milford Haven.”

“What’s your name?”

“*Fidele*, sir. I have a kinsman who is bound for Italy; he embarks at Milford—to whom being going, almost spent with *hunger* I am fall’n in this offence.”

Belarius nods, then smiles; despite their hermit-like posture, the men are quite charmed by the pale, ingenuous boy. “Prithee, fair youth, think us no churls, nor measure our good minds by this rude place we live in. Well *encounterèd!* ’Tis almost night; you shall have *better cheer*”—food—“ere you depart!—and thanks to stay and *eat* it!

“Boys, bid him welcome!”

“Were you a *woman*, youth, I should woo hard but to be your *groom!*” says the older, studying the boy’s delicate features. He blushes. “I’d bid for you in *honesty*—as I’d *buy*.”

Arviragus concurs, but laughs. “I’ll make’t my comfort he is a *man*: I’ll love him as my *brother!*”

Guiderius tells Imogen, “And such a welcome as I’d give to *him* after long absence, such is *yours!* Most welcome! Be sprightly, for you fall ’mongst *friends!*”

Imogen smiles. “Amongst friends.” But she turns, wearily, and goes to sit upon a wide, round rock. *If brothers.... I would it had been so!—that they had been my father’s sons!* Although both boys were abducted before her birth, she has often thought about what they might be like.

Then had my price been less—and so balancing more equal with thee, Posthumus.

In the presence of male heirs to the throne, the king’s daughter would have seemed better matched to her husband.

Belarius sees the tears in her eyes, her slender hands clutched together upon her lap. He tells the young men softly, “He *wrings* some *distress*.”

“Would I could *free*’t!” says Guiderius earnestly.

“Or *I*, whate’er it be, what pain it cost, what danger, gods!” whispers Arviragus.

Belarius hushes them. “*Hark*, boys....” They speak quietly among themselves.

Imogen, weak with hunger, regards the three, touched by their concern for a poor stranger. She had heard, from far off to the east, of disciples who have begun to propagate a new kind of thinking about others. *Great men who had a court no bigger than this cave—who did attend themselves, and, laying aside the nothing of gift-offering multitudes, had but the virtue which their own conscience certified in them—could not out-peer these twain!*

Pardon me, gods: since Leonatus is false, I’d change my sex to be a companion with them!

Belarius intends to shelter Fidele; he nods to the two princes, who also hope to bring comfort to the troubled young traveler. They are agreed. “It shall be so.

“Boys, we’ll go dress our hunt”—prepare the game for cooking. He goes into the cave, and, with a courtly bow and gesture, invites Imogen. “Fair youth, come in!” he says kindly. “Discourse is heavy, fasting; when we have *supped*, we’ll mannerly demand of thee thy story, so far as thou wilt speak it.”

“Pray, draw near,” says Guiderius, entering the cave.

Arviragus smiles. “As the night to the owl, and morn to the lark, no less welcome!”

Imogen’s young gentleman rises. “Thanks, sir.”

“I pray, draw near,” says Arviragus.

As the sun sets, they follow the others into the cave, now aglow with the light of torches.

In Rome tonight, patrician lords meet with two of the commoners’ elected representatives.

“This is the tenor of the emperor’s writ,” a senator tells the tribunes. “That—since the common troops are now in action ’gainst the men of Pannonia and Dalmatia, and the legions in Gallia are too weak to undertake, alone, our war against the fall’n-away Britons—we do incite the *gentry* to this business.

“He creates Caius Lucius proconsul; and for this immediate levy he commends his absolute commission to you the tribunes.” He hands the taller man a scroll authorizing them to impress

gentlemen into service as officers—force them join commoners already conscripted as soldiers to invade Britain. “Long live Caesar!”

“Is Lucius *general* of the forces?” asks the other tribune, stroking his beard thoughtfully.

“Aye.”

“Remaining now in Gallia?”—just across the water from the British.

The senator nods. “With those legions which I have spoken of, whereunto your levy must be supplyant. The words of your commission will tie you to the numbers and the time of their dispatch.”

The tribunes bow. “We will discharge our duty.”

Chapter Seven Two Graves

Cloten, riding alone, surveys the surrounding Welsh hills this morning. Satisfied, he dismounts. *I am near to the place where they should meet, if Pisanio have mapped it truly.*

He is wearing Leonatus’s clothes. *How fitly his garments serve me! Why should the mistress of him that was made by a tailor not fit me too?—especially as, with all due reverence for the word, ’tis said, a woman’s fitness comes by fits!—between menses. Therein I must play the workman!*

He ties the reins to a sturdy branch on a small pine, and walks toward the bend ahead—noticing, with satisfaction, his own legs.

I dare speak it to myself—for it is not vainglory for a man and his mirror to confer in his own chamber— He stumbles but manages to stay upright, and continues walking. *I mean, the lines of my body are as well drawn as his: no less young, more strong, not beneath him in fortunes, beyond him in the advantage of the time, above him in birth, alike conversant in general services, and more remarkable in single oppositions!*

He scowls, thinking of Imogen. *Yet this unperceiving thing loves him in my despite!*

Rounding a turn, he stops. *Here mortality is! Posthumus, thy head, which now is growing upon thy shoulders, shall within this hour be off, thy mistress enforced, thy garments cut to pieces before her face!*

And all that done, I’ll spurn her home to her father!—who may perhaps be a little angry for my so-rough usage. But my mother, having power over his testiness, shall turn all into my commendations.

He looks around. *This is the very description of their meeting-place, and the fellow dare not deceive me.*

Actually, Pisanio has sent him to a lonely, barren spot well outside and above the town.

My horse is tied up safe. Out, sword, and on to a sore purpose!

Fortune, put them into my hands!

Cloten moves forward, stealthily, and crouches behind some bushes, to wait for the fatal rendezvous.

Barely concealed, not far behind him, is the low entrance to the cavern.

In the sleeping area at the back, Belarius has been watching Fidele—with sympathy. “You are not well; remain here in the cave; we’ll come to you after hunting.”

In the time he has spent with them, the gentle lad has endeared himself to the hardy hunters.

“Brother, *stay here,*” Arviragus urges softly. “Are we not brothers?”

She smiles. “As man and man *should* be: clay and clay, whose dust is both alike, differing but in regard. I am not very sick.” Imogen has been pressing to hunt with them.

“Go you to hunting,” Guiderius tells the others. “I’ll abide with him.”

That draws a protest from Fidele. "So sick I am not *yet!* I am not well, but not so wanton a citizen as to *seem* to *die!* So please you, leave me; stick to your journal course!—the breach of *custom* is breach of *all!* I am ill, but your *being by* cannot mend me; society is no comfort to one not sociable."

The men still look worried.

"I am not *very* sick, since I can *reason* of it," she argues. "Pray you, *trust* me here—I'll rob none but myself—and, stealing so *poorly*, *let* me die!" she laughs.

Guiderius laughs, too, and throws a comforting arm around the boy's shoulders. "I *love* thee!—I have spoken it! How much the quantity?—the weight as much as I do love my *father!*" "Eh?—what? *What!*" cries Belarius in mock indignation.

Arviragus tells the white-bearded man, "Even if it be sin to say so, I *yoke* me in my good brother's offense! I know not why I love this youth; but I have heard *you* say, 'Love's reason is *without* reason'"—the heart is beyond argument. With a young man's casualness about death, he grins. "A *bier* at door, and the demand, 'Who is't shall die?'—I'd say 'My *father*; not this youth!'"

Belarius only laughs and shakes his head. But he thinks, watching the prince, *Oh, noble strain! Oh worthiest of Nature—bred of greatness! Cowards father cowards, and base things sire base; nature hath bran and meal, contempt—and grace!*

He regards the young men. *I'm not their father, yet he who should be, if not beloved by me, doth mirror himself.*

"'Tis the ninth hour o' the morn," the old warrior notes gruffly; they are late for starting to work.

"Brother, farewell," Arviragus tells Imogen—his sister, though he doesn't know it.

She smiles. "I wish ye *sport!*"

"You, *health!*" says he, ready to begin the day's outing. "So please you, sir," he says courteously to Belarius.

Imogen watches as the hunters move forward in the cave to gather their weapons. *These are kind creatures.*

Gods, what lies I have heard!—our courtiers say all's savage but at court! O experience, thou disprovest report! The seas, imperious, breed monsters; for the dish, poor tributary rivers sweet fish!

Still, I am sick—heart-sick! Pisanio, I'll now taste of thy drug. She rises and finds the small box in a coat pocket. She swallows some of the powdered mixture, and starts toward the front.

Just outside the cave entrance, Guiderius quietly advises the other men, "I could not stir more from him; he said he was *gentle* but *unfortunate*—dishonestly *afflicted*, but yet honest."

Arviragus nods. "Thus did he answer me; yet said that hereafter I might know more."

But Belarius is eager for the day's hunt. "To the field, to the field!" He turns as Fidele reaches them. "We'll leave you for this time; go in and rest."

"We'll not be long away," Arviragus promises.

"Pray, be not *sick*—for you must be our *housewife!*" gibes Belarius.

The boy laughs. "Well or ill, I am bound to you!"

"And shalt be *ever*," says Belarius, reassuringly, as the men walk from the cave. The three confer as they ready themselves. The old man looks back. "This youth, how'er distressed he appears, hath had good ancestors."

"How angel-like he sings!" says young Arviragus, tightening his bow-string.

"And his skillful *cookery!*" adds Guiderius, attaching a long, sheathed knife to his belt. "He cut our roots into *alphabets*, and *sauced* our broth as if *Juno* had been sick, and he *her* dieter!"

"Nobly he yokes *smiling* with a *sigh*," says Arviragus, "as if the sigh were sad about not being a *smile*—and smile *mocked* sigh for flying from so divine a temple, to commix with winds that sailors rail at!"

Guiderius concurs: "I do note that grief and patience, both rooted in him, mingle their stems together."

"*Grow, patience!*" wishes Arviragus. "And let thy sinking elder, *grief*, untwine its perishing stem from thy increasing vine!"

Belarius wants no further delay. "It is *great morning!* Come!—away!" But as they start to go, he is startled to spot someone, his back to them, rising in the brush. Whispering, the old man asks the princes, "Who's there?"

Lord Cloten is very annoyed. "I cannot find those runagates! That villain hath *mocked* me!" Vexed by Pisanio's trick, and hot in the unfamiliar light of daytime, he pulls off his hat and wipes his forehead in frustration. "I am *faint!*"

- Belarius speaks with quiet urgency: "'Those runagates!' Means he not *us?* I partly know him... 'tis *Cloten*, the son o' the queen! I fear some *ambush!* I saw him not these many years, and yet I know 'tis he!" He glances around. "We are held to be *outlaws!* Hence!"

- "He is but *one!*" says tall Guiderius. "You and my brother search out what companions are near! Pray you, away; leave me alone with him."

Warily, the other two hurry off, in different directions.

Cloten now notices them and strides forward. "Soft!—what are *you* that fly me thus? Some villain *mountaineers!*"—brigands. "I have heard of such! What *slave* art *thou?*" he demands.

Guiderius steps toward him, already offended. "I ne'er did anything more slavish than *answer* a slave—with a *knock!*"

"Thou art a *robber*, a *law-breaker*—a *villain!* Yield thee, *thief!*"

Guiderius scoffs. "To whom? To *thee?* What art *thou?* Have not I an arm as big as thine?—a heart as big? Thy *words*, I grant, are bigger—for I wear not my dagger in my *mouth!* Say what thou art—why I should yield to thee."

"Thou *villain base*, know'st me not by my clothes?" asks Cloten haughtily.

"No—nor the rascal *tailor* who is thy *stepfather*: he made these *clothes* which, as it seems, make *thee!*"

"Thou precious *varlet*, my tailor made them not!"

Guiderius waves him away. "Hence, then!—and *thank* the man who gave them thee: thou art such a *fool* I am loath to *beat* thee!"

Cloten glowers. "Thou *injurious thief*, hear but my *name*—and *tremble!*"

"What's thy name?"

"*Cloten*, thou villain!"

Guiderius laughs. "If *double* 'Cloten-thou-villain' be thy name I cannot tremble at it! Were it *Toad, Adder, or Spider*, 'twould move me sooner!"

Cloten scowls. "To thy further fear—nay, to thy sheer consternation!—thou shalt know I am *son to the queen!*"

"I am sorry—about your not seeming so worthy as thy birth!"

Cloten stares. "Art not afeard?"

"Those that I *reverence*, *them* I fear: the wise. *Fools* I *laugh* at, not fear!"

His face red with rage, Cloten draws his sword. "Die the *death!*" he cries. "When I have slain *thee* with my proper hand, I'll follow those that even now fled hence—and on the gates of Lud's Town"—Britain's capital—"set your *heads!*"

He rushes forward, but Guiderius drives the vicious thrust aside with his own plain broadsword.

"*Yield*, rustic *mountaineer!*"

The prince backs away, countering each of the angry slashes.

Then he surges forth, driving Cloten back with a relentless rain of heavy blows.

—
"No companies abroad?" asks Belarius, meeting Arviragus as they return to the cave entrance.

“None in the world. You did mistake him, surely.”

“I cannot tell,” says the old man, frowning. “Long is it since I saw him, but time hath nothing blurred those lines of ill-favour which then he wore!” He shakes his head. “The snatches in his voice, and bursts of speaking, were as *his*.... I am positive: ’twas very *Cloten!*”

Arviragus looks around, worried. “In this place we left them. I wish my brother marked good time with him you say is so fell!”—so deadly.

“Being scantily made up—I mean, as a *man*—he has no apprehension of roaring *terrors*, for the effect of *judgment* is oft the cause of fear,” says Belarius. His contempt is mixed with concern, though: obtuse fearlessness can be dangerous. “But, see!—thy brother!” he cries.

Guiderius returns—with a severed head dangling by the hair from his right hand. “This Cloten was a fool!” He lifts the trophy. “An *empty purse*: there was no *money* in’t! Not *Hercules* could have knocked out *his* brains, for he *had* none!

“Yet, I not doing *this*, the fool had borne *my* head as I do his.”

The other men stare, aghast. “What hast thou *done?*” gasps Belarius.

Guiderius shrugs. “I am certain of what: cut off the head of one Cloten, son to the queen, after his own report—who called me *traitor!*—*mountaineer!*—and swore that with his own single hand he’d *take us in*—*displace* our *heads* from where, thank the gods, they grow, and set them on *Lud’s Town bridge!*”

Belarius groans. “We are all undone!”

“Why, worthy father, what have we to lose but what he swore to *take?*—our lives! The *law* protects not *us*,” says Guiderius. “Then why should we be so tender as to let an arrogant piece of flesh threaten us?—play judge and executioner all by himself, because *we* do *respect* the law!

“What company discover you abroad?”

“No single soul can we set eye on,” Belarius admits. “But in all safe reason, he must have *some* attendants! Though his mood was nothing but *mutation*—aye, and that from one *bad* thing to a *worse!*—no *frenzy* of absolute *madness* could so far have raved as to bring him here *alone!*”

“Although perhaps it may be heard at court that such as we cave here, hunt here, are outlaws, and in time may make some *stronger* head,”—join forces with other rebels, “the which hearing, he might, as is like *him*, break out in swearing he’d fetch us in, yet is’t not probable to come *alone!*—either he so undertaking, or they so permitting!

“Thus on *good grounds* do we stare, if we fear his body hath a *tail* more perilous than the head!”

Arviragus is unafraid. “Let ordinance come as the gods foresay it! Howsoever, my brother hath done *well!*”

But old Belarius recalls forebodings. “I had no mind to hunt this day; and the boy Fidele’s sickness did make my way coming forth long....” It is nearing noon.

Guiderius cites the angry assault he faced: “With *his own sword*—which he did wave against my *throat!*—I have ta’en his head from him. I’ll throw’t into the stream behind our rock, and let it wash to the sea—and tell the *fishes* he’s the queen’s son Cloten!

“That’s all *I* reckon,” he says, striding away to dispose of the still-dripping remnant.

Lord Belarius is concerned. “I fear ’twill be revenged.” He tells Guiderius as he heads toward the creek, “Though valour becomes thee well enough, Polydore, I would ye hadst not done’t.”

“Would *I* had done’t!” cries Arviragus, “so the revenge pursued *me alone!* Polydore, I love thee brotherly, but *envy much* that thou hast robbed me of this deed! I would that revenges which opposable strength might meet *would* seek us through—and put us to our *answer!*”

“Well, ’tis done,” says Belarius. “We’ll hunt no more today, nor seek for danger where there’s no profit. I prithee, go to our rock. You and Fidele play the cooks; I’ll stay till hasty Polydore return, and bring him to dine presently.”

“Poor sick Fidele; I’ll willingly go to him. To restore his colour I’d let a *parish* of such Clotens’ blood!—and praise myself for *restraint!*” Arviragus heads toward the cave.

Sitting on a flat rock under the hot midday sun, Belarius ponders.

*O thou goddess, thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st in these two princely boys!
They are as gentle as zephyrs blowing below the violet, not wagging its sweet head—and yet as
rough, their royal blood enchain'd, as the rudest wind that doth shake the mountain pine by the
top, and make it stoop to the vale!*

*'Tis a wonder that an invisible instinct should frame them to royalty unlearn'd, honour
untaught, civility not seen from others—valour that wildly grows in them, but yields a crop as if it
had been sow'd!*

That the two young men have been well taught, by fine example indeed, does not occur to the humble soul. After a few minutes he rises. *Yet still it's strange what Cloten's being here to us portends—or what his death will bring us!*

Guiderius returns from the fast-flowing tributary, his hands rinsed clean of blood. “Where’s my brother? I have sent Cloten’s clotpoll down the stream—in *embassy* to his mother; his body is *hostage* for its *return!*”

And then they look up, surprised to hear sad, slow music—a dirge—coming from the cave.

“My simple instrument,” says Belarius, who carved the wooden pipe himself. “Hark, Polydore, it *sounds!* But what occasion hath Cadwal now to give it motion? *Hark!*”

“Is he at home?”

“He went hence even now.”

“What does he mean?” They listen to the sorrowful tones. “Since the death of my dear’st mother, it did not speak; for only a solemn time should its accidence be answer!

“The matter?” He frowns. “*Triumph's for nothing*, and lamenting *toys* is jollity for apes and grief for *boys!* Is Cadwal mad?”

Belarius points. “Look, here he comes!—and brings in his arms the dire occasion of what we blame him for!”

Arviragus, tears streaking his face, carries a willowy body. “The bird is dead that we have made so much of!” he moans. “I had rather have skipped from sixteen years of age to *sixty*—to have turned my *leaping* time to one on a *crutch!*—than to have seen *this!*”

“O sweetest, fairest lily,” groans Guiderius, “my brother wears thee not half so well as when thou grew’st by thyself!”

Belarius moans. “O *Misery*, which never yet could discover thy depth, *sound the ooze* to know what coast might most readily harbour *this* slug of care!” He looks at the peaceful face. “Thou blessed thing, Jove knows what a *man* thou mightst have made—but *I* know thou diedst, most rare boy, of *melancholy*.”

“How found you him?”

“Stark as you see, thus *smiling*—as if some fly-tickled *slumber*, as if Death’s dart were being *laughed* at—his right cheek reposing on a cushion.”

“Where?” asks Guiderius.

“O’ the floor, his arms thus leaguèd; I thought he *slept*, and I pulled my clouted brogues, whose rudeness answered my steps too loud, from off my feet.”

Guiderius, wiping away tears with his sleeve, smiles. “Why, he *does* but sleep: if *he* be gone, he’ll make his grave a *bed!*—with female fairies will *his* tomb be haunted!” he says, tenderly touching the young face. “And worms will not come to *thee.*”

The younger prince lowers the lad gently to the turf. “Whilst summer lasts and I live, here, Fidele, with fairest flowers I’ll sweeten thy sad grave,” pledges Arviragus. “Thou shalt not lack the flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose; nor the azured harebell, like thy veins; no, nor the leaf of eglantine, which, not to slander, out-sweetened not *thy* breath!

“Then would ruddock”—robin—“with *charitable* bill—a bill sorely shaming those rich-left heirs that let their fathers lie without a monument—bring thee all this. Yea, and furrèd *moss* besides, when flowers are none, to winter-guard thy corpse.”

Says Guiderius, tearfully, “Prithee, have done; and do not play with wench-like words in that which is so sad. Let us bury him, and not protract with admiration what is now due debt to the grave.”

His brother nods. “Say, where shall ’s lay him?”

“By good Euriphile, our mother.”

“Be’t so. And let us, Polydore, though now our voices have got the mannish crack, sing him to the ground as once we did our mother—use like note and words; Fidele must be sent to Euriphile.”

“Cadwal, I cannot *sing*,” says Guiderius, his voice rasping. “I’ll weep, and *word* it with thee; for notes of sorrow out of tune are worse than temple priests that lie.”

“We’ll *speak* it, then.”

Guiderius brings a spade out from the cave, and they approach the body.

Says Lord Belarius sternly, “Great *griefs* I see—*meditation* the less, for *Cloten* is quite forgot! He *was* a queen’s son, boys; and though he came as our enemy, remember he was *paid* for that. Though the poor and the mighty, rotting, together leave one dust, yet *Reverence*—that angel of the *world*—doth make distinction of place ’tween high and low.

“Our foe was princely; and though you took his life as being our *foe*, yet *bury* him as a *prince*.”

Guiderius shrugs. “Pray you, fetch him hither. Thersites’ body is as good as Ajax’s, when neither is alive.” The legendary Greeks were a slender cynic and a powerful hero.

But Arviragus touches the old man’s shoulder. “If you’ll go fetch him, we’ll say our song the whilst.” Belarius nods, and goes to find the corpse. “Brother, begin.”

“Nay, Cadwal, we must lay his head to the east; my father hath his reason for’t” Britain lies east of them.

“’Tis true.”

“Come on then, and we’ll move him.” They gently shift the slight figure on the soft grass.

“So,” says Arviragus. Holding their hats before them, they tearfully regard their sister as a brother—one found, then soon lost. “Begin.”

Guiderius speaks, softly:

“Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done;
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages.
Golden lads and girls all must,
As dandelions, come to dust.”

Arviragus follows:

“Fear no more a frown of the great;
Thou art past the tyrant’s stroke.
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak.
Sceptres lean and forsake must.
All follow so, and come to dust.”

“Fear no more the lightning flash,” says Guiderius.

“Nor all-dreaded, thunderous tone,” adds Arviragus.

“Fear not slander, censure rash.”

“Thou hast finished joy and moan.”

The princes intone together:

“Lovers young, as all others must,
Consign with thee in coming to dust.”

Guiderius again leads: “No exorciser harm thee.”

“Nor witchcraft charm thee.”

“Unsettled ghost forbear thee.”

“Nothing ill come near thee.”

They utter, voices choked: “Quiet consummation have.” “And revered be thy grave.”

Belarius returns, lugging a gruesome burden.

“We have done our obsequies,” says Guiderius. “Come, lay him down.”

While looking for the cadaver, Belarius had stooped to gather. “Here’s a few flowers; but after midnight more.” He will rise well before dawn. “The herbs that have on them cold dew o’ the night, laid upon their faces”—as if weeping—“are fitt’st for *graves*.”

Mournfully, he regards the dead. “You were as flowers, now withered; even as shall be these which we upon you strew,” he says, gently placing the blossoms.

“Begin we upon our knees,” he tells the princes, “then come away.” They all kneel before Fidele.

The white-haired man looks up to the hills, and beyond. “The ground that *gave* them first has them *again*: their pleasures here are past; so is their pain.”

The three rise, and they go up to a glade in the woods to dig two graves.

Chapter Eight Invaded, Embattled

The boy’s body stirs.

Eyes still closed, Imogen sighs, slowly waking as the drug’s effect wears off. She murmurs, still half asleep, “Yes, sir, to Milford Haven...” “Which is the way?”

“...I thank you. ... By yond bush?” She shifts onto her side. “...Pray, how far thither?”

She sits up, blinking slowly. “’*Ods pittikins!* Can it be *six miles* yet?—I have gone all *night!*’ Faith, I’ll lie down and sleep....”

She starts to lean back—and sees a man’s body. “But, *soft!*—no *bedfellow!*

“—O *gods* and *goddesses!*” she cries, scrambling away.

She rises, and edges unsteadily forward, peering at the corpse.

These flowers are like the pleasures of the world; this bloody man, the cares of’t!

She turns away and rubs her forehead. *I hope I dream!*—for so *I thought I was a cave-keeper, and cook to honest creatures....*

But ’tis not so! ’Twas but a dart of nothing, shot at nothing, which the brain makes of fumes!—our very judgment, like our nighttime eyes, blind!

In good faith, I tremble, stiff with fear! She looks up. *But if there be yet left in heaven a drop of pity small as a wren’s eye, fearèd gods—a part of it!* she pleads.

She looks down again. *The dream’s here still!* She moves closer and touches a sleeve. *Even when I wake, it is without me as within me—not imagined, felt!*

A headless man! She stares. *The garments of Leonatus! I know the shape of’s leg!—this is his hand; his foot Mercurial; his Martial thigh!—the brawns of Hercules!*

But his Jovial face!—’tis gone! Murder upon heaven—how?

She thinks: agents from Britain have managed to find Leonatus in Wales.

Pisanio!—all the curses maddèd Hecuba gave to the Greeks—and mine to boot!—be darted on thee! The queen of Troy cursed its besiegers after her husband’s slaughter. *Thou, conspiring with that ridiculous devil Cloten, hast cut off my lord here!*

To write and read be henceforth treacherous! Damnèd Pisanio hath with his forgèd letters from this most bravest vessel of the world struck the main-top! Damn Pisanio!

Oh, Posthumus!—alas, where is thy head? Where’s that? *Ay, me!*—where’s that? *Pisanio might have killed thee at the heart, and left thy head on!*

How should this be?

Pisanio!—'tis he—and Cloten! Malice in him—and lucre!—have laid this woe here! Oh, 'tis pregnant, pregnant! The drug he gave me, which he said was precious and cordial to me—have I not found it murderous to the senses? That confirms it home! This is Pisanio's deed—and Cloten's!

She sways, looking around uneasily as fear returns; but she has an idea. She addresses the dead man: *Oh, give colour to my pale cheek with thy blood, that we the horrider may seem to those who chance to find us!*

She kneels and reaches over the body, intending to daub her husband's protective blood onto her face.

But the shock is too much. "*Oh, my lord,*" she says weakly, "*my lord....*"

She faints, falling across the corpse.

Caesar Augustus's new proconsul looks back, down into the valley, to observe as troops of his army make camp there in western Cambria, not far from the shore. The Welsh are no friends of the British.

The Romans' chief military officer tells Caius Lucius, "To *these* add the legions garrisoned in Gallia that, after your will, have crossed the sea, attending you here at Milford Haven with their ships. They are in readiness."

"But what from *Rome*?" asks Lucius, dismounting to lead his horse up though the vale with the officer, followed by several young soldiers, to gain a better view of the growing city of tents.

Those recently arrived from the Continent have brought word to their commander. "The Senate hath stirred up the residents and gentlemen of Italy—most willing spirits, that promise noble service! And they come under the conduct of bold *Giacomo*, Syenna's brother!"

"When expect you them?"

"With the next benefit o' the wind!"

Lucius can feel the strong, steady breeze flowing in off the sea. "This forwardness makes our hopes fair! Command our present numbers be mustered! Bid the captains look to't!" The officer nods and goes.

The civilian leader of the empire's forces against Britain turns to the soothsayer who came along with the troops from Rome. "Now, sir, what have you dreamed, of late, of this war's purposes?"

The man frowns; everyone *dreams*. The deep voice is calm. "Last night the very *gods* showed me a *vision*! I *fast*, and *pray* for their intelligence; thus I saw *Jove's* bird, the Roman *eagle*, wing it from the spongy south to this part of the west—and there *vanish* in the *sunbeams*!"

The proconsul's eyebrows rise, questioning.

"Which *portends*, unless my sins abuse my divination, *success* to the Roman host!"

Lucius is hardly surprised; no one bets against Rome. "Dream *often* so, and never *falsely*," he says dryly, as they round a turn. "Soft... *ho!*" he cries, after spotting two bodies on the ground ahead. "What trunk is here without its top?" he gasps, dismayed, as he approaches. "The ruin speaks that it was sometime a worthy building!"

He looks at Imogen. "*What? A page!*—either dead or *sleeping* on him! *Dead* rather, for our nature doth abhor to make a bed with the defunct.

"Let's see the boy's face."

The officer reaches down and rolls the page onto his back. "He's *alive*, my lord!" He helps the moaning youth to sit up.

"Then he'll instruct us of this body," says Lucius, kneeling beside Imogen. "Young one, inform us of thy fortunes, for it seems they crave to be demanded! Who is this thou makest thy bloody pillow? Or who was he that hath *altered* that good picture, otherwise than noble Nature did?"

"What's thine interest in this sad wreck? How came it? Who *is* it? What art *thou*?"

Says pale Imogen, weakly, "I am *nothing*. Or if not, to be nothing were *better!* This was my *master*, a very valiant Briton, and a *good!*—who here lies *slain by mountaineers!*

"*Alas!*—there are no *more* such masters!" she sobs, remembering the man she married.

But she needs help—and soon; she looks up, tearfully, at the nobleman she recognizes. "I may wander from Occident to east, crying out for a service,"—a new position, "try many, all *good*—serve *truly*—but never find another such master!"

Caius Lucius is touched by the boy's grief, and respects his devotion. "*Alack*, good youth!—*thou* movest me no less with thy *suffering* than thy master in *bleeding!* Say his *name*, good friend."

"Richard du Champ." Thinks Imogen, *If I do lie and do no harm by it, though the gods hear, I hope they'll pardon it!* She sees, through honest tears, that Lucius is speaking again. "Say you, sir?"

"*Thy name?*"

"Fidele, sir."

The Latin word means *faithful*. Lucius smiles. "Thou dost prove thyself the very same! Thy name well fits thy faith, thy faith thy name."

The proconsul has no page here on the isle. "Wilt take thy chance with *me?*" he asks. "I will not say thou shalt be as well *mastered*, but, be sure, no less *belovèd!* The Roman *emperor's* letters, sent by a consul to me, should not sooner than *thine own worth* recommend thee! Go with me!"

Imogen agrees. "I'll follow, sir." With the officer's help, she rises. "But first, an't please the gods, I'll hide my master from the flies, as deep as these poor pickaxes"—she is wringing her hands—"can dig; and when with wildwood leaves and weeds I have strewed his grave, and on it said a century of prayers, such as I can, twice o'er, I'll *weep*, and sigh *goodbye*."

"And, leaving so *his* service, follow *you*, so please you entertain me."

"*Aye*, good youth!" says Lucius, again moved by the lad's intense sorrow. "And rather *father* thee than master thee!"

He turns to the others. "My friends, this *boy* hath taught us *manly* duties!" He rises beside the corpse. "Let us find out the prettiest daisied plot we can; then make for him, with your pikes and halberds, a grave. Come, lift him." Four soldiers grasp the body's limbs to carry it.

"Boy, he is referred to us by *thee*," Lucius tells Fidele, "and he shall be interrèd as *soldiers* can!"

"Be cheerful!—wipe thine eyes. Some falls are means the happier to arise!"

Cymbeline tells an attendant, urgently, "*Again!*—and bring me word how *'tis* with her!" The man bows and hurries away. "*A-fever* with the absence of her son!—a madness in which her *life's* in danger!"

"O heavens, how deeply you at once do touch me!" moans the king. "*Imogen*, a great part of my comfort, *gone!*—my *queen* upon a desperate bed!—and in the time when fearful *war* points at me! Her *son* gone, so needful for this present! It strikes me past the *hope* of comfort!"

He turns angrily to Pisanio. "But as for *thee*, fellow—who needs *must know* of her departure, yet dost *seem* so ignorant!—we'll *force* it from thee by sharp *torture!*"

"Sir, my life is yours. I humbly set it at your will," says Pisanio. "But as for my mistress, I nothing *know* where she remains or has gone, nor when she purposes to return! I beseech Your Highness, hold me to be your *loyal servant!*"

A tall lord intervenes: "Good my liege, the day that she was missing he was *here!* I dare be bound he's true, and shall perform all parts of his subjection loyally! As for Cloten, there wants no diligence in *seeking* him." The king fails to note the courtier's disgust when he adds, sourly, "And no doubt he will be found."

Cymbeline drops onto his throne, dejected. "The time is *troublesome!*" He glares at Pisanio. "We'll slip you, for a season—but our forgiving does yet *depend!*"

The nobleman has a more pressing matter. He begins according to form: “So please Your Majesty, the Roman legions, all from Gallia drawn, are *landed on your coast*—with a supply of *gentlemen* sent by the Roman Senate!”

Cymbeline groans. “Oh, for the counsel of my *son* and *queen*! I am *amazèd* with *matters*!”

The courtier assures him. “Good my liege, your *preparation* can affront no less than what you *hear* of; come more, for more you’re *ready*!”

“The want is but to put those powers in *motion* that *long to move*!” The British forces, already called, are eager to fight the invaders.

“I thank you,” says Cymbeline, rising wearily. “Let’s withdraw, and meet the time as it seeks us.” The lords will hold a council of war. “We”—the *royal* we: *I*—“fear not what can from *Italy* annoy us; but we grieve at what chances *here*!”

“Away.” The king and advisors proceed to a hall with many tables and chairs—and maps.

Pisanio frets—but not about himself. *I’ve had no letter from my master since I wrote to him Imogen was slain! ’Tis strange!*

Neither hear I from my mistress, who did promise to yield me tidings often!

Nor know I what is betid to Cloten, but remain perplexed in all!

And he has qualms about withholding some of what he does know. *As always, the heavens must work. Wherein I am false I am honest—not true, to be true.*

These present wars shall find I love my country, even to the noting o’ the king—or I’ll fall in them!

All other doubts, by Time let them be cleared. Fortune brings—in some boats that are not steered!

Before their cave, Belarius—long since calling himself “Morgan”—faces rebellious sons. “The noise is *round about* us!” says Guiderius. They have heard—and seen from hiding—the busy assembling of Roman forces, all nearly ready now to move east, toward Britain, for the imminent incursion.

“Let us *from* it!” urges Belarius.

“What pleasure, sir, find we in *life*, locking it from *action* and *adventure*?” asks Arviragus.

His older brother concurs. “And what hope have we in *hiding* us? That way the Romans must either *slay* us for being Britons, or *receive* us”—let them take part against the king—“as barbarous and unnatural *rebels* during their attack—and slay us *after*!”

But Belarius has decided. “Sons, we’ll go higher into the mountains, there secure us.

“To the king’s party there’s no going.” He paces, distraught. “Upon news of Cloten’s death, we being not *known* to them nor mustered among their bands, they may drive us to render where we have *lived*—and so extort from us what we have *done*!—response to which would be *death*, drawn on with *torture*!”

Guiderius frowns. “This doubt, sir, in such a *time*, is nothing *becoming* you—nor *satisfying* us!”

Arviragus too wants to join the British fighters. “It is not likely that when they *hear* the Romans’ *horses* neigh, *behold* their quartered *fires*!—have both their eyes *and* ears so cloyèd by *invaders* as now are *ours*!—that they will waste their time inquiring from whence are *we*!”

“Oh, I am *known* to many in the army!” counters Belarius. “And the years, as you see, wore not Cloten from *my* remembrance, though he was then but young!

“Besides, the *king* hath not *deserved* my service!—nor *your loves*, who find in my exile and thy want of rearing, only the certainty of *this hard life*!—hopeless to have the courtesy your cradle promised, but ever to be hot *summer*’s tanlings, and the shrinking slaves of *winter*.”

“Than be *so*, better to *cease to be*!” cries Guiderius. “Pray, sir—to *the army*! I and my brother are not known; yourself, so long out of thought, and thereto so o’ergrown, cannot be questioned!”

“By this sun that shines, I’ll thither!” insists Arviragus. “What a thing it is, that I never did see a man die!—scarce ever *looked* on blood, but that of coward *hares*, broiling *goats*, and

venison!—never bestrid a *horse*, save one that had a rider like myself, who ne'er wore *iron* nor *spur* on his heel!" He and Guiderius, as children, briefly rode a farm animal, met along the way during a rare trip to the town. "I am ashamed to *look* upon the holy sun, to have the benefit of his blest beams, remaining so long a poor unknown!"

"By heavens, *I'll* go!" exclaims Guiderius. "If you will bless me, sir, and give me leave, I'll take the better care; but if you will not, the hazard therefore due falls on me at the hands of *Romans!*"

"So say *I! Amen!*" adds Arviragus.

The aging warrior realizes—proudly—that the princes are determined to fight in defense of Britain—their native land. But he simply shrugs. "Since of your *lives* you set so slight a valuation, no reason I should reserve *my* crackèd one to *more* care."

And then he smiles. "Have with you, boys! If in your country's wars you chance to die, that is *my* bed, too, lads, and there I'll lie!"

The princes look at each other, chary, now, of offending the man they know as their father.

"Lead, *lead!*" he tells them gruffly; but his tearful pride cannot be hidden. The young men head eagerly into the cave to gather up their weapons.

The time seems long, thinks the old exile, following. *Their blood holds kings in scorn—till it cry out to show them princes born!*

The new forces under Roman gentlemen called into service on the emperor's order have disembarked and joined a regular army, along with troops sent from Gallia; united, they start to move east, into Britain.

The imperial invasion has begun. And Posthumus Leonatus, banished from his forefathers' land, finds himself compelled to return—and to serve among the Romans.

Just before sailing, he had received a parcel from Britain, one sent by Pisanio, containing a handkerchief—stained dark. Standing outside his tent, he once again holds it—and again weeps in anguish.

Yea, bloody cloth, I'll keep thee, for I wishèd thou shouldst be coloured thus!

O Pisanio! Every good servant does not all commands!—no bond but to do just ones!

O married men, if each of you should take this course, how many must murder wives much better than yourselves for but wavering!

O Gods, if you had ta'en vengeance on my crimes—had stricken me, a wretch more worthy of your vengeance!—I had never lived to put on this one!—and so had you savèd the noble Imogen to repent!

But, alack, you snatch hence some for little fault, to have them we love fall no more—yet some permit to second ill, with ill each worse than the elder in the doer's thoughts!—and make them dreaded!

He looks at the cloth—stained, actually, with Pisanio's blood. *Now Imogen is your own!*

Leonatus bows his head in penitence. *Do your best wills; and make me blest to obey.*

He sees the officers milling around him. *I am brought hither among the Italian gentry, and am to fight against my lady's kingdom.* But he has reached a resolution: *'Tis enough, Britain, that I have killed thy mistress. Peace!—I'll give no wound to thee!*

Therefore, good heavens, hear patiently my purpose: I'll disrobe me of these Italian clothes, and suit myself as does a peasant Briton. So I'll fight against the part I come with!—so I'll die for thee, O Imogen, for whom my life is every breath a death! And thus unknown, not pitied nor hated, even in the face of peril myself I'll dedicate.

Let me make men know more valour in me than my garb shows! Gods, put the strength o' the Leonati in me!

To shame the guise o' the world, I will begin a fashion: less without, and more within!

On a span of rocky land, the Romans encounter the British forces led forth by King Cymbeline to halt the invaders, and the battle is joined.

Riding and marching onto the field of battle from the west are the troops directed by Caius Lucius and spurred forward by Lord Giacomo. Striving to drive them back are proud ranks of Britons, soldiers of the army and militia troops from the counties, all now commanded by lords and knights of Cymbeline's court.

The emperor's proconsul demands payment of tribute to Rome; the defiant British noblemen assert their independence. Both sides' gallant, well armored leaders call aloud, on horseback, to their gods for victory.

On the barren ground, cloth-clad men now find the fighting fierce and brutal. They move close in, and struggle against each other with spear, ax, sword and knife, then bloody fists, feet, thumbs and teeth. Gasping for breath, they send silent prayers to the heavens—for survival.

—

During an early skirmish, Lord Giacomo confronts a threadbare opponent who is fighting on foot, and who, with a powerful blow of the broadsword to the Roman's chest armor, has left him unhorsed—and stunned.

Thinks Giacomo, as he staggers to his feet, *The heaviness and guilt within my bosom take off my manhood! I have belied a lady—the princess of this country—and the error of it revengingly enfeebles me! How else could this churl, a very drudge of Nature's, have subdued me?—in my profession! Knighthoods and honours, borne as I wear mine, are but titles scorned!*

He stares, still dazed, as the tatterdemalion Briton fights valiantly against another Roman officer, and quickly kills him. *If that thy gentry, Britain, go before this lout as he exceeds our lords, the disparity is that we scarce are men, and you are gods!*

He turns, retrieves his fallen sword, and backs away hastily—frustration turning to fear.

The Briton—Posthumus Leonatus—shouts encouragement to his fellows as he fights on.

—

At one juncture of the continuing conflict, the king's party is suddenly surprised—ambushed while chasing Romans through a ravine—and forced to turn back. Cymbeline stumbles and falls. A heavy young lord with him is killed, and the king is taken; two triumphant Roman soldiers grasp his arms, holding him prisoner, as two others, elated, call for their captain.

But three Britons spring to their sovereign's rescue. "Stand, *stand!*" warns Belarius. "We have the advantage of the ground! The lane is guarded!—nothing routs *us* but the villainy of our fears!" His sword and hands are smeared with blood; he hardly looks fearful.

"Stand!" demands Guiderius.

"Stand and *fight!*" cries Arviragus.

And Leonatus strides up to support the British yeomen's challenge.

The proud Roman soldiers will not yield; instead they step forward boldly—and die, cut down two at a time.

Cymbeline again leads his resurging army.

—

Caius Lucius, watching the battle, is appalled at the swift turn of fortune.

"*Away, boy, from these troops, and save thyself!*" he tells his new page, as the Roman soldiers fall back and scatter. "For friends kill *friends* when disorder's such!—as if War were hoodwinked!"—blindfolded. He hurries after his fleeing men.

Wide-eyed Imogen turns to watch them go, and is soon engulfed by island defenders.

—

Lord Giacomo thinks Cymbeline has cleverly held troops in reserve. "'Tis their fresh supplies!"

"It is a day turned strangely!" mutters Lucius. "Let's *reinforce* betimes—or *fly!*"

There are no Roman reinforcements. They flee.

—

Leonatus encounters a British lord who is edging cautiously forward from the rear.

“Camest thou from where they made the stand?” the nobleman asks the dusty, sweaty commoner.

“I did. Though *you*, it seems, come from the *fliers*.”

The courtier is somewhat abashed. “I did.”

“No blame be to you, sir; for all was lost—but that the *heavens* fought!” Leonatus describes it. “The *king himself*—destitute of his wing troops, the army broken, and but the *backs* of Britons seen, all flying through a straight lane!”—hurrying from a trap set by the Romans.

“The *enemy*—*full-hearted*, lolling their tongues in *slaughtering*, having work more plentiful than *tools* to do’t!—struck some down mortally, touched some slightly, felled others merely through *fear*!—so that soon the pass was *dammed with dead men*!—those beyond hurt, and *cowards* living to die with *lengthened* pain!”

“Where was this lane?”

“Close by the *battle*—ditched, and walled with turf!” Once in it, the Britons could move only forward or backward. “Which gave vantage”—opportunity—“to an *ancient* soldier—an *honest* one, I warrant!—who deserves so long a breathing as his white beard can come to, in doing this for ’s country!

“Athwart the lane,”—blocking British retreat, “he and two striplings—lads more likely to run a country race than to commit such slaughter—with faces fit for *bold masks*; rather fairer than those faces cased for *preservation* in *shame*—*controlled the passage*!

“They cried to those that fled, ‘Our Britain’s *harts* die flying, not our *men*!—to *darkness* fleet souls that fly *backwards*!

“*Stand!*—or we are *Romans*, and will beastly give *you*—looking back and frowning like *beasts*!—that which you shun!

“*Stand! Stand!*”

“Those *three*—*three-thousand* confident!—in *act* so many, for three *performers* are a *file*, when all the rest do *nothing*—with this word ‘stand’—*Stand!*—accommodated by the site, persuading more with their own *nobleness*, which could have turned a *distaff* to a *lance*!—*warmed pale looks*, and spirits part *shamed*, part *renewed*!

“So that some, who’d been turned coward but by *example*—oh, a *sin* in war, *damnèd* in the first beginning it!—’gan to look to the way that they had come, and to *glare* like *lions* at the pikes o’ the hunters!

“Then began a *stop* i’ the chase—then a *return*!—anon a *rout*, destruction *thick*!

“Forthwith they—*chickens*, in how they stopped, as *eagles flew*!—*slaves*’ strides they made into *victors*’! And now our cowards, like fragments on hard voyages,”—stale provisions found by starving sailors, “on the *need* became the *life*!

“Having found the door open onto the unguarded hearts,”—the fallen, “*heavens*, how they *wend back*!—past some slain before, some dying; some their *friends*, o’erborne i’ the former wave.

“*Ten* are chased by *one*!—each Briton now the slaughter-man of *twenty*!

“Those Romans that would die before desisting are sown for the mortal *bugs o’ the field*!”

The courtier is amazed. “This was strange chance!—a narrow lane, an old man, and two boys!”

“Nay, do not wonder at it,” Leonatus tells the pusillanimous patrician. “*You* are made rather to *wonder* at the things you *hear* than to *work* any!” He asks the craven lord how he will describe the event, when safely back at the court. “Will you vent it as in *mockery*?—and *rhyme* upon’t?

“Here is one:

‘Two *boys*, one man *twice* a boy, and a *lane*

Preserved the Britons!—were Romans’ banel!’”

Leonatus sees the man’s face redden. “Nay, be not *angry*, sir.

“*Alack*, and to what end?”

Who dares not stand against his foe,
Him I will befriend—
For if he does what he was *made* to do,
He'll quickly *flee* my friendship too!"

Complains Leonatus, disgusted, "You have driven me into *rhyme*."

The nobleman turns away stiffly. "You're angry. Farewell."

"Still *going*?" gibes Leonatus. He shakes his head. Aware of his own poor attire, he watches the peacock slink away. *This is a lord! Oh, a noble misery!—to be i' the field, yet ask 'What news?'—of me!*

Today, how many would have given their honours to have saved their carcasses?—took heel to do't! And yet, dièd, too.

Under an enchantment—mine own woe, I could not find Death where I did hear him groan, nor feel him where he struck! Being an ugly monster, 'tis not strange he hides him—in fresh cups, soft beds, and sweet words!—and hath more ministers than we who draw his knives i' a war!

Well, I will find him!

As for being now a favourer of Britain—no more a Briton!—I have resumed again the part I came in. Fight I will no more, but yield me to the veriest hind that shall once touch my shoulder!—to arrest a fugitive, banished and condemned. Great is the slaughter here made by the Romans; great be the answer that Britons must make!

He stands alone, exhausted and despairing. *As for me, my ransom's death, on either side. I came to spend my breath—which I'll neither keep here nor bear away again, but end by some means—for Imogen.*

Two British captains approach, with a band of weary soldiers. "Great Jupiter be praised!—*Lucius is taken!*" the older officer is telling the younger. He wags his head in astonishment: "'Tis thought the old man and his sons were *angels!*"

"There was a *fourth* man, in a pauper's garb, who gave the affront *with* them!"

"So 'tis reported. But nothing of him can be found!" They spot Leonatus. "Stand! Who's there?"

"A *Roman*," says Leonatus, "who had not now been drooping *here* if seconds had *answered* him!"—others had heeded his demands to stay and fight.

"Lay hands on him!—*the dog!*" cries the older officer. "A lag of Rome shall not return to tell what crows have pecked here!"—report the British losses.

But he stares suspiciously at the prisoner. "He *brags* his service as if he were *of note*; bring him to the king."

—

The fighting is done.

Ready to return east over land with the British royal party are the three heroic strangers, Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus—and the valorous Pisanio, bandaged, but no longer suspected of treachery.

Behind the regal procession are the troops, officers and soldiers, many of them injured and limping. Those following at the end are guarding prisoners.

Two captains approach King Cymbeline and bow deeply; their men bring forward a peasant, and the monarch motions for him to be taken to join the other battered captives at the rear.

The mighty Roman Empire, annoyed with this troublesome island, will soon withdraw its forces; in Wales, the Italians' ships are already being prepared for the voyage home, as are those from Gaul.

The exhausted Britons now struggle to enjoy the victory, despite their pain and the loss of many companions. Tomorrow they will break camp. Except for those kept here long enough to bury the dead, the survivors will trudge steadily homeward.

Chapter Nine

Remorse, Atonement and Tidings

Now you shall not be *stolen*—you have *locks* upon you!” gibes the fat warden, as the shackled captive is shoved into a dank cell in the palace dungeon. “So *graze* as you find *pasture*,” he mutters. It is too late to bring even such food as inmates get.

“Aye, or a *stomach!*”—courage. The beardless young jailer, never in battle, has only contempt for one who allows himself to be taken alive.

Leonatus watches the heavy iron door clank shut, leaving him in near-darkness.

Most welcome, bondage!—for thou art a way, I think, to liberty.

Yet am I better off than one that’s sick o’ the gout, since he would rather groan so in perpetuity than be cured by the sure physician: Death—who is the key to unlock these bars.

O my conscience, thou art fettered more than my shanks and wrists!

He kneels in prayer. *You good gods, give me, a penitent, instrument to pick that bolt—then, free for ever!*

Is’t enough to sorrow? So children temporal fathers do appease; and gods are more full of mercy....

Must I repent? ’Tis the main part! I can do better than shackles, desired more than constraining to my freedom, to satisfy you: take no stricter render of me than my all!

I know you are more clement than vile men, who from their broken debtors take a third, a sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again on their abatement; that’s not my desire. For Imogen’s dear life take mine; and though ’tis not as dear, yet ’tis a life—you coined it!

But coins, he knows, are not minted perfectly. *’Tween man and man they weigh not every stamping—and take pieces, though light, for the figure’s sake*—at face value, even though metal may have been trimmed off illegally.

You rather mine beings already yours! And so, great powers, if you will, take this audit: take this life, and cancel these cold bonds.

His most important obligations—commitments—were to his wife. He stands, and moans. *O Imogen, in silence I’ll speak to thee.*

The bereaved Briton sinks onto the cell’s narrow bench, and leans back against the rough stone.

At length he falls asleep, tears still wet upon his face.

From a high, narrow window, faint traces of radiance from a star touch his haggard visage.

The dreaming penitent perceives, vaguely, a soft, solemn strain of ethereal music from out of the vast night. An old man comes into view, arm in arm with a gray-haired matron: Sicilius Leonatus, with his wife, the mother of Posthumous. With them are two young men, Leonatus’s brothers; he can see the wounds from which they died during their wars with Rome.

They near the prisoner, and old Sicilius stops and peers upward—in bold defiance of Jupiter. *No more, thou thunder-master, show thy spite on mortal flies!—with Mars fall out!—chide with Juno, who berates and revenges thy adulteries!*

The warrior demands that the gods’ king cease fomenting war on earth, and contend instead with his own wife—who knows he’s often unfaithful.

Hath my poor boy, whose face I never saw, done aught but well? I died whilst in the womb he stayed, Nature’s law attending—he whose father thou shouldst then have been!—and shielded him from this vexèd earthly smart, as men report thou orphans’ father art!

The lady, too, glares up. *Lucina lent not me her aid, but took me in my throes! From me was my Posthumus ript!—left crying ’mongst his foes!*

Adds the father, *As a thing of pity! But from his ancestry, great Nature moulded the stuff so fair that he deserves praise o’ the world as great Sicilius’ heir!*

The older brother demands, angrily, *When once he was maturèd man, where in Britain was one could stand his parallel?—or fruitful object be, in the eye of Imogen?—best meed unto his dignity!*

Asks the mother, *Wherefore in marriage was he mocked?—to be exilèd, thrown from Leonati seat, and cast from her, his dearest Imogen, the sweet!*

Sicilius complains into the reaches beyond all clouds, *Why did you suffer Giacomo—a slight thing of Italy!—to taint this nobler heart and brain with needless jealousy?—to become the pawn and scorn o' th' other's villainy?*

The younger brother addresses Jupiter: *For this from stiller seats we came, our parents and us twain—who striving in our country's cause fell bravely, and were slain, our fealty and Tenantius' right with honour to maintain!*

Like hardiment for Cymbeline hath Posthumus performèd! his brother insists. *Then, Jupiter, thou king of gods, why hast thou thus abjured the graces for his merits due?—all being to dolours turnèd!*

Thy crystal windows ope! cries Sicilius. *Look out! No longer exercise upon a valiant race thy harsh and potent injuries!*

The prisoner's mother pleads: *Since, Jupiter, our son is good, take off his miseries!*

Peep from thy marble mansion! cries Sicilius. *Help—or we poor ghosts will cry to the shining synod of the rest against thy deity!*

Help, Jupiter! demands the older brother.

Or we appeal!—and from thy justice fly! adds the younger.

The threats have been heard. The stone walls vanish, and at a great distance in the blackness surrounding the frail platform, Jupiter himself appears over a billowing of white vapor—riding nearer, amid lightning and thunder, upon the back of an enormous eagle—its menacing talons hurtling toward them.

The frowning god flings ahead a bolt of lightning—and in its startling flash, the apparitions fall to their hands and knees.

As the thunder echoes away, Jupiter, hovering, scowls.

His voice booms out, *Hush! No more, petty spirits of region low, offend our hearing!*

He leans forward, and reaches out to point. *How dare ghosts accuse the thunderer?—whose bolt I, sky-planted, throw to batter all rebelling coasts! Poor shadows of Elysium, hence, and rest upon never-withering banks of flowers! Be not with mortal incident opprest—it is no care of yours, you know—'tis ours!*

The mighty eagle shuffles its feathers, smoothing the massive, folded wings, and the spirits cower, afraid even to look up past the huge, hooked beak.

The powerful voice is calmer, if no less imperious. *Whom best I love I cross, to make my gift, delay'd, the more to delight! Be content; your low-laid son our godhead will uplift!—will his comforts thrive!*

His trials well are spent. Our Jovial star reign'd at his birth, and in our temple was he marièd. In rise and fade he shall be lord of Lady Imogen—and happier much by his affliction made!

This tablet lay upon his breast, wherein our pleasure his full fortune doth define.

And so, away! No further with your din express impatience—lest you stir up mine!

Mount now, eagle, to my palace crystalline!

The immense bird's long wings extend, and the splendid figures spring upward, then glide away through the starry night.

Sicilius rises slowly to his feet—still fearful; they might easily have been damned. *He came in thunder!—his celestial breath was sulphurous to smell!—on the holy eagle he stooped as if to uproot us!*

But now he looks up and watches, amazed: *His ascension is to a place more sweet than our blest fields! His royal bird now trims immortal wings, and closes its beak, as when its god is pleased!*

The others stand, gazing at the shimmering path of the disappearing deity.

Thanks, Jupiter! whisper Sicilius, as the image fades from view. *The marble pavement closes; He is under his radiant roof.*

The father reaches for the tablet—which in a twinkling becomes a little book of notes; he lays it over Leonatus's heart.

Sicilius turns to the others. *Away! And, to be blest, let's with care perform his great behest!*

The clear, silvery apparitions become more transparent—and vanish.

Leonatus awakens suddenly—refreshed and alert. He blinks.

O Sleep, thou hast been a grandsire, and begot a father to me!—and thou hast created a mother and two brothers! But, gone!—they went hence so soon as they were born. Oh, forlorn!

And so am I, awake. Poor wretches that depend on greatness' favour dream as I have done—wake and find nothing!

But, alas, I swerve! Many cannot dream to find—neither deserve—and yet are steeped in favours! So am I, that have this golden chance, and know not why!

What fairies haunt this ground? He is much aware of the cramped cell's rough walls—and of his recently fervent wish, now gone, for death.

He sits up, and is surprised when something falls onto the bench. *A book? O rare one!—be not, as in our fangled world, a garment nobler than what it covers! To be most unlike our courtiers, let thy effects follow so—as good as promised!*

Standing at the door's small, barred window, he opens the slender volume and reads, by the flickering light of a torch in the corridor.

'When a lion's whelp, to himself unknown, shall without seeking find, and be embracèd by a peace of tender air;

'And when branches lopped from a stately cedar, which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow;

'Then shall Posthumus end his miseries, and Britain be fortunate—flourish in grace and plenty!'

Leonatus puzzles over the words. *'Tis still a dream—such stuff as madmen tongue, but brain not; or else a senseless speaking, speaking of such as sense cannot untie! Or both—or nothing!*

But whatever it is, the action of my life is like this—which I'll keep, if but for sympathy. With difficulty, his manacled hands slip the thin book into a frayed coat pocket.

A clinking of keys from outside the row of cells heralds the warden. He unlocks the heavy door and pulls it open. “Come, sir. For death are you ready?”

Leonatus, surprised at feeling much better, quibbles wryly with a cook's use of *ready*: “Over-roasted, rather! Ready long ago.”

“‘*Hanging*’ is the word, sir; if you be ready for *that*, you *are* well-cooked!”—drunk. Clearly craving a pint, the lugubrious keeper rubs his jowls and licks his lips.

A rough crowd commonly gathers around the gallows to enjoy a public execution, Leonatus knows. “If I prove a good repast for the spectators, ‘the dish pays the shot’”—the game's meat justifies the hunter's expense.

“A heavy reckoning”—tab—“for *you*, sir,” says the glum jail keeper. “But the *comfort* is, you shall be called to no *more* payments, fear no more tavern-bills which offset the procuring of *mirth* with sadness in *paying* for it.”

The seedy man's girth suggests he knows what he's talking about. “You come in, *faint* for want of *meat*,” he says, “and depart reeling with too much *drink*, sorry that you have *paid* too much—and sorry that you *are* paid too much”—punished with nausea and an aching head. “The *brain*, the heavier for being too *light*,”—hurt by heedlessness, “the *purse* too light, being drawn

of its *heaviness*,”—drained of money, “purse and brain both *empty!* Of this contradiction *you* shall now be quit.”

The jailer nods sagely. “Oh, the *charity* of a penny cord!”—noose. “You have no true debtor and creditor but *it*: it sums up *thousands* in a trice—pen, book and counters for what’s *past, is,* and *to come.* The discharge, sir, is your *neck.*”

“Soon follows the *acquittance,*” he adds mournfully; death cancels all bonds.

The condemned man laughs. “I am merrier to *die* than thou art to *live!*”

The tippler shrugs. “Indeed, sir, he that sleeps feels not the toothache.” He regards Leonatus dourly. “But a man with the *hangman* to help him to bed—who were to sleep *your* sleep!—I think he would change places with the *officer!* For, look you, sir, you know not *which way* you shall go.”

“Yes, indeed I *do,* fellow!” says Leonatus, increasingly buoyed by the propitious dream, and the book’s prophecy.

Says the jailer, “*Your ‘Death’* has *eyes* in ’s head then; I have not seen him so pictured. You must either be directed by some that take upon them to *know,* or do take upon yourself that which I am sure you do *not* know. On you jump to the after-inquiry”—Judgment—“at your own *peril!*”

“And how you shall fare in your journey’s end, I think you’ll never return to tell.”

As best he can in chains, Leonatus straightens his faded coat, and stands erect. “I tell thee, fellow, there are none who lack eyes to direct them the way I am going, but only such as *close* and will not *use* them!”

“I am sure *hanging’s* a way to close eyes. What an infinite mock is this—that a man should have the best use of eyes to see the way to *blindness.*” He has escorted many—too many—to the gallows, but heard few epiphanies. He motions for the prisoner to come out of the cell.

As they walk toward the door leading outside, a messenger from the court runs down between the rows of cells to the warden. “Knock off his manacles! Bring your prisoner to the king!”

“Thou bring’st good news,” says Leonatus. He feels oddly calm, with a profound new hope. “I am called to be made *free.*”

The warden is doubtful; kneeling to unbolt the iron shackles, he mutters, “I’ll be hanged then.”

“Then *thou* shalt be free, jailer!” laughs Leonatus. “No bolts for the *dead!*”

And soon the gentleman is briskly following the young messenger out of the dungeon.

The melancholy warden watches them go. *Unless a man would marry a gallows and beget young gibbets, I never saw one so prone!*

Despite himself, he has been moved. *Yet, for all that he be a Roman—and there be some of them that died against their wills!—by my conscience there are verier knaves who desire to live! So should I, if I were one.*

It occurs to him that he *is* something of a knave.

I would we were all of one mind—and one good mind.

Then he laughs. *Oh, there were desolation for jailers and gallowses!—I speak against my present profit!*

He gazes up, thoughtfully, through a high window at a brightening star in the east.

But my wish holds a premonition in ’t....

Chapter Ten Comfort and Joy

Stand by my side, you whom the gods have made preservers of my throne!” says King Cymbeline, once again at the palace among his courtiers. Three lowly hunters from the hills of Cambria come forward and bow.

“Woe is my heart that the paupered soldier who so richly fought, whose rags shamed gilded arms, whose naked breast stepped before targes of proof,”—hardened shields, “cannot be found! He shall be happy who *can* find him, if *our* grace can make him so!”

Old Morgan remembers. “I never saw such *noble* fury in so common a thing—such *precious* deeds in one that promised nought but beggary and pleading looks!”

Cymbeline asks Pisanio, “No tidings of him?”

“He hath been searched for among the dead and living, but no trace of him found.”

“Then, to my grief, I am the heir of his reward,” says the king. But he beams at the three strangers. “Which I will add to *yours*—the spirit, heart and mind of Britain—*by* whom, I grant, she *lives!*”

“’Tis now the time to ask of whence you are. Report it.”

Belarius replies—equivocally. “Sir, in Cambria we were born as *gentlemen*. Further to boast were neither true nor modest; unless I add, we are *honest*,” he says—sharply; it is a sore point.

“Bow your knees,” Cymbeline commands. He draws his sword, and touches the flat of its blade to each man’s shoulder.

“Arise my *knights* o’ the battle! I create you companions to our person, and will fit you with estates becoming your dignities!”

The three bow deeply as the courtiers applaud.

But now the king pales as the court physician arrives, accompanied by several waiting-gentlewomen. “There’s business in these faces. Why so sadly greet you our victory?” he asks Doctor Cornelius. “You look like Romans, and not of the court of Britain.”

The physician bows. “Hail, great king. I must report to sour your happiness: the queen is dead.”

Says Cymbeline, angrily, “Whom would this report *worse* become than a *physician*? But consider: by medicine life may be prolonged, yet Death will seize the *doctor* too!” He has dreaded reaching this moment; the queen upon whom he had long relied has been ill for weeks. “How ended she?”

Cornelius’s face is stern. “With *horror!*—*madly*, like her *life*—which, being cruel to the *world*, concluded most cruelly to *herself!*”

He sees the king flush with anger. “So please you, I will repeat what *she confessed!* These her women, who with wet cheeks were present when she finished, can trip me, if I err.”

Cymbeline glares. “Prithee, *say.*”

“First, she confessed she *never loved you*—cared only for the *greatness* got by you, not *you*—married your *royalty*, was wife to your *place*—*abhorred* your person.”

The king is visibly shocked. “She *alone* knew this!—and, but that she spoke it *dying*, I would not believe *her* lips in opening it!” He moves slowly to her throne, and sadly touches its arm. He turns and looks at the doctor, tears in his eyes. “Proceed.”

“Your daughter, whom she *pretended* to love with much integrity, she did confess was as a *scorpion* to her sight!—whose life, but that her flight prevented it, she had ta’en off by *poison!*”

“O most *delicate* fiend,” groans Cymbeline. “Who is’t can read a *woman?*” Wearily, he sits upon his own gilded throne. “Is there more?”

Cornelius nods. “More, sir—and *worse!* She did confess she had for *you* a mortal mineral!—which, being took, should by the minutes *feed* on *life*, and lingering, waste you *by inches!*—during which time she purposed, by watching, weeping, kissing *attendance*, to o’ercome you with her *show*—and in time, when she had unfitted you with her craft, to work her *son* into adoption of the *crown!*”

“But *failing*, in his strange absence, she grew desperate—and, at her end, shamelessly opened her purposes in *despite* of heaven and men!—regretted only that the evils she hatched *were not effected!*”

“And *so* despairing, she died.”

Cymbeline looks to the ladies. “Heard *you* all this, her women?”

The eldest curtseys, and they all nod. "We did, so please Your Highness."

Cymbeline is stricken again—by irony: *So please Your Highness*. He stares down, sadly, at his hands. "Mine eyes were not in fault, for she *was* beautiful... nor mine ears, that heard her flattery—nor my *heart*, that thought her like her seeming." His voice, now barely audible, cracks with sorrow: "It had been vicious to have mistrusted her...."

"Yet, O my *daughter*, that it was *folly* in me *thou* mayst say!—and *thy fleeing proved it!*"

He looks up, oblivious of the court. "Heaven mend all," he moans—wondering, fearfully, where Imogen may be.

Guarded by soldiers, several of the captured Roman prisoners are being brought to face the British monarch. The king rises from his sad reflection as the procession enters the tall chamber.

Cymbeline glares at the invaders' commander. "Thou comest *now*, Caius, not for *tribute!*—*that* the Britons have razèd out!—though with the *loss* of many a bold one." The king steps forward. "Whose *kinsmen* have made suit that their good souls may be appeasèd with slaughter of *you*, their captives!—which ourself have *granted!*"

"So think on your estate." He turns away.

"Consider, sir, the *chance* of *war!*" says Lord Lucius. "The day was yours, as it happens; had it gone with us, *we* should not, when the blood was cool, have threatened our prisoners with the sword!"

"But since the gods will have it thus—that nothing but our *life* may be callèd ransom—let it come! Sufficeth that a Roman a *Roman's* heart can proffer!"

He adds, pointedly, "*Augustus* lives, to *think* on't.

"But so much for my particular care," says Lucius. "This *one thing only* will I entreat: my boy, a *Briton* born—let *him* be ransomed. Never had master a page so kind, so duteously diligent, so tender over his occasions!—so true, so graceful, so nurse-like!"

"Let his *virtue* join with my request—which, I make bold, Your Highness cannot deny. Though he have served a Roman, he hath done no Briton harm! Save *him*, sir, if you spare no blood beside."

Cymbeline motions the page forward. He stares. "I have surely *seen* him; his face is familiar to me...."

The queen's heavy influence—and potions—now gone, the king feels strangely clear-headed. He smiles at the youth's rosy cheeks, and the unblinking gaze of clear blue eyes. "Boy, thou hast *looked* thyself into my grace—and art mine own, I know not why. But I say, '*Live, boy!*'"

The page returns the smile, bows, and turns to Lucius.

Warns the king sternly, "Live, but ne'er thank thy *master*." Still, seeing the boy's admiration for his own old friend, he relents. "Ask of Cymbeline what boon thou wilt, befitting my bounty and thy state, and I'll give it—yea, though thou do demand a *prisoner*—the noblest ta'en!"

"I humbly thank Your Highness," says the page.

"I do not bid thee beg my life, good lad," says Lucius, "and yet I know thou wilt."

But the boy, facing the other prisoners, has suddenly become very distressed. "No... *now*, *alack*, there's *other work* in hand!—I see something *bitter* to me as *death!* Your life, good master, must shuffle for a while...."

The Roman is stunned. "The boy *disdains* me!—he *leaves* me, *scorns* me! Briefly die *their* joys who place them on the truth of girls and *boys!*" And then he is surprised to see the page burst into tears. "Why stands *he* so perplexèd?"

Cymbeline tells the boy, who reminds him, somewhat, of his first wife, "I love thee more and more. What *wouldst* thou, boy?" he asks kindly. "Think more what's *best* to ask...."

He sees that the page is staring at another prisoner in the sullen ranks. "Know'st him thou look'st on? Speak: wilt have *him* live? Is he thy kin? Thy friend?"

The boy looks up, wet cheeks red with indignation. "He is a *Roman!*—no more *kin* to me than *I* to Your Highness! Being born your *vassal*, I am *somewhat* nearer."

"Wherefore *eyest* him so?"

"I'll tell you, sir—in *private*, if you please to give me hearing."

"*Aye*, with all my *heart!*—and my best *attention!* What's thy name?"

"Fidele, sir."

The king, who has always been faithful, nods sadly. "Thou'rt *my* good youth, my page." He puts an arm, fatherly, around Fidele's slender shoulders. "I'll be thy master. Walk with me. Speak freely...."

Apart from the others, Cymbeline listens.

Sir Belarius can now see the page's face—and stares, transfixed. "Is not this *the boy?*—*revivèd from death!*"

Sir Arviragus gasps. "One and another cannot *more* resemble!—that sweet rosy lad who died, and was *Fidele!* What think you?"

Sir Guiderius is staring as intently. "The same dead thing *alive!*"

"Peace, *peace!*" says Belarius, hushing them. "See further... he eyes *us* not. Forbear; creatures may be alike! Were't he, I am sure he would have spoken to us...."

"But we saw him dead!" whispers Guiderius.

"Be silent; let's see further...."

It is my mistress! Pisanio's mind races, but he is joyously silent. *Since she is living, let the time run on, to good or bad!*

Cymbeline moves forward. "Come, stand thou by our side," he tells the page. "Make thy demand aloud." He motions to a prisoner—Giacomo. "Sir, step you forth; give answer to this boy! And do it freely,"—without reservation, "or by our greatness and the grace of it, which is our *honour*, bitter *torture* shall winnow the truth from falsehood!

"On," he tells the lad. "Speak to him."

The page stands near the Roman lord. "My boon is that this gentleman may reveal *from whom he had this ring!*" He points to Giacomo's hand, which sports a gold band, set with a large, sparkling diamond.

- A prisoner at the back, Posthumus Leonatus, is puzzled by the boy's interest. *What's that to him?*

Cymbeline is glaring; he knows the ring. "That diamond upon your finger—say how came it yours!"

Giacomo is struck by an irony: "Thou would torture me for leaving unspoken that which, to hear spoken, would torture *thee.*"

"What? *Me?*"

Giacomo steps forward. "I am *glad* to be constrained to *utter* that which *torments* me to conceal!

"By *villainy* I got this ring! 'Twas *Leonatus's* jewel—he whom thou didst *banish!* And, may it grieve *thee* more than it doth *me*—a *nobler* sir ne'er lived 'twixt sky and ground!

"Wilt thou hear more, my lord?"

Cymbeline nods. "All that belongs to this."

"That paragon, thy *daughter*—for whom my heart drips *blood*, and my false spirit quails to *remember...!*" He must pause, weak from hunger—and remorse. "Give me leave; I faint...."

"My *daughter!* What of *her?* insists Cymbeline. "Renew thy strength! I had rather thou shouldst live while *Nature* will"—to a normal demise—"than die ere I hear *more!*"

"*Strive*, man, and *speak!*"

Giacomo nods tearfully. "Upon a time—unhappy was the bell that struck the hour!—it was in Rome—*accursèd* the mansion where!—'twas at a feast—oh, would our viands had been *poisoned*, or at least those which *I* heaved-to had! The good *Posthumus*—

“What might I say? He was *too* good to be where *ill* men were, and was, amongst the rarest of *good* ones, the best of *all*!

“In propriety, silent, but hearing *us* praise our *Italian* loves for their *beauty*—for *features* becoming the shrine of *Venus*, and, beside, for their *condition* of straight-standing *Minerva*—postures beyond the brief of Nature—a *show* of all the qualities that man loves *woman* for—

“Fairness which strikes the *eye*, but was made *barren* by the swelled boast of him that *best* could speak a *book of wiving*—”

“*I stand on fire!*” cries the impatient king. “Come to the *matter!*”

“*All too soon* I shall!—unless thou wouldst *grieve quickly*.

“This Posthumus, most like a *noble lord* in love, and one who had a *royal* lover, took *his* turn, and—not disparaging whom *we* praised—therein he was as calm as *Virtue*—he began his mistress’ *picture*, which by his tongue being made—and then put a *mind* in’t!

“Either *our* brags were traced from *kitchen-trolls*, or his description proved us *unseeing sots!*” Cymbeline scowls. “Nay, nay!—to the *purpose!*”

“Your daughter’s *chastity!*—there it begins. He spake of her as if *Diana*”—the virgin goddess of chastity—“had *hot* dreams, and she alone were cold!

“Whereat I, *wretch*, made *doubt* of his praise—and *wagered* with him pieces of gold ’gainst *this*, which then he wore upon his honoured finger: to attain in suit the place of his *bed*, and win this ring by *adultery*, hers and mine!

“He, true knight, no less confident of her honour than *I did truly find it*, staked this ring—and *would* so had it been a carbuncle of *Phoebus*’ wheel!—and might *safely* so had it been all the worth of ’s *chariot!*”

“Away to Britain posted I in this design. Well may you, sir, remember me at court—where I was taught by your chaste daughter the wide difference ’twixt *amorous* and *villainous!*”

“Being thus quenched of *hope*, but not of *longing*, mine Italian brain began in your simpler Britain to operate most *vilely*—excelling for my *advantage*.

“And, to be brief, my scheme so prevailed that I returned with *simulated* proof, enough to turn the noble Leonatus *mad* by wronging his belief in her renown with *tokens*—averring thus of chamber-hangings, pictures—and *this* her *bracelet*—*oh, cunning*, how I got it, and noted some marks of secret on her person, so that he could not but think her bond of chastity quite cracked!”

He looks down, ashamed. “I have ta’en the forfeit.

“Whereupon—” But he is startled by a man’s movement nearby. He gasps. “Methinks I *see him now!*”

Leonatus, in chains, comes forward. “*Aye*, so thou *dost*, Italian *fiend!*”

“*Ah*, ‘*Thief!*’ *me*, a most credulous *fool*, egregious *murderer!*—*anything* that’s due to *all the villains past*, in *being*, to *come!* Oh, give me *rope* or *knife* or *poison*, some upright *justicer!*”

“*Thou*, king, send out for ingenious *torturers!* It is *I* who all the *abhorred* things o’ the earth amend by being *worse than they!*”

“I am *Posthumus*—who *killed thy daughter!*” He shakes his head angrily; “*Villain-like, I lie!*—I who caused a *lesser* villain than myself, a *sacrilegious thief*, to do’t!” He sobs. “The *temple* of *Virtue* was she—yea, and *she herself!*”

“*Spit* and *throw stones*, cast *mire* upon me, set the dogs o’ the street to *bay* at me! Let every villain be called *Posthumus Leonatus!*—and so define ‘villainy’ as *less* than ’*twas!*”

“*O Imogen!*” he wails. “My queen, my *life*, my *wife!* Oh, *Imogen*, *Imogen*, *Imogen!*”

“*Peace*, my lord!” cries the page, coming to him. “Hear, *hear!*”

Leonatus, now on his knees, weeping, looks up—angrily. “Shall we have a *play* of this?” He pushes the boy away, and the famished young prisoner, overwhelmed, reels, then faints. “Thou scornful page, there *lie!*—that’s *thy* part!”

Pisanio rushes to her. “Oh, gentleman, *help* mine and your *mistress!*”

“Oh, my lord Posthumus! You ne’er killed *Imogen* til *now!* *Help!*—*help* mine honoured *lady!*”

Cymbeline goes to them, dizzied. “Does the world *go 'round?*”

Leonatus rises, vexed. “Why come these *staggerers* to me?”

Pisanio rubs the princess’s hand. “*Wake*, my mistress!” He pulls off her cap, letting tresses tumble free.

Cymbeline kneels beside her, and cries, astonished, “If this be *so*, the gods do mean to strike me to death with mortal *joy!*”

“How fares my mistress?” asks Pisanio kindly.

Imogen looks up at him—fearfully. “Oh, get thee from my sight!” she cries, shoving him away. “Thou gavest me *poison!* Dangerous fellow, *hence!*—breathe not where *princes* are!”

“The tone of *Imogen*,” murmurs Cymbeline, hearing the familiar pluck.

Protests Pisanio, “Lady, may the *gods* throw *stones of sulphur* on me if that box I gave you was not thought by me a *precious* thing! I had it from the *queen!*”

Cymbeline, helping the princess to rise, is alarmed: “*New* matter, still!”

“It *poisoned* me!” insists Imogen.

“O gods!” Cornelius comes to the king. “I left out one thing which the queen confessèd—which must approve *thee* honest!” he tells the servant. “‘If Pisanio have,’ said she, ‘given his mistress that confection which I gave him for *cordial*, she is served as I would serve a *rat!*’”

“What’s *this*, Cornelius?” demands Cymbeline.

“The queen, sir, very oft importuned me to prepare *poison* for her, always pretending it to be for the satisfaction of her *knowledge*, and for killing only creatures vile!—as cats and dogs of no esteem”—strays. “I, dreading that her purpose was of more *danger*, did compound for her a certain stuff which, being ta’en, would cease the *immediate* power of life!—but in short time, all offices of nature should again do their due functions.”

The physician asks Imogen, “Have you ta’en of it?”

“Most likely I *did*—for I was *dead!*”

- “My boys, there was our error!” whispers Belarius.

- Guiderius nods happily. “This *is*, surely, *Fidele!*”

Imogen goes to confront poor Leonatus. “Why did you *throw* your wedded lady *from* you?—*sink* as if you were *on a wreck!*” But she has heard how he was deceived, and how he has suffered. She puts her arms around his neck and clasps him to her. “Enfold me now again!”

Leonatus overcomes his astonishment enough to kiss her tenderly. “Hang there like fruit, my *soul*, till the tree die!”

Cymbeline is touched by their obvious love. “How now, my dear, my child,” he says, with a warmth not seen for years. He chides gently, “What?—makest thou me the dullard in this scene?” He pleads: “Wilt thou not speak to *me?*”

She turns to curtsy. “Your *blessing*, sir.” And then she embraces her father.

“Though you did love this youth, I blame ye not,” the king tells her. “You had a *motive* for’t!” Weeping softly, he holds her close. “May tears that fall prove *holy* water on thee!”

After a moment he regards the princess sadly. “Imogen, thy mother’s dead.”

She knows he means the harsh queen—and knows that he had loved her. “I am sorry for’t, my lord.”

“Oh, she was *nought*,” says Cymbeline brusquely; but his face reveals the pain. “And because of *her* it was that we meet here so strangely. And her *son* is gone—we know not how, nor where.”

“My lord, now that *fear* is from me, I’ll speak fully,” says Pisanio. “Lord Cloten, upon my lady’s being known *missing*, came to me—with his sword drawn!—foamed at the mouth, and swore if I discovered not which way she was gone, it was my *instant death!*”

“By accident, I had a *letter* of my master’s then in my pocket, which—as I *feigned* it—directed him to seek her on the mountains near to *Milford*—where, in a *frenzy*—and in my master’s garments, which he enforced from me—away he posts with unchaste purpose!—with oath to *violate* my lady’s *honour!*”

“What further became of him I know not.”

Guiderius steps forward boldly. “Let *me* end the story! *I slew him there!*”

“Marry, the gods *forfend!*” cries Cymbeline. “I would not that thou of *good deeds* should from my lips pluck a *hard sentence!* Prithee, valiant youth, again—*deny’t!*”

“I have spoken it, and I did it.”

“He was a *prince!*” protests the king.

“A most *incivil* one!” retorts Guiderius. “The *wrongs* he did me were nothing *prince-like*; for he did provoke me with language that would make me spurn *the sea*, if it could so roar to me!

“I cut off *’s head!*—and am right glad he is not standing here to tell this tale of *mine!*”

“I sorrow for thee,” Cymbeline tells the new knight sadly. “By thine own tongue thou art condemnèd, and must endure our law; thou’rt *dead.*”

“That headless man I thought had been *my lord!*” cries Imogen.

Cymbeline orders the soldiers, “Bind the offender, and take him from our presence.”

“*Stay, sir!*” cries old Belarius angrily. “King, this man is *better* than the man he *slew!*—as well descended as *thysself!*”

“And he hath *merited* more from thee than a *band of Clotens* had ever scar for!” He tells the guards, “Let his arms alone! They were not born for *bondage!*”

Cymbeline stares. “Why, old soldier, wilt thou *undo* the worth thou art yet unpaid for, by tasting of our wrath?” He demands, “How of descent *as good as we?*”

Arviragus, standing at the old man’s side, says, humbly, “In that he spake too far.”

Cymbeline tells Belarius, “And thou shalt die for’t!”

“We *will* die, all three,” the aged warrior admits, with philosophical calm. “But I will prove that *two* of us are as good as I have given out *him!*”

“My sons,” he tells the youths, “I must unfold a dangerous speech, for mine *own* part—though, haply, well for *you.*”

“Your danger’s *ours!*” says Arviragus staunchly.

Guiderius moves beside them. “And our good *his!*”

Lord Belarius smiles. “Have at it then!”

“By leave,” he says to Cymbeline. “Thou hadst, great king, a subject who was called *Belarius—*”

“What of him? He is a banished traitor!”

Belarius touches his white beard. “*He* it is that who hath assumèd *this age!*—indeed a *banished* man; I know not how a *traitor!*”

“Take him hence!” Cymbeline orders the guards. “The whole *world* shall not save *him!*”

Cries Belarius—indignantly, “Not too *hot!*—first *pay* me for the *nursing* of *thy sons!*” He adds, resigned, “Then let it be confiscated, all, so soon as I have received it.”

“*Nursing* of *my sons!*”

“I am too blunt and saucy,” says Belarius. He kneels before the king. “Here’s my knee. Ere I arise, I will proffer my sons; then spare not the old father.

“Mighty sir, these two young gentlemen that call me Father, and think they are my sons, are none of mine—they are the issue of *your* loins, my liege, and blood of your begetting!”

“*What? My issue?*”

“As surely as you’re your father’s! I, old ‘Morgan,’ am that Belarius whom you at one time banished! What I’ve *suffered* was all for harm that you did! Taking your treasure was *my only offence!*—my ‘treason’ was for *my banishment itself!*”

“These *gentle princes*—for *such* and *so* they are!—these *twenty years* have I trainèd up; those arts as I could put into them, they have. My breeding was, sir, as Your Highness knows it.

“Their nurse, *Euriphile*—whom for the theft I *wedded!*—stole these children upon my banishment. I moved her to’t—having received the punishment *before*, for that which I did *then!*”

“Being banished for *loyalty* incited me to *treason*: their dear *loss!* The more ’twas *felt* by you, the more it conformed to my end in stealing them!

“But, gracious sir, here are your sons again.” He looks at the amazed young men. “And I must lose two of the sweet’st companions in the world!” He wipes his eyes. “The benediction of these covering *heavens* fall upon their heads like dew! For they are worthy to *inlay* heaven with *stars!*”

Cymbeline is moved. “Thou weep’st as speak’st....”

The king ponders; a new sense of peaceful beneficence has infused the palace. “The *service* that you three have done is more surpassing than this thou tell’st,” he allows. “I lost my children; but if *these* be they, I know not how to wish a pair of *worthier* sons!”

Belarius nods. “Be pleased awhile.” He rises and grasps the taller young man’s shoulder. “This gentleman, whom I call Polydore, most worthy prince, as *yours* is true *Guiderius*.

“*This* gentleman, my Cadwal—*Arviragus*, your younger princely son. He, sir, was wrapped in a most curious mantle—wrought by the hand of his queen mother—which for more probation, I can with ease produce.”

Cymbeline regards the princes. “Guiderius had upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star; it was a mark of wonder....”

Belarius smiles. “This is *he*—who hath upon him still that natural stamp! It was wise Nature’s end in its donation for that to be his *evidence* now!”

Cymbeline regards his children lovingly. “Ah, *what?*—am I a mother to the *birth of three?* Ne’er mother *rejoicèd* deliverance *more!*”

He smiles at the princes—who are still stunned. “*Blest* pray you be!—so that, after that strange departure from your *orbs*, you may *reign* in them now!”

He turns to his daughter—no longer his only heir. “O Imogen, thou hast lost by this a kingdom!”

“No, my lord!” says she, gazing happily at her siblings. “I have got *two worlds* by it!” Already she can tease. “My gentle brothers, have we just *met?* Oh, never say hereafter but that I am the *truest* speaker: you called me *brother* when I was your *sister*; but I called *you* brothers when indeed ye *were* so!”

Cymbeline is surprised yet again. “Did you e’er *meet?*”

Arviragus smiles. “Aye, my good lord!”

“And at first meeting *loved!*—continued so until we thought he died!” adds Guiderius.

Doctor Cornelius explains: “By the queen’s dram she swallowed.”

And now the king is in rapture, watching as his happy children, reunited, embrace. *O rare instinct!*

When shall I hear all through? This fierce abridgement hath to it circumstantial branches, which should be rich in distinction! How lived you? Where?

And when came you to serve our Roman captive? He sees that Lucius looks grave.

The king watches Imogen again hugging her husband. *How parted from your brothers? How first met them? Why fled you from the court? And whither?*

These, and your three motives to the battle, along with I know not how much more, should be demanded—and all the other by-dependencies, from chance to chance!

But nor this time nor place will serve our long inter’gatories!

See, Posthumus anchors upon Imogen!

And she throws her glances, like harmless lightning, on him, her brothers, me—

And her husband touches each with a joy! The exchange is encountered severally in all!

He cries, “Let’s quit this ground, and *smoke the temple* with our *sacrifices!*”

He turns to Belarius and embraces him. “Thou art my *brother!*—so we’ll hold thee ever!”

Imogen comes to them. “You are my father, *too,*” she tells Belarius, “and did relieve me to see this gracious season!”

Cymbeline sees something else new before him: his courtiers’ smiling faces now reflect his own happiness.

“All o’erjoyed,” he notes, “save these in *bonds*.” He motions toward the prisoners. “Let *them* be joyful, too, for they shall taste our comfort!”

The princess smiles at Caius Lucius. “My good master, I will *yet* do you service!”

The proconsul bows to the sprightly page. “Happy be you!”

Cymbeline has but one remaining concern. “The forlorn soldier who so nobly fought—he would have *well* becomèd this place, and graced the thankings of a king.”

Leonatus bows. “Sir, *I* am the soldier who did accompany these three in poor *beseeming*; ’twas a fitment for the purpose I then followed. That I was *he*, speak, Giacomo! I had you down, and might have made your finish....”

Lord Giacomo kneels. “I am down again,” he says humbly. “But now my heavy *conscience* sinks my knee, as then your force did! Take that life, beseech you, which I’ve so often owed! But first, your *ring*,” he says, pulling it from his finger, “and here—the bracelet of the truest princess that ever swore her faith!” He hands them to the Briton.

“Kneel not to me,” says reborn Leonatus. “The power that I have over you is for *sparing you*; the motive towards you, to *forgive* you. Live, and deal with others better!”

“*Nobly* doomed!” says Cymbeline. “We’ll learn *our* freeness from a son-in-law: *pardon*’s the word to *all*!” he calls out.

“Your *servant*, princes!” says Leonatus, bowing to his young brothers-in-law.

He goes to Lucius. “Good my lord of Rome, call forth your *soothsayer*. As I slept, methought great *Jupiter*, upon his eagle’s back, *appeared* to me—with other spritely shows of *mine own kindred*!” He reaches into his coat pocket. “When I waked, I found this book on my bosom—whose containing is, in its hardness, so far from sense that I can make no collection of it!

“Let him show his skill by construing it.”

Lucius calls to the prisoners. “Philarmonus!”

“Here, my good lord.”

“Read, and declare the meaning.” He hands the slender volume to the seer.

The soothsayer reads: “When a lion’s whelp to himself unknown shall without seeking find, and be embraced by a peace of tender air;

“And when branches lopped from a stately cedar, which, being dead many years, shall after revive—be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow;

“Then shall Posthumus end his miseries, and Britain be fortunate—flourish in peace and plenty!”

The graybeard smiles. “Thou, Leonatus, art the lion’s whelp; the fit and apt construction of thy name, being *Leo-natus*,”—in Latin, “doth import so much.

“As to the peace of tender air—which we’d call *mollis aer*... and might speak it *mulier*....”

He turns to Cymbeline. “I divine is this most-constant wife, thy virtuous *daughter*—who, even now, reflecting the letter of the oracle—*unknown* to you, *unsought*—was wrapped about with this most tender air!”

Cymbeline nods. “This hath some seeming.”

“The lofty *cedar*, royal Cymbeline, personates *thee*—and thy loppèd branches point thy two *sons* forth—who, by Belarius stol’n, for many years thought dead, are now revived, to the majestic cedar joined—whose issue promises Britain peace and plenty!”

“Well, *my* peace we will begin,” says Cymbeline. “And, Caius Lucius, although the victor, we submit to Caesar, and to the Roman empire, promising to pay our wonted tribute—from the which we were dissuaded by our wicked queen. The heavens, in justice, have laid most-heavy hand on both her and hers.”

The soothsayer pronounces, “The fingers of the powers *above* do tune the *harmony* of this peace! The vision which I made known to Lucius ere the first stroke of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant is full accomplishèd!

“For the Roman eagle, from south to west on wing soaring aloft, *lessoned* herself, and in the beams o’ the sun so vanished—which foreshowed that our princely eagle, the imperial Caesar, should again unite his favour with the radiant Cymbeline, which shines here in the west!”

“*Laud* we the *gods!*” cries Cymbeline, “and let our swirling smokes climb to their nostrils from our blest altars!

“Publish we this peace to all our subjects!

“Set we forward. Let a Roman and a British ensign”—two flags—“wave *friendly together!*

“So through Lud’s Town march! And in the temple of great *Jupiter* our peace we’ll ratify, and seal it there with *feasts!*

“*Set on!* Never was a war that did cease, ere bloody hands had washed, with such *ease!*”