

LADY TONGUE

A Play in Five Acts
By Sarah Marksteiner

In Conversation with *Cymbeline*
11.27.2018

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Cast of Characters

Primary Characters	Suggested Doubling
Althea of Keely (f, 20s)	-Sister 3 (f, 20s)
Brona of Debilisium (f, late teens)	-Sister 2 (f, early teens)
Libitina (f, 30s-early 40s)	-Sister 1 (f, 40s or older)
Euriphile (f, 20s)	-Soldier (m/f/any, any age)
Tenantius (f+, 40s)	-Isolde (f, 30s or older)
Draco of Iomagain (m, 20s-40s)	-Sister 4 (f, 50s or older)
Cymbeline of Debilisium (m, 40s-50s)	-Edward (m/f/any, any age)
Belarius (m, 20s-30s)	-Various Servants
Pisanio (m/f/any, early 20s)	-Roman 1 (m/f/any, 40s) -Various Servants
Cornelius (f+, any age)	-Roman 2 (m/f/any, 30s) -Various Servants
Briton 1 (m/f/any, any age)	-Fr. Anthony (m, 40s-60s)
Briton 2 (m/f/any, any age)	-Mother (f, 40s)

The voices inhabit this ensemble and should be played by the full cast.

Scene

An imagined landscape of Britannia, where peoples and faiths meet.

Time

One eye to the present, one looking back to a time before the fall of Rome.

Notes on Punctuation

A '/' denotes an overlap with the line to follow.

A '-' at the end of a line denotes an interruption.

ACT IScene 1

SETTING: The imagined Briton city of Keely, northern Britannia. We are in a very nice bed chamber—of a chieftain.

AT RISE: The dressmaker ISOLDE is buttoning our lady ALTHEA into a gown, the kind for weddings. It feels wrong on this body, in this room. ALTHEA wears a veil that covers her face. Her MOTHER is just outside, collecting various things from the garden.
The full cast drifts in and out of the VOICE personas. The VOICES ride this moving train with you.

VOICE
They say if a house made by humans is abandoned for long,
nature will reclaim it.

VOICE
That the barriers constructed to keep outside from in will
slip or crumble,
And crawling things will come in Biblical bravura to seep
into cracks.

VOICE
That spiders will weave new curtains to catch wind
And sunlight in sunlight's sliver-est strands

VOICE
Before the ivy will tuck the home into the hill under
smooth covers.

VOICE
This is what our lady mused of, cloaked by a veil,

VOICE
That climbed like kudzu from the dress
And threatened to claim her into the lace.

VOICE

This veil melted like wax over her, so thick
That not even her breath could escape.

(ALTHEA lifts the veil,
breaking the spell. The
voices of poetry slip away,
and we find her simply here,
her mother's garden just
outside. When she breathes so
can we.)

ISOLDE
Hold still, or it won't look right.

ALTHEA
I think we're beyond that.

MOTHER
(calling inside, not
necessarily heard)
Do you think they'll make you wade through the river?

ALTHEA
I hope not.

ISOLDE
You'd drown.

MOTHER
And this time of year, your tits will freeze off.

ALTHEA
(calling back)
I've yet to see it happen, Mother.

ISOLDE
Hold still.

ALTHEA
It's close right? To how they make them.
(ISOLDE shrugs.)
But we're trying. I must believe that will count, for the
Count.

ISOLDE
Hold still.

MOTHER

(looking at a plant)

You killed the valerian.

ALTHEA

(to ISOLDE)

It's strange though, isn't it? This isn't mine. To marry someone, shouldn't you wear something that's yours?

ISOLDE

Hold still.

MOTHER

I told you these trees would block too much sun. Who knows if it will come back this late in the season..

ALTHEA

I should show up in armor. That would be more appropriate.

ISOLDE

He's not going to kill you on his own wedding day. Receiving him in armor..

ALTHEA

Not him, his army.

ISOLDE

Still, please.

MOTHER

I knew you'd forgotten to cover the flowers when it stormed. You remember that, Althea, when I said, 'the valerian's got to be covered,' and you said, 'I already covered them,' and I told you, 'I'm looking at the baskets right now Althea and they are not over my valerian,' you remember that?

ISOLDE

Why are you holding your breath?

ALTHEA

I'm holding still.

ISOLDE

If you don't breathe now, I will wrap up your chest tighter than a wound. When you're up there together and doubt is

whispering and your heart wants to thu-thump it will have nowhere to go. And you'll faint.

MOTHER

(coming inside)

You didn't cover the valerian. You're lucky I took root clippings to dry last week.

(covers her with the veil)

It must be covered. Why do they wear these?

ISOLDE

In case she's terrible to look at. You don't take it off until after you both make the promise. He can't change his mind then.

ALTHEA

Or if he's terrible to look at, he won't see me grind my teeth.

MOTHER

Althea.

ALTHEA

Mother.

ISOLDE

Still.

(MOTHER takes the veil and drapes it on herself.)

MOTHER

Do I look like a willow tree?

ALTHEA

No. Willow trees can breathe.

MOTHER

I think it's rather... I don't know.

ALTHEA

Then keep it.

(SHE removes it.)

MOTHER

It is stuffy. We'll pray this... holy man is expeditious.

ALTHEA

So we'll pray that the Holy Man Anthony is far away.

MOTHER

Althea, what did I say—

ALTHEA

He sat right there and took a full evening to drink one cup of ale.

MOTHER

You weren't there.

ALTHEA

No, no I wasn't because you negotiated the terms without me. If I'm to be Lady of the Tourniquet though, I'd prefer to get it over with.

MOTHER

You could afford to sift the thoughts between your mind and your mouth.

ALTHEA

He's not here.

MOTHER

You'd say the same thing if he were.

ALTHEA

There is a pair of lips under this veil. They tend to make sound.

MOTHER

You let your tongue run faster than your head.

ALTHEA

(with mock seriousness)

When I meet this Holy Man Anthony, I swear never to tell him he's insufferable.

MOTHER

Oh, certainly. You'd never say such a thing to your father either. Or cousin Evelyn. Or Count Draco, the gods forbid.

(ISOLDE is now helping ALTHEA out of the dress, leaving her

in an under layer. MOTHER is grinding bits of plant she's collected from the garden with a mortar and pestle.)

ALTHEA

And he'll never utter an unkind word about me.

MOTHER

That's not what I said.

ALTHEA

(with a bit of wry humor)

Nothing about my flapping tongue, 'whipping like hanging laundry.' Or the way the bluebirds nest better than my tresses. Or the fear that my wrist bones, protruding so, might 'give someone a nasty cut.'

(to ISOLDE, as she climbs out)

So be wary, Isolde.

MOTHER

I'm only asking you to be careful.

ALTHEA

No you're not, you are asking quite a bit more.

MOTHER

Thank you Isolde.

ISOLDE

(to ALTHEA)

Breathe...

(ISOLDE exits.)

MOTHER

You wanted to engage their clan. / It was your idea, your decision-

ALTHEA

You kept me out of the room. / Maybe I had things to say.

MOTHER

They kept Draco from the room. Would you prefer we look desperate?

ALTHEA

We are desperate.

MOTHER

Blame the north that bleeds us on our own soil. Or blame the sea bearing boats captained by foreign death. Blame the whims of an emperor who believes the earth from which our bones are sculpted is for him to piss on more than for our gods to rain on. But do not blame me.

ALTHEA

Draco's clan will make strong allies. Roman allies.

(Beat.)

I think I'm being more than diplomatic; I'll dress like them, I'll learn their lives and their land and their god, but my words are my own. If I am to endure his fire, he may endure my kindling.

(tugging at her own
corseting)

Won't he have trouble with this?

MOTHER

Your ladies will be there to help you.

ALTHEA

What do you mean they'll be there?

MOTHER

Everyone will be there.

ALTHEA

In our bedchamber?

MOTHER

At first, yes.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

Holy Man Anthony?

MOTHER

We can hope not, but—

ALTHEA

Damara help me.

MOTHER

They will be there to bless your fertility.

ALTHEA

(darkening, somehow)

My fertility, I know. My bounty, my...

MOTHER

Kindling.

(Beat.)

He's important to the king in Debilisium. He'll want heirs.

ALTHEA

What am I? Who says I don't want heirs?

(MOTHER measures a leather strand around ALTHEA's neck, like a low-hanging necklace.)

MOTHER

It needn't be a *long* night.

ALTHEA

What night? My wedding night.

MOTHER

Why are you getting hot?

ALTHEA

I'm not getting—

MOTHER

Looking forward to it?

ALTHEA

I—Shouldn't I be?

(MOTHER is pouring the powder from the pestle into a leather pouch, on the string.)

MOTHER

Maybe now, but later on—

ALTHEA

I think that is for me to figure out, Mother.

MOTHER

'Until death' is a long time.
(hangs the necklace around
ALTHEA, tucks it into her
under layer)

Out of sight.

(ALTHEA pulls it out, smells
the contents.)

ALTHEA

Oh augh, smells like...

(sniffs again)

Father's tea. I always hated that smell. Is this to bless
my *fertility*? And I'll gather all my ladies and Draco his
servants, and we'll all get cozy around our bed for an
evening brew. We'll put Father Anthony right in the middle,
get that fertility fervor up.

(she's loving her own bit)

What do you think their god says about that? It's one way
to ingratiate me to the clan, Mother, all of us sharing a
special, fertile, night.

(but it's so funny to her)

Is this before or after the ladies help me with the corset?

(new thought)

Oh! Oh *Mother*; Father was always drinking this tea, where
are all my brothers or sisters, huh?

(Something in MOTHER softens,
almost imperceptibly.)

MOTHER

It's for Count Draco, no one else.

ALTHEA

... It's not for me? Fertility is a two-way-

MOTHER

(sharply)

It's for him.

ALTHEA

Alright.

MOTHER

You have enough blessings from everyone else. *This*, this is in case it's a long night. And you would rather he just... sleep.

(Long beat.)

ALTHEA
I don't need that.

MOTHER
You might one day.

ALTHEA
I don't want it.

MOTHER
Then don't use it.

ALTHEA
I don't need this.

(ALTHEA tries to hand over the pouch.)

MOTHER
Keep it.

ALTHEA
No.

MOTHER
Sleep tonic, nothing more. Fast, deep sleep. He won't even remember drinking it.

ALTHEA
Count Draco may be a prick but I don't think he's...

MOTHER
You don't *think* so. You haven't met him. Just take it.

ALTHEA
I'm not worried about that.

MOTHER
You don't need to be worried, but you need to be prepared.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

I did cover the valerian. You moved the baskets around because the mint was over-watered. You came inside to get more, but never brought them out because someone came to the door.

MOTHER

Then why didn't you finish it for me?

ALTHEA

I don't know.

(MOTHER exits. ALTHEA takes the necklace off. She puts on a robe, and goes to exit. She snatches the pouch before she leaves.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING: The imagined Romano-Briton city of Debilisium, home to Queen BRONA and King CYMBELINE. East of Keely.

AT RISE: A nursery. We know it's a nursery because there is a rocking chair and a crib. The children are not here; their nurse is. EURIPHILE is reading a letter. There is a bucket of water and a scrubbing brush on the floor, some embroidery on the rocking chair.

VOICE

Her eyes flickered to the crib even while it was empty.
It was empty now.

VOICE

She was afraid of the baby,
The softest thing she'd held.

VOICE

The smallest softest thing
With gravity heavy and wide.

VOICE

Afraid that the tiny fingernails
Like onion skin could flake and fall away
And the fleshy cheeks could go sunken like rotten pears.

VOICE

Afraid that something so small could still push air out and
back in
When accordions, not much bigger,
Wheezed so with the trial.

VOICE

She feared the soft thing living in the crib
More than the death that hid under it.

(A sound. EURIPHILE hides the
letter, kneels by the bucket.
BELARIUS enters.)

EURIPHILE

Stack the wood by the fireplace.

BELARIUS

(do I like her?)

I apologize lady, that I have none to be stacked.

EURIPHILE

(standing)

I mistook you.

BELARIUS

(I do, in a way)

Mistake is mine. I am clearly not who you're expecting.

EURIPHILE

Expecting? No sir, I'm not expecting. Certainly not with you.

BELARIUS

Ah. NO. My apologies; I did not mean to insinuate—

EURIPHILE

(touching her own stomach)

Do I appear so?

BELARIUS

Appear to be...?

EURIPHILE

Expectant?

BELARIUS

No. Rather... no.

EURIPHILE

(resumes scrubbing)

I suppose I am expecting a child. Two children, any time now.

BELARIUS

I was told the King was with his children.

EURIPHILE

As was I.

BELARIUS

Told by whom?

EURIPHILE

The King.

BELARIUS

(gesturing around)

Well, are they hiding?

EURIPHILE

The King has taken his children 'out.'

BELARIUS

'Out?' The matter is urgent.

EURIPHILE

I wouldn't say so just yet; they've only been gone the morning.

BELARIUS

I have an urgent message for the King and must speak to him at once.

EURIPHILE

Then you have the wrong man.

BELARIUS

Where has he gone?

EURIPHILE

I regret to inform you that King Cymbeline does not report to me. You are a consort of his, yes? Then you would be the one... consorted.

BELARIUS

And who do you answer to, *my lady*?

EURIPHILE

Who do I *answer to*, my my.

BELARIUS

You heard me.

EURIPHILE

Is that a threat, sir?

BELARIUS

It is a question.

EURIPHILE

I report a loyal servant to Diana.
And yourself?

BELARIUS

I do not report to...
(gesturing at the embroidery
on the chair)
Seamstresses.

EURIPHILE

Is it good?

BELARIUS

Pardon?

(EURIPHILE holds up the
stitching.)

EURIPHILE

Is it?

BELARIUS

Yes, yes it's very nice.

EURIPHILE

(tossing it down)
It's not mine. It's Annette's.

BELARIUS

You're not Annette?

EURIPHILE

My mother said we shouldn't ask questions we know the
answer to. It isn't prudent.

BELARIUS

Then who are you?
The—the nurse.

EURIPHILE

'Wet nurse,' it isn't dirty to say. Are you aware that you
have a habit of pinching your face, as if you are saying
swear words, when you are in fact not? *Nurse*. You did it

before, what was it... Ah, *insinuate*, it's very much in the eyebrows when you do it, *nurse*. 'Out' you did it then too, 'out, what do you mean he's taken them out' - like foul words.

(pause)

Or is it that I am making you *think* of many clever, foul words? In which case, I would probably make such a face at a lady too.

BELARIUS

You're the nurse to the heirs? You?

EURIPHILE

My mother also had a saying about pointing fingers, but you probably already know that one.

BELARIUS

Does the Queen know her sons spend time with such a nurse?

EURIPHILE

(doing the face thing)

Nurse.

BELARIUS

(ignoring)

I fear for young Guiderius, that he will grow to have a tongue like yours.

EURIPHILE

A tongue like mine? And what is it about my tongue that draws you?

BELARIUS

I do not think if our Lady Brona heard you speak such that she would want her sons to feed at your breast.

EURIPHILE

My tongue and my breast both interest you. A tongue that utters prayers? A tongue that tastes the food 'our Lady Brona' is to eat, taking poison to my own lips before hers? Lest there be poison to stop the heart—that beats under this breast of mine. And you fear for young Guiderius. I would fear for my tongue. Should mine die in the line of duty to my Queen, it may be yours that is next in line.

(She has won the game, for now. BELARIUS looks down the

corridor in fruitless search
for the King.)

BELARIUS

In Jupiter's name...

EURIPHILE

Again, you have the wrong man.

(BELARIUS starts to leave.)

EURIPHILE

(in one breath)

The youngest will soon be hungry. He feeds at this hour
every morning. So he will cry. The King will ask Mistress
Annette what to do, and she will say, 'he is hungry, Sire,'
and they will bring the baby back to the mouth that feeds.

(pause)

Within the hour, I'm certain. He will return here.

BELARIUS

Thank you.

(EURIPHILE resumes her
scrubbing.)

I apologize for interrupting your work.

EURIPHILE

You said it was urgent, didn't you?

BELARIUS

Yes.

(BELARIUS fiddles with the
note he is holding.)

EURIPHILE

How urgent?

BELARIUS

That is information for the King and his consorts alone.

EURIPHILE

Leave the message with me.

BELARIUS

Pardon?

EURIPHILE

Write a copy for me, and continue your search. Whoever reaches him first will deliver the message.

BELARIUS

I cannot do that.

EURIPHILE

Why? If you say it is urgent—

BELARIUS

And nondisclosed. It may pass from your hands to someone who can read it.

EURIPHILE

And you won't risk the irresponsibility of the nurse. Pardon, I shouldn't say words like that in polite company.

(Beat.)

BELARIUS

(sarcastic)

Your sensibility is admirable. I must continue looking.

(Enter Queen BRONA, very young, and very pregnant. The combination inspires unease, but it's hard to look away. BELARIUS and EURIPHILE immediately bow.)

EURIPHILE

My Lady.

BELARIUS

Majesty.

BRONA

Where is Cymbeline.

BELARIUS

He / has gone out.

EURIPHILE

He will return with the children shortly.

BRONA

He is with the boys alone?

EURIPHILE

Mistress Annette has gone to help with the baby.

BRONA

Annette. Why did he not come to me?

EURIPHILE

So that in your condition / you may rest.

BRONA

How long have they been gone?

EURIPHILE

Only the morning, my Lady.

BRONA

(to BELARIUS)

You have a letter.

BELARIUS

Yes, Majesty.

BRONA

Give it to me.

(HE does; SHE reads, pacing.)

Juno, hear me.

(to EURIPHILE)

Leave us.

(SHE has no choice. EURIPHILE drops the brush in the bucket and exits with it. We see the Queen and the consort drop formality.)

BRONA

You should have come to me.

BELARIUS

You were not in your chambers, and I needed to find him.

BRONA

I was very clear; I said come to me first. I was clear, wasn't I?

BELARIUS

Very-

BRONA

Tell me now. What it means.

BELARIUS

Read it.

BRONA

I did.

BELARIUS

Aloud, talk through it. Shadows you saw before will take their fleshy forms.

BRONA

'Skirmish south of Debilisium. Roman assembly attacked.'

BELARIUS

Is that all?

BRONA

'6 of Roman party slain, 4 Britons.'

BELARIUS

6 Romans, 4 Britons.

BRONA

An unfortunate, but meager loss. Why the urgency?

BELARIUS

Britons south of Debilisium?

BRONA

Likely ours, soldiers under Tenantius.

BELARIUS

Six Romans slain, Romans unknown to Tenantius then?

BRONA

(the dread lands)

Sent by the Emperor. Oh, Belarius. They attacked kinsmen *from Rome*. Men of the Emperor.

BELARIUS

And?

BRONA

(reading)

'The guilty detained.' *Guilty*, that's a bit... They must be brought here. And questioned.

BELARIUS

And the assembly from Rome will want satisfaction.

BRONA

What, six new soldiers to escort them back to shore?

BELARIUS

Perhaps. Or Tenantius's head.

BRONA

No. No. Silver, then.

(Beat.)

BELARIUS

You can do this.

BRONA

Thank you. For all... of this.

BELARIUS

It is my duty to serve my Queen.

BRONA

And mine is to take to my chambers and 'rest.' In my *condition*. Duties do not demand our enjoyment. Or approval.

BELARIUS

So we may seek our enjoyment elsewhere.

BRONA

For our health.

BELARIUS

And our sanity.

BRONA

Perhaps my son shall bear your name. It would be fitting.

BELARIUS

A prince will outgrow the name Belarius.

BRONA

No, I don't think so. He will grow in the shade of a man with the kindest heart.

(SHE is looking at him intently, but he is moving about the room. He looks at the things on the chair to reveal EURIPHILE's letter we saw earlier.)

BELARIUS

(picking it up)

Even curs smile with their teeth.

BRONA

What is that?

BELARIUS

A... letter.

BRONA

Is it mine?

BELARIUS

Apologies, my Lady, it is mine.

(lying)

I set it down before.

(BELARIUS pockets it.)

BRONA

What is troubling you?

BELARIUS

Nothing, my Lady.

BRONA

'My lady.'

(Beat.)

Belarius. Saying your name is like sliding over a hill. *Bel-air-ius.* Or the strike of a bell, one bel, and then the pulse. *Bell-ayr-yus.* The morning bell raising me from bed, and the evening bell that takes me back. My bell sounding alarum. And you call me, 'my lady.'

(HE abruptly crosses to HER
and kisses her forehead.)

BELARIUS

Why don't you sit.

BRONA

(sitting in the rocking
chair)

Is my weariness plain?

BELARIUS

Plain to see, but not plain. Quite becoming.

BRONA

I think Cymbeline is afraid.

BELARIUS

Afraid of who?

BRONA

Me. Afraid I am ill. That the baby is unwell.

BELARIUS

(places a hand on the baby)

Do you feel unwell? I'll take you to the physician at once.

BRONA

No, no I am alright.

BELARIUS

Are you sleeping?

BRONA

How can I sleep when he never sits? He doesn't lay, he *churns* in our bed. Or he is up, opening the windows, or closing them. All the while touching my forehead, am I warm, or cool? Too warm? Open the window. Too cool? Close it again. He watches me until I fall asleep, those eyes never leaving me. All I can think of is those eyes, watching. And I can't sleep. So 'no,' he says, he 'must go so I can doze off.' Paces and paces the halls. Opening and closing our chamber doors. Even if I lay asleep, our chamber finally quiet, I hear the hinges riding stiff in their pockets. The door groans open, but I swear I hear the muddled scrape of iron sliding unsheathed. A sword being drawn over my bed. And I wake with a cotton throat.

BELARIUS

My dear...

BRONA

It's not the dream itself that wakes me. It's the baby. I feel him kick, like he hears the sword too, and I imagine who he's fighting off.

(Beat.)

My husband runs back, 'I should not have left you; I will not leave you again,' it's enough to make anyone weary. I feel terrible for keeping him up like this, but how can I sleep? And he cannot if I cannot.

BELARIUS

The man loves you very much.

BRONA

He does. I shouldn't complain to you; he is very good. A good man and King.

BELARIUS

But the dreaming.

You think someone may come for you?

BRONA

You would too. The way he watches me makes me feel like I should be watching out for something.

(Beat.)

BELARIUS

Kings must worry about these things—

BRONA

But he had a dream.

BELARIUS

Like yours.

BRONA

No, a vision. Some time ago. After Guiderius was born. He saw blood, in our bed. He dreamed blood seeped from the mattress and onto the floor, flooding the room until it rose up over our mouths.

BELARIUS

Have you spoken to a holy man? A priestess?

BRONA

No. No one.

(Beat.)

And please don't tell the physician. You must not tell anyone.

BELARIUS

It will stay between us.

BRONA

Do you swear?

BELARIUS

Swear? What reason have I to swear at you?

BRONA

I'm sorry. The weariness speaks.

BELARIUS

I can station more guards at your chamber.

BRONA

I don't know that more men standing around watching will help me rest.

BELARIUS

Then I will come myself. Just myself.

BRONA

Thank you.

BELARIUS

Know that my ear is always yours to listen.

BRONA

And these lips are always yours, to speak.

BELARIUS

My Lady, you should wait for your family's return. Then you will be here to give Cymbeline the message. I will return shortly to you both.

BRONA

Stay.

BELARIUS

I'll send in the nurse. Unless you would prefer to be alone.

(SHE considers it.)

BRONA

You may send her in.

(BELARIUS nods, exits. BRONA sits and rocks in the chair a bit, so young, so pregnant, and so weary.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 3

SETTING: Confession, a Christian church in the imagined Romano-Briton town of Iomagain. South of Keely.

AT RISE: Two chairs back to back create a confession setting. DRACO is praying.

VOICE

His skin bled with colors,
Stained glass staining him too.

VOICE

Bathing a jaw line in blue,
A shirt collar in gold,
And praying hands in green.

VOICE

Those hands turning prayer beads
On the spit of his thumb,
And Latin laying in his lips.

VOICE

The colors were his until sundown.

(We go now to DRACO.)

DRACO

... Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

(Enter FATHER ANTHONY. He takes his sweet time.)

ANTHONY

Ah-men.

DRACO

Father Anthony, may God bless you.

ANTHONY

And Draco, may God forgive you. Doing penance before the confession?

DRACO

No sir, praying.

ANTHONY

Praying that she's pretty?

DRACO

You saw her mother, you tell me.

ANTHONY

Eh.

DRACO

Only eh?

ANTHONY

Eh. Well, pretty / for a Brit.

DRACO

(in unison)

For a Brit.

Could you ever love one?

ANTHONY

A pagan? A pagan is without a soul, so no, couldn't be loved by mine. But a lost soul still leaves a shell behind, a body behind; and even a content sea snail could be persuaded to enter a shell if it was beautiful enough.

DRACO

Or even the purest sea snail could split open a shell?

ANTHONY

Yes, even a snail needs a home to come into.

(taking his place in a chair)

Shall we hear this Confession of yours?

DRACO

Can you confess a premeditated sin?

ANTHONY

Depends.

DRACO

On the sin?

ANTHONY

On the priest.

DRACO

How does this priest feel about a holy man marrying an unholy woman?

ANTHONY

This priest arranged it.

DRACO

I agree that it's necessary.

ANTHONY

If you want to dig fewer graves in the long run, then yes, it's necessary. And I'd call that good.

DRACO

I don't much like the cost though.

ANTHONY

Of what?

DRACO

My soul?

ANTHONY

How many times do you think I repeated myself. "We'll only go through with it if she converts. No conversion, no alliance."

DRACO

I couldn't guess.

ANTHONY

Am I an honest man?

(DRACO nods.)

I made the point, my son.

DRACO

And if she refuses?

ANTHONY

Well, it will be a bit late to call it off, unless you haven't...

DRACO

Pardon?

ANTHONY

Unless you haven't 'entered the shell.'

DRACO

Oh. And that needs to happen on the wedding night.

ANTHONY

Is that news?

DRACO

No. No, of course not.

ANTHONY

I presume you haven't done much exploring there.

DRACO

That's... a sin.

(FATHER gives him a look.)

It's a sin.

(The two have a silent conversation with their eyes.)

ANTHONY

What do you think confession is for?

DRACO

Yes. Of course.

(Beat.)

Then you've...? You have... seen a... shell, that you-

ANTHONY

It's important for a man to learn these things, my son. To go and get some experience. So when you've got a village watching your wedding bed, you know what you're doing.

DRACO

Right.

ANTHONY

Where's your father when you need him?

DRACO

I was still a child when he died.

ANTHONY

Bless his soul.

DRACO

Let's get to the confession.

ANTHONY

Look at me Draco. She's a virgin; she won't know any different.

DRACO

Thank you Father. I'm ready to begin.

ANTHONY

I think you have some more praying to do. Do a little more thinking on that my son, and I'll come back when you're ready.

DRACO

I'd rather get on with it, Father.

ANTHONY

Give yourself the time to feel the weight of your sins. *All of them*. Only then should you make your confession and receive your indulgence.

DRACO

And of course pay their weight in silver.

ANTHONY

To the Church, my son. Where better?

DRACO

I am ready now.

ANTHONY

I shall return. Then if you have any... *questions*...

DRACO

Please Father.

(Father ANTHONY exits.)

Father—

(rises to stop him, but he is gone)

In the name of...

(When DRACO sees ANTHONY is not returning any time soon, he sits. He is sitting in the priest's confessional chair; it's the most comfortable place in the room. Eventually he pulls the prayer beads back out.)

(ALTHEA enters, wearing the dress we saw before. She sees the back of him.)

ALTHEA

Anthony the Holy Man, I come to you as a woman wholly.

DRACO

(without turning)

Name yourself.

ALTHEA

My mother's done that already. Call me Althea of Keely.

(Beat.)

And you are that faithful man to join a marriage knot this evening?

DRACO

(the idea)

Yes. I am.

ALTHEA

(as if to cross to see him, before she is interrupted)

I thank you for your support of peace / and your hospitality.

DRACO

Kneel.

ALTHEA

You are seated.

DRACO

In confessing, we kneel to show our shame.

ALTHEA

I'll kneel before a god when I meet one.

DRACO

Do you believe the earth is holy?

ALTHEA

Yes.

DRACO

Is it profane to kiss it with your knees, then?

ALTHEA

I kiss the ground with each step of my feet, each planted seed, and each pluck of a wildflower. After bathing, I do kiss the earth sparing no measure of my full skins, except for that on which the sun does the kissing.

DRACO

Then why not kneel here.

(ALTHEA takes the open chair and pulls it around so it sits in front of DRACO. She takes a seat and smiles at him.)

ALTHEA

I understand I am to bare my wrongdoings to you.

DRACO

Not to me, but to the one looking down.
(points up)

ALTHEA

Then it would seem your presence is superfluous.

DRACO

God is good for everything but proof.

ALTHEA

I expect I will be given *proof* of Draco's honest personhood in return.

DRACO

You have the word of a Holy Man that your husband is God-fearing.

ALTHEA

God-fearing. Forgive me, but I'd prefer god-loving.

DRACO

There is grace in fear.

ALTHEA

If I could choose I'd choose the latter.

DRACO

You're not afraid?

ALTHEA

Afraid of god?

DRACO

Of being wrong about Him.

ALTHEA

I don't see what good that would do. Any of us could be wrong.

DRACO

That is a very comfortable lie.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

I will answer you honestly, if you do the same for me.

DRACO

These things tend to start with lying, stealing, and killing.

ALTHEA

And of those, which will we do first?

DRACO

The lying comes after the wedding.

ALTHEA

The very night, in fact.

DRACO

And stealing?

ALTHEA

What have I to steal from you?

DRACO

And killing. You can take life.

ALTHEA

Or give a kind of death?

(Beat.)

I can promise you Holy Man, needless killing is what I'd like to prevent. My people, and your people, can help each other.

DRACO

'Needless killing.'

ALTHEA

Needless. It benefits no one, in the end.

DRACO

Some would say they *need* vengeance. Or *need* satisfaction. It's only needless when you're on the receiving end.

ALTHEA

Thank goodness we are creatures of reason then. What else?

DRACO

Prudence.

ALTHEA

What of it?

DRACO

Tell me what you think of it.

ALTHEA

Tell me first.

DRACO

Necessary. You.

ALTHEA

Prudence. Practicing restraint? I don't often find it productive. I have words enough to fill a river, and

damning it will only cause floods. My mother may have told you of my 'wandering tongue.'

DRACO

And envy?

ALTHEA

What you call desire, right?

DRACO

Desire without right. What do you covet?

ALTHEA

You're more interested in what I want to do than what I do.

DRACO

You're avoiding the question.

(A beat of standoff.)

River dried?

ALTHEA

Human desire makes humans human. I don't know what else you'd expect me to say.

DRACO

It's wrong though.

ALTHEA

To you.

DRACO

What do you covet?

ALTHEA

Peace. Don't we all? Isn't that why you and I are here.

DRACO

What else?

ALTHEA

The same things you do. To be better fed and better feeling, tenfold for those I love. To be overfull with knowledge I am starved from.

DRACO

You cannot covet knowledge.

ALTHEA

But you may the people who hold it, can you not?

DRACO

You're about to be wed. You will have no cause to want for anything.

ALTHEA

I would hope so, were it not impossible.

DRACO

Hope is for the sinner. In faith there is only conviction.

ALTHEA

Conviction of the impossible makes leaders into fools.

DRACO

And?

ALTHEA

To expect that a person could satisfy my every desire.

(HE rises, begins to move
about the chapel.)

DRACO

If he doesn't, you will envy others. So you hope he will, you just do not believe he will.

ALTHEA

No. I do not think I should.

DRACO

Hope without belief is empty.

ALTHEA

Then I should not hope at all, is that what you want? I will believe with all my heart that my husband will be nothing but a man like other men. And there will be places in my heart no *person* can fill, not even were they the most perfect one in this world.

DRACO

You do believe that, don't you?

ALTHEA

Yes. Yes I do.

DRACO

And you will always be unsatisfied.

ALTHEA

Perhaps I will.

DRACO

Yet you will swear before your people and mine—ours, that is, to be faithful to him, despite that?

ALTHEA

And he will do the same.

DRACO

If he is man like other men, how could he be faithful to you?

ALTHEA

Well I can hope—

DRACO

—Ah, there is that word again.

ALTHEA

Then I believe—

(HE is getting closer to
HER.)

DRACO

But you don't.

ALTHEA

Then let him wander.

DRACO

And you?

ALTHEA

I have already confessed that.

(Beat.)

My wandering tongue.

DRACO

How beautiful it is with my God, that we can confess our sins, and it is as if they never happened.

(standing so close they are
nearly touching)

Do you confess?

ALTHEA

I...

DRACO

Do you confess?

ALTHEA

I... I confess.

(They begin to kiss.)

ALTHEA

No. No, I think I've bared more than enough to you.

DRACO

Don't fret. It is not a sin to kiss your betrothed.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

Draco.

DRACO

Lady Althea, a pleasure.

(placing coins into her hand)

Here, to pay our dear Father Anthony for the *indulgence*.

(HE exits.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IIScene 1

SETTING: We go to a convent.

AT RISE: There are nuns singing somewhere, in a kind of a chant. There is a group of them gathered around a table, reading a play aloud. It's a Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim piece, *Dulcitus*. In this, they stand outside time. As they read, they get more and more into it.

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)
(reading AGAPE, a young soon-to-be saint)

'We beg you not to concern yourself about us, and it is useless to make preparations for our marriage. Nothing can make us deny that Name which all should confess, or let our purity be stained.'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)
(reading DIOCLETIAN, a pagan ruler)

'What does this madness mean?'

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)
'What sign of madness do you see in us?'

(SISTER 1 is distracted by something SISTER 3 is doing.)

SISTER 3
(to SISTER 1)
What sign of madness...

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)
'It is clear enough.'

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)
(SISTER 3 saying this line along with her; it's her favorite)
'In what way are we mad?'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'Is it not madness to give up practicing an ancient religion and run after this silly new Christian superstition?'

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)

'You are bold to slander the majesty of Almighty God. It is dangerous.'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

(getting more into it,
pretending to draw a sword)

'Dangerous? To whom?'

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)

'To you, and to the state you rule.'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'The girl raves. Take her away.'

(This is SISTER 4's part. SHE
is not paying attention, much
to SISTER 3's dismay.)

SISTER 3

(to SISTER 4)

Take her away.

SISTER 4

Ah, yes. Where are... Yes.

SISTER 3 (CHIONA)

(jumping in, as CHIONA)

'My sister does not rave. She is right.'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'This maenad: seems even more violent than the other!
Remove her also from our presence, and we will question the
third.'

SISTER 3 (IRENA)

(but she must do the part she
was supposed to read, IRENA,
too now)

'You will find her as rebellious and as determined to
resist.'

(Enter a fifth sister in habit covering her face. She watches unobtrusively.)

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'Irena, you are the youngest in years. Show yourself the oldest in dignity.'

(SISTER 4 is feeling a bit put out now, but SISTER 3 continues.)

SISTER 3 (IRENA)

'Pray tell me how.'

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'Bow your head to the gods, and set an example to your sisters. It may rebuke and save them.'

(The fifth nun removes the head covering. It is EURIPHILE. She begins at the same time as SISTER 3, from memory.)

SISTER 3 (IRENA)

'Let those / who wish to provoke...'

EURIPHILE

'Let those who wish to provoke the wrath of the Most High prostrate themselves before idols! I will not dishonor this head which has been anointed with heavenly oil by abasing it at the feet of pictures.'

(Beat.)

No, 'images,' 'feet of images.'

(A moment of shock. And then excitement, in cacophony. These lines should SNAP.)

SISTER 2

Euriphile! / Great heavens.

SISTER 3

How many months has it been?

SISTER 1

Where have you been keeping that awful robe?

SISTER 4

God you're thin. Are they feeding you? Look how thin you are.

(touching her stomach)

EURIPHILE

The tomb is empty.

SISTER 2

Your face is different. You have these circles.

SISTER 1

(to SISTER 2)

That's rude to say.

(then, to EURIPHILE)

It is true though. You look ten years older.

EURIPHILE

Maybe I am. Maybe it's been a hundred years since I left here, and someone's been counting the days wrong.

SISTER 3

That would be Sister Veronica; she keeps the calendar. I don't think Veronica would do that...

EURIPHILE

(to SISTER 1)

Are you well? How is that cough?

SISTER 3

... She has always been very diligent with the calendar.

SISTER 2

You've only been gone since last winter.

SISTER 1

(to EURIPHILE)

That cough has set up a summer home in my chest.

EURIPHILE

You're not serious; it's still bothering you?

SISTER 3

... Plus with mass we keep pretty good count.

SISTER 1

As long as we're cohabiting; it could be worse.

SISTER 2

I'm sorry, I just have to hug you.

EURIPHILE

(hugging)

Lydia... I swear you're taller.

SISTER 2

Or you're shorter.

SISTER 4

(soft, serious)

We thought we'd lost you.

EURIPHILE

I'm here, am I not? Found as found.

SISTER 3

It's only been since last winter.

EURIPHILE

It could be a lifetime. Been a whole life I've lived since I was here.

(A voice from the corridor.
EURIPHILE replaces her veil
and keeps her head down. The
SISTERS pick up where they
left off. Roughly.)

SISTER 3 (IRENA)

'What could be more shameful baseness, what baser shame,
than to venerate slaves as if they were lords?'

(In this time, two nuns walk
by, talking, and exit.)

SISTER 1 (DIOCLETIAN)

'I do not ask you to worship slaves, but the gods of
princes and the rulers of the earth...'

(Their voices fade away.
EURIPHILE removes the veil

again.)

SISTER 2

It's not about the baby, is it?

SISTER 1

Lydia.

SISTER 2

Your baby's okay?

EURIPHILE

No, it isn't about the baby.

(taking SISTER 2's hands)

Sometimes I dream that both of us wake at the same moment,
when the sun comes over the hill. And we start our morning
sharing warmth.

SISTER 1

They were an honest couple... that took her in.

EURIPHILE

I'm in their debt.

SISTER 1

Devout people. He had a Christian brother, in Rome.

EURIPHILE

Yes.

SISTER 3

I still think about it, Euriphile. That horrible night.

SISTER 1

We need not discuss it.

SISTER 2

I know you think about it too. You looked so cold. With the
snow coming down... (to EURIPHILE) and your belly like a
bread basket under your dress.

SISTER 4

I don't know that I can forgive that woman, for throwing
you out.

('That woman' is one of the
nuns who just walked by.)

EURIPHILE

It isn't your fault.

SISTER 2

We could have done more.

EURIPHILE

You found a family that would take in my child. Gave me the greatest help you possibly could have.

SISTER 1

Are you getting by?

EURIPHILE

Yes, no I'm fine. Maybe He forgives after all.

SISTER 1

Where are you living?

EURIPHILE

The family had friends in Debilisium.

SISTER 3

In Debilisium?

EURIPHILE

The Queen Brona had trouble nursing the baby. They needed someone quickly, who could be trusted / so the family sent me there.

SISTER 1

(she doesn't swear, so)
Jesus Christ in Heaven.

EURIPHILE

And the King was just grateful someone could feed the baby.

SISTER 2

You met the King?

EURIPHILE

I... Yes, I met King Cymbeline.

(SISTER 1 is trying to cope,
thru her isms.)

SISTER 1

Jesus Christ. King of / the Jews.

EURIPHILE

I've been there since then.

(Beat.)

EURIPHILE

So if anyone else is considering being with child, I would say—

SISTER 1

Christ has died. / Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

SISTER 3

No wonder you look so old. You are a whole world away.

(A bell sounds.)

SISTER 2

All this time I could only think of you in that snow. I was afraid you would die like that.

SISTER 4

The bell.

SISTER 1

Our Lord and Savior, Son of Mary, / Jesus Christ.

SISTER 4

The bell. We need to go to Liturgy or she'll come looking.

SISTER 2

(to EURIPHILE)

Will you stay? Until after?

EURIPHILE

I can't stay that long. Mother Superior's little alarm will go off.

(tapping on SISTER 2's head)

SISTER 2

I can't believe she did that to you. Not what I think Jesus would—

EURIPHILE

It's no matter now. Does Mother Superior live with a Queen?

SISTER 1

Go to prayer, all of you.

SISTER 3

We love you.

(hugging EURIPHILE)

Come back to us again.

EURIPHILE

I will.

(The SISTERS collect themselves and start for the Liturgy, except SISTER 1.)

EURIPHILE

I don't want to keep you from prayers.

SISTER 1

What do you need?

EURIPHILE

Ephigenia—

SISTER 1

Why have you come here?

EURIPHILE

How much do you want to know?

SISTER 1

If you could refrain from playing the fool for once—

EURIPHILE

I'm not playing you Sister. When I told you I thought I was going to have a baby, you warned me that I shouldn't tell the other sisters, or they would be in danger too. Right? So there are things I shouldn't tell you now.

SISTER 1

Are you in danger?

EURIPHILE

It is... possible.

SISTER 1

Are you really in Debilisium? Will you tell me that much.

EURIPHILE

Yes.

SISTER 1

Are you nurse to the Prince?

EURIPHILE

Yes. I can show you my swollen chest if you don't believe me.

SISTER 1

This couple who took in your child just happened to place you in Debilisium? That's a pretty miraculous match.

EURIPHILE

We believe in miracles here, don't we?

(Beat.)

I was placed in court. Deliberately.

SISTER 1

Euriphile, you must leave that place / if it is dangerous.

EURIPHILE

I am in the safest place I could be. I'm with the heirs to Cymbeline's throne.

SISTER 1

What is this 'I was placed,' by who? There are nurses enough in Britannia.

EURIPHILE

I... was placed there to-

SISTER 1

By whom?

EURIPHILE

The followers of Christ value my eyes and ears.

SISTER 1

Do you really serve Cymbeline?

EURIPHILE

I serve Cymbeline as much as anyone could.

SISTER 1

He's a pagan.

EURIPHILE

He believes as much of me.

SISTER 1

To deny Christ is to—

EURIPHILE

I am in Debilisium to send back information to Rome. To followers of Christ in Rome.

(Beat.)

I give my *kind, Christian* family secrets, and they keep my daughter alive.

SISTER 1

The brother. In Rome—

EURIPHILE

—Knows all that happens in Debilisium.

SISTER 1

You should never have accepted that offer.

EURIPHILE

And deny my girl a home.

SISTER 1

This is madness.

EURIPHILE

You taught me to read here. And write. Who there would suspect a nurse could do that?

SISTER 1

And you deny your King.

EURIPHILE

To serve him.

(There is a long silence.)

SISTER 1

I sent you right to them.

EURIPHILE

They feed her. It makes no difference to the baby where it comes from.

SISTER 1

Why have you come here?

(For the first time, we see
how scared she is.)

EURIPHILE

A letter has gone missing from my chambers. One of importance.

SISTER 1

Important enough that you are concerned.

EURIPHILE

I may need to leave quickly. If it's traced back.

SISTER 1

(takes a moment to process)

Do you need money?

EURIPHILE

I was hoping you could write a letter to the Abbey you know of in Wales. Tell them that you are sending a Sister, who perhaps *fell ill*, and requires a safe refuge?

SISTER 1

And lie.

EURIPHILE

You were always the better actor.

SISTER 1

I'll write your letter.

EURIPHILE

Thank you. Thank you. You're right, I know it sounds like madness.

SISTER 1

My sister does not rave; she is right.

EURIPHILE

Thank you Ephigenia. Leave it under the loose stone in the garden wall. I'll retrieve it there.

(The voices down the corridor return. EURIPHILE replaces her veil.)

SISTER 1

Go, I will meet them.

(EURIPHILE exits. SISTER 1 looks up for support, or maybe an answer. She doesn't quite find it, but exits toward the corridor.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 2

SETTING: We go to Debilisium, to the cells where the Roman and Briton survivors are being detained, same day.

AT RISE: The Briton and Roman warriors are in separate holds.

VOICE

Was it drying blood
Or wetting rust that made such a smell,

VOICE

Like copper going sour.
A smell that could scratch a watch face
Or crawl back up the drain.

VOICE

A smell sharpened by eyes
Squinting against the dark.

VOICE

The must must have been blood.
Blood spilled, Roman
By bloody hands, Briton.

ROMAN 2

The Emperor will have you skinned and paraded through Rome.

BRITON 1

Draw your own knife. The Emperor dares not leave his palace of gold.

TENANTIUS

Enough.

ROMAN 1

If you think you will remain under his protection now, /
make your sacrifices.

BRITON 2

Protection? We die by the day. You protect no one but yourselves.

TENANTIUS

You will all be brought before the King to answer for your actions.

ROMAN 1

You forget who you address.

ROMAN 2

Find guilt in Roman blood entering Roman territory and I will pour mine from my own veins.

BRITON 1

The soil could not take up your blood; it is already soaked. Taste the apples grown in this land, watered by blood Briton, Roman, Christian, Pagan, all fallen, and tell me the taste of your own is greatest.

TENANTIUS

Silence! The King comes.

ROMAN 2

In a clay crown.

BRITON 2

You are our King, Tenantius. And our loyalty is bound in chains.

(BRONA, CYMBELINE, and
BELARIUS enter.)

CYMBELINE

(to BRONA)

Why don't you wait on the stairs? The air down here is musty.

BRONA

Rome must know I am at your side, so let them see me there.

CYMBELINE

Think of the child.

BRONA

Belarius? Do you think it is unsafe?

BELARIUS

I will stay here with you, my Lady.

ROMAN 1

Cymbeline, *your Majesty*, shall we bow to you now?

CYMBELINE

I give my sincere apologies for the misunderstanding that has passed between us.

ROMAN 1

Misunderstanding? Six of the Emperor's own men and women, slain by ally spears, and you have apologies?

ROMAN 2

Release us.

ROMAN 1

This is barbaric.

BRITON 1

Barbaric, you just love using that word, don't you? How many times have you coughed up that word today?

BRITON 2

'Barbaric! This is barbarism!'

ROMAN 2

You'd look better skinned too.

CYMBELINE

(to the Romans)

Tenantius, please release our kinsmen.

TENANTIUS

Yes, my Liege.

BRITON 1

(bows)

Thank you, General.

BELARIUS

(to the BRITONS)

Silence, in the presence of the King and Queen.

BRITON 2

Are we the presents, then?

(TENANTIUS releases the
ROMANS.)

BELARIUS

I will not ask again.

CYMBELINE

Please, countrymen, tell us all.

ROMAN 1

Approaching Debilisium, we did travel through a narrow
pass—

BRITON 1

Unannounced.

ROMAN 2

—to avoid a pack of animals.

ROMAN 1

To keep from working the beasts up into a frenzy. Our men
threaded the pass, steep terrain on either side / and the
slope...

ROMAN 2

With the slope, the horses were at their limit as it was.
Here, your men descended like bandits. Hiding in the black
of the sky.

ROMAN 1

(to TENANTIUS)

These are your men?

TENANTIUS

Yes.

ROMAN 1

They fight without honor. Like hunters throwing spears into
the den.

TENANTIUS

(to the BRITONS)

Did you not see plainly they were Romans?

BRITON 2

Not at the hour of night.

BRITON 1

Creeping through the pass / like wolves.

BRITON 2

I am proud to defend this kingdom against threat, King Cymbeline.

CYMBELINE

I'm certain that—

ROMAN 1

This *kingdom* is a freckle on the body of a great empire.

TENANTIUS

You did not send a messenger ahead of your arrival.

ROMAN 1

General, does a mother ask her daughter permission to visit?

TENANTIUS

She does if her daughter is often thieved.

CYMBELINE

(to the ROMANS)

My lords, I think you must have time to rest from your journey and from this affair. / Belarius, can we—

ROMAN 1

I will not rest until their crimes are answered in criminal punishment.

(The next four lines happen
all at once.)

CYMBELINE

It is best we take the time to—

TENANTIUS

Sire, may I entreat you—

ROMAN 2

With severance from their lives.

BRITON 2

Who do you call criminal?

BRITON 1

When have we shamed you General? When have I acted against Debilisium, against you?

TENANTIUS

You have shown indiscretion between foe and ally.

BRITON 1

And who is an ally, can you answer that General? Is there any outsider who wouldn't rather we were all buried under this ground so they could live upon it?

CYMBELINE

If you have wronged Rome, then you have wronged me. Tenantius; these men are to be executed.

BRITON 1

Executed? For love of Debilisium.

TENANTIUS

My King.

BRITON 2

I was prepared to die *for* you, General, but not *by* you.

TENANTIUS

There has been terrible misfortune on this soil without terrible *act*.

ROMAN 1

The price must be paid.

BRONA

(from the stair)

Name it.

(Oh shit.)

BELARIUS

The lives of these wrongful soldiers, yes—

BRONA

In silver. For the proper burial and honoring of the men you have lost, in Rome. Name it. It is our duty.

(CYMBELINE and BELARIUS give her a 'shut up' look.)

ROMAN 1

Those men and women we have lost are worth the whole of
Britannia.

CYMBELINE

Debilisium has always dutifully paid her taxes to the
Caesar.

ROMAN 1

Then She should have no issue paying now what is due.

ROMAN 2

Unless your funds are not sufficient?

CYMBELINE

Countrymen, I believe we are losing sight of the concern at
hand. I think it is paramount that you are able to rest and
mend your wounds.

ROMAN 2

Rest will not restore what has been lost.

BRONA

(stepping off the stairs)

Because you are people of action. And rest is abstinence.

CYMBELINE

Silver must come from somewhere.

BRITON 1

It'll come from us. We'll be starved for it. What do you
need silver for in Rome, that we don't need more badly
here?

TENANTIUS

Silence, or I will silence you.

BRITON 2

Just like a King, ask us to give more-

BRITON 1

(jabbing a finger toward

CYMBELINE)

What more can we possibly give you, *King*?

(BELARIUS draws his sword and
picks up BRITON 1 by the
shackles.)

BRONA

Belarius—

BELARIUS

(to BRITON 1)

You used this hand to profane your King.

BRITON 1

Sir—

BELARIUS

Am I wrong?

BRITON 1

You know it's true. That he would rather we suffer than
face those *tyrants*—

CYMBELINE

That's / enough.

ROMAN 1

You will pay for what you've done.

BELARIUS

(grabbing him by the wrist)

So I'll take this hand before I take your tongue for your
disrespect.

(Chaos breaks.)

BRONA

Belarius / don't.

TENANTIUS

These are MY soldiers / and MY responsibility.

BRITON 2

Please sir, / you weren't there—

BELARIUS

There will be justice.

BRITON 1

Placating them makes you a barbarian.

(BELARIUS strikes his head
with the butt of the sword,
knocking him out. BRONA and
CYMBELINE are rattled.)

CYMBELINE

My lords, / I apologize that you have seen such violence
since your arrival.

BRONA

(a strange expression on her
face)

Allow us to be the hosts you deserve and let us come out of
this... out of this cell...

(a hand goes to her stomach)

CYMBELINE

Darling-

BRONA

If you will follow me, I... Excuse me... I will escort you-

(a groan takes over)

(BELARIUS leaves his business
for BRONA.)

BELARIUS

Lady, let's go from here.

BRONA

I apologize. Soldiers, let us-

(the groan comes again,
louder)

TENANTIUS

The child.

(SHE wants to escort them
upstairs and she is going to
try dammit.)

BRONA

Follow me this... This way...

(BRONA staggers a bit, but catches herself.)

CYMBELINE

Our child is coming?

BRONA

(Beat.)

Yes.

(There is a rush to exit, to help BRONA out of the chambers. The BRITONS are all but forgotten in their cell, one still knocked out on the ground. TENANTIUS shares a silent look with her soldier before exiting.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 3

SETTING: We go to the wedding.

AT RISE: DRACO and ALTHEA are in a trance-like dance. FATHER ANTHONY and MOTHER are there, watching.

VOICE (MOTHER)

The swirling long garments stirred up the dust
As feet pressed their patterns
And hands met their fellows.

VOICE (DRACO)

He saw only hands,
Joining and parting,
Like pressing wax seals
Into fresh folded parchment.

VOICE (ALTHEA)

She saw only the church,
The gaudy colors of glass,
Their silhouettes cutting his face in strange shapes.

VOICE (MOTHER)

She bit her lip, to feel his was gone now
But near burnt her tongue
On the fire remaining.

(MOTHER and ANTHONY officiate
the ceremony, but the trance
of the dance does not break.)

MOTHER

Count Draco of Iomagain.

ANTHONY

Althea of Keely.

MOTHER

May the gods destroy the violence of the past and bind us
now in peace.

(begins to prepare the
binding cloth)

ANTHONY

May the Lord make plentiful your bounty.

MOTHER

May Aeronwen fight in your favor.

ANTHONY

May God give you heirs to people Britannia.

MOTHER

May your choice of love inspire others to love.

ANTHONY

And may children make your union manifest.

(In the dance, ALTHEA
suspended, the veil drops and
reveals her face.)

MOTHER & ANTHONY

Be one in blood.

(MOTHER slices DRACO's palm,
and ANTHONY slices ALTHEA's.
SHE gasps. In the same
moment, BRONA cries out.
While MOTHER begins wrapping
the couple's palms together
with the binding, we shift
our gaze to BRONA, where she
lays in bed, in labor.
CYMBELINE, BELARIUS, and
several servants are present.
CORNELIUS delivers the baby.)

CORNELIUS

You are strong, my Lady, you can.

BRONA

I can't; there's something wrong.

CYMBELINE

What's wrong?

CORNELIUS

The child is breech.

(BRONA cries out in labor—and continues to throughout the scene intermittently.)

CYMBELINE

And what does that / mean?

CORNELIUS

Turned, in the womb.

BRONA

No, but for my sons there was no—

CORNELIUS

No child is the same, my Lady; each will behave as it will.

(BRONA groans again.)

CYMBELINE

She is in pain.

CORNELIUS

I'm doing everything I can—

BRONA

Tell me what to do.

CORNELIUS

(giving her a cloth)

Bite down on this, my Lady.

BRONA

Why?

CORNELIUS

I am going to try and flip the baby.

CYMBELINE

You are going to—

CORNELIUS

If I may be so bold, Majesty, I suggest you leave us.

CYMBELINE

I will not.

CORNELIUS

It will not be easy to witness.

BELARIUS

Perhaps we should, Majesty.

CYMBELINE

I will not leave her side.

CORNELIUS

Very well.

BRONA

Oh God.

CORNELIUS

Bite down my Lady, on the cloth.

BRONA

Oh God—

CORNELIUS

Now.

(SHE does. CORNELIUS begins,
and BRONA screams into the
fabric. Our gaze shifts back
to the wedding. DRACO and
ALTHEA have floated away from
the officiators.)

ALTHEA

May I hold your hand?

DRACO

So modest now.

ALTHEA

I don't want to catch you off guard.

DRACO

If you'd like to grab my hand then grab it.

ALTHEA

I want the people to see us like this, as a unit. Because
this must be a strange day for them. My people see me as
their Chieftain, and seeing us—

(HE kisses her, suddenly. It is not romantic.)

DRACO

Part of the performance. Am I convincing?

ALTHEA

My turn then. I have a gift. A wedding gift.

(SHE receives a cloak from one of her ladies, wraps it around his shoulders.)

DRACO

What is this?

ALTHEA

A cloak, made by my clan.

DRACO

(signaling FATHER ANTHONY over)

Father.

ANTHONY

Yes, son.

DRACO

It's cold tonight, isn't it?

ANTHONY

The air bites shrewdly.

DRACO

Take this. A gift, from my wife.

ANTHONY

If you insist.

(to ALTHEA)

Lady, a pleasure. You do make a beautiful bride.

ALTHEA

I hope to be a wise one.

ANTHONY

(touching to the dress)

I must ask, my Lady, is this traditional? To your... people?

ALTHEA

No, to yours.

ANTHONY

Ah. Well I've never seen one like it.

(ANTHONY exits with the
cloak.)

DRACO

(touching her chin)

It's rude of me to accept another gift, when I opened mine
this morning.

ALTHEA

Merely shaken the box. Remember that a toy and a snake make
the same rattle.

(Beat.)

Draco, I think we should talk about what happened in the
church.

DRACO

Shall we? Now, before all our loved ones.

ALTHEA

When we have time alone.

DRACO

Each of these faces, every one of them is looking to us
now. Nothing we do will be alone.

(DRACO leaves her. Our gaze
shifts back to BRONA.
Throughout this sequence we
see ALTHEA and DRACO retire
to the wedding bed,
surrounded by their lords and
ladies.)

CORNELIUS

(to CYMBELINE)

There is no change in her condition.

CYMBELINE

The child?

CORNELIUS

I have been unable to turn the baby.

BRONA

(between grunts)

The baby's coming as he is.

CORNELIUS

(giving her a tonic)

Swallow this, for the pain.

CYMBELINE

What then? My son is born... upside-

CORNELIUS

Sire, if you want to help your wife I need you to step back.

(BRONA cries out again.)

Now, my Lady. You must try to push.

BRONA

(quietly, to CORNELIUS)

He is always watching me. I can't do this with him watching me.

CORNELIUS

Her Majesty requests we clear the room. Immediately.

CYMBELINE

My love, I can handle it.

BRONA

I can't.

CORNELIUS

Sire.

(BELARIUS touches the king on the elbow.)

CYMBELINE

Please, continue.

(BELARIUS and CYMBELINE melt into the ensemble but remain watching. We go back to the wedding chamber. The ladies

are helping ALTHEA dress down
to her underlayers, and the
lords, DRACO. A kettle over
the fire whistles over the
VOICES.)

VOICE

We blessed them with fertility
And good fortune.

VOICE

So their line may stretch like hallowed
Tree branches toward a vaulted sky.

VOICE

Limbs countless in number
Splitting from the tallest, slimmest trunk,

VOICE

So tall, children gaze at it and wonder
How the wind does not knock it down.

(The ladies and lords melt
into the background and
watch. DRACO and ALTHEA meet
at the bed. They look at each
other in stillness for a long
time.)

ALTHEA

Now what?

DRACO

Pardon?

ALTHEA

I'm teasing. You looked nervous.

(Beat.)

There's no need. Some languages are universal.

DRACO

Are you a fluent speaker?

(DRACO takes the kettle from
the fire.)

ALTHEA

Can I play too?

DRACO

Feed our love-making, *play on*.

ALTHEA

Promiscuous. Harlot. Bedswerver, that's a good one. Am I playing it right? Coming up with as many clever ways as possible to call me a whore? Strumpet? My favorite, *concubine*. It's fun; I see why you're enjoying it.

DRACO

You find me harsh.

ALTHEA

Presumptuous.

DRACO

Should I be gentler with you?

ALTHEA

I don't see any reason for that, as I do not intend to be gentle with you.

(DRACO turns his back to seek out teacups; ALTHEA goes to the tea. With her back to him, we see ALTHEA thumb the pouch of herbs from MOTHER. Is she going to do it? She looks to the crowd 'watching,' and sees her MOTHER.)

MOTHER

If you don't make love tonight, he can break the union. Declare it unconsummated.

(A moment. ALTHEA looks at the teacups. She wants to. No, she can't. She tucks the pouch away. DRACO returns and finishes preparing the tea.)

ALTHEA

I can see in you all the things I want to know. I don't need you to confess anything for me to read you like poetry.

DRACO

Keep a list of my sins then.

ALTHEA

(keeping his gaze)

Item one, Draco covets knowledge too.

DRACO

Whose?

ALTHEA

Mine. You can't stand not knowing what grows in the valleys of my thought. You need to hear me say the words. That's why you prod me to talk so.

DRACO

Go on.

ALTHEA

Item two, Draco lacks faith. You don't trust me, and you don't want to.

DRACO

How could I trust you? The first thing you do alone with a man—

ALTHEA

If I betrayed you, you did the same to me.
(noticing his cut palm)
You're still bleeding. Here, I have a salve.

DRACO

I don't need it.

ALTHEA

I know. Item three, Draco thinks himself too quick to *need* anyone.

DRACO

And I'm not?

ALTHEA

You are quick to judge.

(soothing his cut with the
salve)

Quick to decide. Perhaps quick to change your mind.

DRACO

What is this?

ALTHEA

It's made from yarrow. A flowering herb. It will help heal
you.

(slowing the care of his
hand)

I want us to be allies. Not just in name, but as people.

(The air changes. The crowd
starts humming low tones.)

DRACO

Do you still want to seal that promise? With me?

ALTHEA

Yes. Despite your attempts to change my mind.

DRACO

If you're finished with your observations—

ALTHEA

One more. Draco doesn't believe anyone can best him... but
you are tired of waiting.

DRACO

Do I look tired to you now?

ALTHEA

Not tired. I revise... impatient.

(Is it a raw attraction that
follows them into bed, or is
it power of will? DRACO
hesitates.)

ALTHEA

Trust me.

(They fold together. The
VOICES form around the two

scenes, putting the birth and
wedding bed side by side.)

CORNELIUS

Push, Majesty, hard.

BRONA

I am.

CORNELIUS

Harder, I know it hurts.

BRONA

I'm bleeding.

CORNELIUS

Yes.

BRONA

I'm going to die.

CORNELIUS

No, you are not. You are going to keep on.

BRONA

I can't.

CORNELIUS

Push. Now.

(SHE does, with a loud cry.)

VOICE

It was this moment of life,
So full it was spilling over,
That it felt most like death.

VOICE

And this moment of a little death,
That there was planted new life.

(CORNELIUS holds the baby.)

BRONA

I want to hold my son.

CORNELIUS

Your daughter.

(CORNELIUS gives BRONA the
baby.)

CORNELIUS

Such an innocent face.

BRONA

Look at her.

(BRONA passes out. CORNELIUS
catches the baby.)

CORNELIUS

Majesty!

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 4

SETTING: A corridor of CYMBELINE's court,
Debilisium.

AT RISE: EURIPHILE passes through the
hallway.

(Enter BELARIUS; HE stops
her.)

BELARIUS
Miss?

EURIPHILE
Good day sir.

(EURIPHILE tries to pass.)

BELARIUS
Could be worse.

EURIPHILE
I have heard the good news and give thanks for the health
of the princess. And of course prayers for the Queen's
recovery.

BELARIUS
You haven't nursed the child yourself?

EURIPHILE
No, the Queen insists on feeding her. I will continue to
care for the boys.

BELARIUS
That's the real good news, isn't it? No burden of a third
child to care for, you may still have time for some odd
hours of sleep...

EURIPHILE
Your words not mine, naming the King's / children *burdens*.

BELARIUS
...time to sit with the young children...

EURIPHILE

Yes. How generous of the royal family.

BELARIUS

...time to write.

EURIPHILE

I beg your pardon sir.

(BELARIUS holds up the
missing letter.)

BELARIUS

It was found at your post. It's yours, or Arviragus is a
prodigy.

EURIPHILE

Where? The nursery? That chamber can be crowded, sir, by
yourself included. If you'd like to ask me if I've seen
anyone unusual there / then proceed-

BELARIUS

(with the letter unfolded)

Do you deny this is your signage?

(silence)

You can write.

EURIPHILE

What do you want?

BELARIUS

How did you learn? In your station?

EURIPHILE

Station can change.

BELARIUS

It is not so easy to rise.

EURIPHILE

Simpler to fall.

BELARIUS

You have kept this *talent* of yours a secret; why?

EURIPHILE

I am certain you can answer that yourself.

BELARIUS

Even so.

EURIPHILE

Then we are wasting your time.

BELARIUS

Tell me.

EURIPHILE

The story of my schooling brings up painful history I'd prefer not to share.

BELARIUS

And the glaring reason?

EURIPHILE

The royal family may not like what I write.

BELARIUS

And for keeping this a secret you would be dismissed. Or tried for treason and the unlawful / spread of information-

EURIPHILE

Spread of information, executed, yes. So you can see why I would rather keep this to myself than risk being framed for something I haven't done, as I fear I am now. Are you here to accuse me?

BELARIUS

No. I am going to offer you something. You never did tell me your name, Madame.

EURIPHILE

Is my penmanship so bad you could not read it for yourself?

BELARIUS

(a bit uncomfortable)

State your name.

EURIPHILE

Euriphile.

BELARIUS

I will keep your secret Euriphile.

EURIPHILE

(putting it together)

You did not read the letter. Why?

BELARIUS

You've broken my trust, but I don't have to break yours by... invading your privacy any further. I could read it. Aloud, in the banquet hall, for all to hear if you'd prefer.

(Then HE does not know SHE is a traitor.)

EURIPHILE

If I am hiding, it is only... embarrassment. It is... a letter to the father of my child.

BELARIUS

I have no interest in such things.

EURIPHILE

(taking the letter back)

Then what are you *interested* in?

BELARIUS

You will pen letters for me that I dictate to you. Serve me, and your secret does not pass my lips.

EURIPHILE

You cannot write them yourself?

BELARIUS

I am in need of a more efficient hand. To keep up with my work.

EURIPHILE

You would have read the letter if you could, sir.

(Beat.)

You cannot read at all. Can you?

(SHE's right. We can see it on his face.)

How have you served as a consort—

BELARIUS

Should you give me another reason to distrust you, ANY, I will not hesitate to turn you over to her Majesty.

EURIPHILE

I will give you no reason. Unless you still hold such rancor for my tongue.

BELARIUS

I can tolerate the qualities of your tongue, however distasteful I may find them.

EURIPHILE

Shall you accept *them*, I will accept your offer.

BELARIUS

Very well.

EURIPHILE

But I have one request myself.

BELARIUS

You are in no place to make requests of me.

EURIPHILE

I can imagine you value your position at least as much as I value mine. In which case, you would not desire to lose it if the King discovers you are unqualified. I continue to write. To the... father.

BELARIUS

He is worth the risk?

(SHE says nothing.)

Must be quite a man. Then we are agreed.

EURIPHILE

We are.

BELARIUS

By day, I do not know you.

EURIPHILE

I will come to your quarters at nine o'clock.

(EURIPHILE exits, BELARIUS looking after her.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 5

SETTING: The same corridor; Debilisium.

AT RISE: We catch the two ROMANS conversing.

ROMAN 2

You know he doesn't.

ROMAN 1

Cymbeline has silver. But he sits on his wealth like a watchdog. And watchdogs can be scared away.

ROMAN 2

If he cannot afford what he says he will pay, then he will not pay.

ROMAN 1

He will, with enough pressure.

ROMAN 2

A man distracted is immune to pressure. Tell me: if a watchdog is fixated on the bird, will he see the hunter approach behind?

ROMAN 1

He has the silver-

ROMAN 2

It doesn't matter. The infant has cast a shadow that will overwhelm us.

ROMAN 1

I have made myself explicitly clear to Cymbeline that should he not pay what is owed to us, we will double the debt. He will pay.

ROMAN 2

And if he doesn't?

ROMAN 1

He will. And we will return home.

ROMAN 2

Will he pay us the six lives of our brothers and sisters?

ROMAN 1

What do you propose?

ROMAN 2

We have men at the wall, keeping the peace in the north.

ROMAN 1

We are not going to war with the Picts.

ROMAN 2

Exactly. We don't send our troops to attack anyone. We simply remove them where it will hurt.

ROMAN 1

Dismiss the companies?

ROMAN 2

We needn't raise a weapon. The Picts will respond to their opening, pick a fight. When Cymbeline loses men in eyesight of home, only then will he look away from the baby bird.

ROMAN 1

I do not have the authority to make that order.

ROMAN 2

Then continue to be ruled by the babe.

(Exit ROMAN 2.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IIIScene 1

SETTING: Just inside ALTHEA and DRACO's new shared home. It is storming.

AT RISE: ALTHEA and DRACO, and various servants, are trying to load the carriage. Tensions are running high.

ALTHEA
The rain will make the way unpassable.

DRACO
'At once,' is not a suggestion, / it is not a 'wait until it's *passable*.'

ALTHEA
The carriage could sink in the mud. The horses, they could / be injured.

DRACO
It's important we appear strong in court.

ALTHEA
It's not safe. We will leave in the morning.

(ALTHEA and her lady finish packing a trunk of various bottles, herbs.)

DRACO
You cannot bring that to court.

ALTHEA
And why is that?

DRACO
They'll think you're practicing magic.

ALTHEA
Ah. I'm a witch now.

DRACO
I didn't say that.

ALTHEA

And why would they think I'm a witch?

DRACO

Are you?

ALTHEA

What?

DRACO

Are you?

ALTHEA

You know very well everything in here is medicinal.

DRACO

Can you prove it?

ALTHEA

I don't / need to.

DRACO

No, not to me, I'm only telling you what they'll say.

ALTHEA

King Cymbeline isn't a Christian. You don't know what they'll say in Debilisum any more than I do.

(ALTHEA looks him in the eye
and seals the trunk. SHE sets
it with the others by the
door.)

DRACO

You're ready? Then let us go.

(DRACO takes a bag and takes
it out into the rain, exits.)

ALTHEA

Draco. Draco!

EDWARD (a servant)

Can I help, my lady?

ALTHEA

No. Thank you; you may leave us.

(EDWARD & all servants exit.
DRACO returns, soaking wet.)

(to DRACO)

I am nervous too.

DRACO

You haven't been there.

ALTHEA

All the more reason.

DRACO

I'm going in my father's stead. This is the first we've
been invited since his death.

ALTHEA

Oh. I understand.

I've lost a father too. I stepped in as a Chieftain in his
place. It's hard to feel like enough.

(Maybe he will let her
comfort him.)

Let's face it as one.

(ALTHEA approaches.)

DRACO

There is nothing to face.

ALTHEA

Good. Then there's no need to rush.

(DRACO avoids her, stepping
aside to take another trunk.)

DRACO

I'll go ahead of you. To answer the King's call, and you
can follow when the storm clears.

ALTHEA

It could be days, a week until the road is dry enough.

DRACO

Best for me to get ahead of it before it gets worse.

(DRACO exits trunk in hand.)

ALTHEA

(calling after him)

We'll go together; I don't want you travelling alone.

(DRACO returns.)

DRACO

Nonsense, I'll go ahead.

ALTHEA

Draco. Draco can we stop for a moment.

Is it me you're afraid of? That what, I'll embarrass you?

DRACO

The thought crossed my mind.

ALTHEA

Item four.

(Beat.)

You're waiting for me to prove you wrong. And I will. If you let me.

That was our wedding night.

Do you think about it often?

DRACO

That would be improper.

ALTHEA

Why? I'm your wife.

(Beat.)

I'd like to see you sleeping. To know what you look like, completely free of worry. We haven't shared a bed since then.

DRACO

Why do you mock me?

ALTHEA

I'm not mocking you.

DRACO

You mock me with your desire.

ALTHEA

My desire is to know you—

DRACO

Desire is different than love; and I will not entertain that.

ALTHEA

And you get to decide what I feel?

DRACO

I know what I feel.

ALTHEA

(a challenge)

And there is no love.

DRACO

Were there love, we would be making love, right?

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

We did.

DRACO

I don't think I'd call it that.

ALTHEA

You don't want me to go with you.

DRACO

It would be better for you to stay here.

ALTHEA

Better for me or better for you?
Does Cymbeline know we're married?

DRACO

I suppose word has travelled—

ALTHEA

You swore you would send messengers to the Roman cities to tell them of our alliance—

DRACO

Which I will—

ALTHEA

And I would to the Briton. And I *have*.

DRACO

Brilliant. Just brilliant.

ALTHEA

You didn't... Is that why you're so nervous? Well if King Cymbeline was ignorant before, I doubt he is now.

(DRACO pulls the pouch of herbs from a pocket and holds it up.)

DRACO

What is this?

ALTHEA

That's mine.

DRACO

What is it?

ALTHEA

A gift. From my mother. Just... tea leaves.

DRACO

This is a sleeping potion.

ALTHEA

It's not a potion, it's a remedy. For sleeping when you're in great pain, or very ill.

DRACO

You must think you're very clever. Asking me night after night why don't I join you in bed, while you're slipping me potions.

ALTHEA

What? No, I would never do that, I swear it.

DRACO

But you just, keep it on hand.

ALTHEA

And you'll thank me for it if ever you should pass a kidney stone.

DRACO

Where'd you get it.

ALTHEA

My mother.

DRACO

You kept it.

ALTHEA

You're interrogating me.

DRACO

You slept with me once for insurance and have been poisoning me since.

(Beat.)

Edward!

(Enter EDWARD again.)

What did you find helping my wife pack? Other powders she has on hand? Tell me Edward.

ALTHEA

Go ahead tell him; tell him anything you like.

(EDWARD freezes.)

DRACO

Admit it.

ALTHEA

What else did you find Edward? I'm terribly curious?

DRACO

Admit you've been slipping me this.

ALTHEA

I say 'yes' and I'm a traitor; 'no' and I'm a liar, right?

DRACO

Tell me the truth.

ALTHEA

Do you think I'm a witch, Edward? You can speak honestly.

DRACO

You've given me / something.

ALTHEA

Gods forbid—

DRACO

'Gods,' that's right, all your gods.

ALTHEA

Maybe ask me what I believe. / Instead of passing your judgements.

DRACO

In desire, unnatural—

ALTHEA

It's perfectly *natural* to have sex—

DRACO

Then why don't I want to sleep with you? Why do I hate touching you? Can you tell me why? If it's so God-willing that we give the world a hundred heirs, can you tell me why?

(Long beat.)

EDWARD

There was nothing. I found nothing, my Lord.

(Exit DRACO, mechanically taking the trunks outside.)

ALTHEA

(to Edward)

Will you help me load the carriage?

EDWARD

Yes, my lady.

(ALL exit, readying to leave.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IIIScene 2

SETTING: The nursery where we first met EURIPHILE, Debilisium.

AT RISE: The crib is offstage. BELARIUS is waiting. SHE enters quietly.

EURIPHILE
They're asleep.

BELARIUS
It is safer to meet in my quarters, as we have been.

EURIPHILE
Guiderius has been fussing all day. I need to be here if he wakes.

BELARIUS
As we tiptoe around the sleeping baby.

EURIPHILE
Children aren't as fragile as you think.

BELARIUS
But they're dependent.

EURIPHILE
Not by choice. Children are always angling toward doing things for themselves. And they would if we let them. Not like us. We try to make others do our work.

BELARIUS
(lighthearted)
You're not turning me on to nursing very well.

EURIPHILE
I fill your duties as consort readily.
(readies her quill)
What am I scribing today?

BELARIUS
A notice to Count Pious, about the grain shortage.

EURIPHILE

Like the one from yesterday?

BELARIUS

Similar. But he trades with the barbarians.

(SHE pulls out a sheet of parchment for herself, and one for BELARIUS.)

EURIPHILE

(writing on his)

N-u-r-s-e. Nurse. D-i-p-l-o-m-a-t. Diplomat. They don't share a single character.

BELARIUS

And I thought it was hard to tell the difference.

(As EURIPHILE starts the letter, BELARIUS studies the words and begins copying them, repeatedly down the parchment. There is a kind of peacefulness in this ritual of theirs.)

EURIPHILE

Decrease by a fifth? Estimated.

BELARIUS

A quarter.

EURIPHILE

Forgive me, a quarter...

BELARIUS

Do you need more detail?

EURIPHILE

I have it. I'm getting better at your voice.

BELARIUS

And I'm not getting any better at 'R's.

EURIPHILE

(looking at his page)

This one's good.

(bumps the inkwell, it
spills)

Dammit—

(They leap up from the table,
try to contain the spill. The
baby stirs, begins to cry.)

BELARIUS

Damn.

EURIPHILE

I'll... The baby.

BELARIUS

Right.

EURIPHILE

And you—

BELARIUS

Yes.

(BELARIUS does his best to
clean up the spill and save
the parchment. A bucket with
cloth and brush sits on the
other side of the room. HE
brings the bucket over,
starts to clean. EURIPHILE
enters, rocking the baby, who
is now quiet.)

EURIPHILE

Shhhh... That's right. Just me.

(A long, quiet moment passes
rocking the prince and
scrubbing the table.)

EURIPHILE

(to BELARIUS)

Thank you.

BELARIUS

You're a natural. With children.

EURIPHILE

I'm a mother.

BELARIUS

I'm sorry.

EURIPHILE

Why? I'm not.

BELARIUS

No, I meant for speaking carelessly like that. I forgot. I shouldn't have, but...

EURIPHILE

Come here.

(HE does.)

Shhh...

(EURIPHILE hands him the baby.)

BELARIUS

What if he cries?

EURIPHILE

What if I cry?

(Beat.)

See? He's not. It is natural, for most people.

BELARIUS

Do you ever see your child?

EURIPHILE

I thought we weren't asking questions. As per your request.

BELARIUS

You don't have to answer. But I'd like to know.

EURIPHILE

No. Never.

BELARIUS

But you hear news of her? From... the father?

EURIPHILE

You don't have children.

BELARIUS

No.

EURIPHILE

But a wife?

BELARIUS

No.

(Beat.)

Do you miss her? Your child?

EURIPHILE

Wouldn't you?

(goes to sift through the
rescued papers)

You brought a letter. Shall I read it?

BELARIUS

Not at this time.

EURIPHILE

Still don't trust me to read the letters, just write the
response.

BELARIUS

I cannot disclose / affairs—

EURIPHILE

Affairs of state.

BELARIUS

Yes.

(to the baby still in his
arms)

Yet you hold the lifeblood of Britannia in your arms.

(EURIPHILE resumes writing
the letter. BELARIUS sits in
the rocking chair with the
child.)

EURIPHILE

Who reads them, if I don't? Someone else does.

BELARIUS

No, only you.

EURIPHILE

Then how do you manage? Without giving yourself away?

BELARIUS

I thought we weren't asking questions.

EURIPHILE

We're not.

(Beat.)

Want me to predict?

BELARIUS

Go ahead.

EURIPHILE

You're smart about it. You have other ways of learning what you need. And you get close to important people.

BELARIUS

Like the King?

EURIPHILE

Like me.

(Beat.)

Important people are only important because they have something you do not.

But you came to me recently. SO—someone else you relied on has fallen through. Or left. Or died, possibly.

BELARIUS

Are you trying to strike a chord?

EURIPHILE

So who was your last confidante? Before me?

BELARIUS

I came to you when I could have chosen to have you investigated.

EURIPHILE

For literacy.

BELARIUS

For *treason*. Because you have deceived the King and Queen.

EURIPHILE

Just like you.

So who was it? Before me?

BELARIUS

If your theory is correct.

EURIPHILE

Ifs and ifs.

(Beat.)

The baby is asleep, why don't you put him back to bed.

BELARIUS

I... I don't know how he likes to be... tucked in.

EURIPHILE

I recommend you start with setting him down, and proceed with walking away.

BELARIUS

You have a complicated process, Miss Euriphile.

(SHE waves him off. HE exits to put the baby to sleep. HE returns, with the color of a new decision.)

BELARIUS

The letter arrived this morning.

EURIPHILE

Okay.

BELARIUS

Yes, and... And I think it best I understand its contents before tomorrow.

EURIPHILE

And you want me to read it.

BELARIUS

And I think that given the circumstances—

EURIPHILE

I'm your only option.

BELARIUS

Read it.

EURIPHILE

Hand it here.

(SHE methodically opens the letter and begins to read. We watch her face drop.)

BELARIUS

What is it?

EURIPHILE

Oh God.

BELARIUS

Read it to me.

EURIPHILE

There was an attack at the border. A village was taken.

BELARIUS

Where?

EURIPHILE

North, at the wall.

BELARIUS

Read it to me.

EURIPHILE

'Roman troops withdraw... Pict rebels took a village...' It remains occupied... and they've given an ultimatum for its surrender.

BELARIUS

What?

EURIPHILE

Good god.

BELARIUS

What ultimatum.

EURIPHILE

I... Silver. That's strange.

BELARIUS

Considering He has none to give.

EURIPHILE

The King has / none?

BELARIUS

The King must know of this.

EURIPHILE

When did you receive this message?

BELARIUS

Just before dawn.

EURIPHILE

Before dawn today.

BELARIUS

I know.

EURIPHILE

And he still / doesn't know?

BELARIUS

Jupiter.

EURIPHILE

He's going to ask you why you didn't come to him immediately.

BELARIUS

I know.

EURIPHILE

Belarius...

BELARIUS

I'll say it's just arrived.

EURIPHILE

In the middle of the night?

BELARIUS

It could happen.

EURIPHILE

But the gates are closed. He would know if they've been opened at this hour. You need to feign receiving it in the morning.

BELARIUS

The longer we wait, the more people are at risk.

EURIPHILE

The alternative is yourself at risk.

BELARIUS

That's my job.

(EURIPHILE says nothing. Her
silence is loud.)

It is. I have to go to him now.

(silence)

I need to. The King depends on my word. You don't—

EURIPHILE

Don't understand. How could I understand?

(Beat.)

He depends on your word. So what happens? You go to him now, in the middle of the night, when he's seen pacing the corridors. Coming in and out of the Queen's chambers, wringing his hands.

BELARIUS

How do you know that—

EURIPHILE

We all know that. He rouses the castle. He will learn the gates did not open tonight, and that you've lied. If you cannot be trusted, who can? The physicians, looking after Brona? The unwelcome guests that sleep down the hall? The Roman dignitaries here that will watch his dissembling? And you will be responsible.

BELARIUS

And if I 'receive' the letter in the morning..

EURIPHILE

The gates will be open. News will be arriving. There will be no reason to suspect.

BELARIUS

If you're wrong, the cost is great.

EURIPHILE

Give it to me.

(HE gives her the letter. She takes a candle from the desk and reseals the wax.)

BELARIUS

May the gods save us.

EURIPHILE

You've bought time to think... About how to pay the ultimatum.

BELARIUS

What?

EURIPHILE

The silver.

BELARIUS

The silver, yes.

EURIPHILE

(pressing the letter into his hand)

The treasury is depleted, isn't it?

BELARIUS

(will he tell her?)

Starved.

(BELARIUS exits. After he's gone, EURIPHILE takes a cypher from the desk, holds it up to the light. She immediately begins writing a letter of her own.)

(END OF SCENE)

(RECOMMENDED INTERMISSION)

ACT III

Scene 3

SETTING: We go to the cell; Debilisium.

AT RISE: TENANTIUS's soldiers are still there, chained, and not looking good. We see BRONA, not looking too good either, slowly carrying a sack of food. SHE kneels beside them, waking them up from their stupor.

BRITON 1

(shuffling into a kneel)

Lady! Forgive me, Majesty.

BRITON 2

Our Queen, an honor.

BRONA

There is nothing to forgive.

BRITON 1

The General is ashamed.

BRONA

You have risked your lives to defend me. And my children.

(SHE opens the sack and pulls out a loaf of bread. SHE begins to tear off pieces and feed them.)

BRITON 2

You are not our Queen but a goddess.

BRITON 1

You have risked your life too. Carrying the heirs inside you, protecting them from the wolves.

BRONA

The wolves are here.

(BRITON 2 convulses into coughing. BRONA holds him as

he struggles against the
chains.)

BRONA

You are not well; you need a physician.

BRITON 2

Tenantius will keep us here until the Romans leave. Or feed
us to them.

BRITON 1

If we die here, she doesn't have to kill us.

BRONA

You won't die.

BRITON 1

Yes, I will. We are damned either way.

BRONA

(feeding BRITON 2)

Not if we pay.

BRITON 1

Pay? Pay with what?

BRONA

Silver. Rome will protect us as long as we are of use to
them. We will satisfy them with silver. When they are
satisfied, I will spare you. So we will pay.

BRITON 1

With what?

BRONA

With silver—

BRITON 1

What silver?

BRONA

My silver, Cymbeline's silver.

BRITON 1

What silver?

BRONA

My. Silver.

BRITON 1

There is none left.

BRONA

How would you know?

BRITON 1

There is none left.

BRONA

You're speaking to a Queen. I know what is mine.

BRITON 1

Then how much?

BRONA

That is my suit, not yours.

BRITON 1

It's a simple question.

BRONA

You don't know. You couldn't possibly / know-

BRITON 1

You don't have a wage, Majesty. You never have. You don't feel it when it stops coming in.

(Long beat. BRONA leaves the bag on the ground.)

BRONA

Why don't you get some rest.

BRITON 2

Rest, rest, rest, rest, rest, / rest, rest, rest, rest-

BRONA

Stop it. STOP.

BRITON 2

REST REST REST REST / REST REST REST REST-

BRONA

(kneeling before him)

What are you doing?

BRITON 1

If you say it enough times, you forget what it means.

BRITON 2

REST REST REST REST / REST REST REST REST-

BRONA

I said STOP IT.

(BRITON 2 coughs violently
into BRONA's face. When she
turns, we see there is
blood.)

BRITON 1

You won't bring him a doctor 'cause it's easier for you too
if we lay on our asses and die here.

(BRONA tries to wipe her face
off, and exits, leaving the
sack.)

BRONA

Try to get some sleep.

BRITON 1

You're no different! You know it's true! YOU KNOW!

(END OF SCENE)

ACT III

Scene 4

SETTING: We go to CYMBELINE's court;
Debilisium.

AT RISE: CYMBELINE sits on the throne, in
conversation with TENANTIUS.

VOICE

The walls tired of the same low voices
Climbing up them in the afternoons.

VOICE

The castle opened at the pores
Waiting for the guests,

VOICES

That would busy the stone annals
Into a hive.

VOICE

The walls are terrible gossips.
Always whispering back the chatter
To the ceiling.

TENANTIUS

My men are restless.

CYMBELINE

They feel betrayed.

TENANTIUS

Betrayed by certainty.

BELARIUS

Your Majesty, Count Draco has arrived.

CYMBELINE

Draco?

BELARIUS

Of Iomagain. His father was loyal to you, if a bit of a
bastard.

CYMBELINE

Yes, Draco. Like father like son?

BELARIUS

He's wed.

CYMBELINE

Who?

BELARIUS

To a barbarian.

CYMBELINE

Loyalty is not inherited, then.

BELARIUS

(announcing their entry)

King Cymbeline, Count Draco and Countess Althea of Iomagain.

(ALTHEA and DRACO enter,
followed by two attendants.
THEY are wet and muddy from
the knees down—and are not
hiding it well.)

ALTHEA

And of Keely.

CYMBELINE

My honored guests. I welcome you to my court.

DRACO

We are honored by your invitation, Majesty.

CYMBELINE

And Count, my deepest sympathies for the loss of your
Father. He was a valued advisor of mine, many years ago,
who could be counted on for... his tenacity.

DRACO

Thank you, Sire.

CYMBELINE

And do you bear resemblance?

ALTHEA

He does.

DRACO

My bride never had the fortune of meeting my father—

ALTHEA

It is our great pleasure to be here and bless the new Princess.

CYMBELINE

Your bride, Draco, yet I spy not a blush.

ALTHEA

And your humble guest; let me not blush at saying so. I did not think in the span of my days to stand before a King of Britannia, choosing to be disarmed and bare softer arms open. But I could see a Britannia where the earth received all our dead content and aged instead of young and bloody. It is because Draco and his people looked ahead as I do, and as mine do, that we can live stronger as allies.

CYMBELINE

A surprising lady.

ALTHEA

Prized by lady or lord, I am honored. Draco and I have a gift for your daughter we'd like to present to your Majesty, and your whole family.

DRACO

Yes, a gift we have chosen with—

CYMBELINE

That is very generous.

ALTHEA

Where is the Queen Brona? I would extend a most grateful welcome to her as well for the hospitality / of the court.

DRACO

I am honored to come in stead of my Father to a place he admired so much.

BELARIUS

The Queen continues to recover her health.

ALTHEA

From a difficult birth?

DRACO

Apologies, your Majesty, that is an inquiry most personal.

CYMBELINE

Yes, our daughter made a demanding entrance to this life.

ALTHEA

Please give her our well-wishes. For the Princess, we considered having a locket crafted. But, rather than ornament her, I wanted to express our blessing for her strength.

(EDWARD, steps forward
carrying a plant.)

An Angelica plant, for our youngest Lady—and perhaps her mother too. The flowers will fill her breath with sweet air, and their tonic will make her strong.

DRACO

Distilled down, the flowers make a fortifying potion.

ALTHEA

A tonic, yes.

CYMBELINE

(taking a closer look)

Such simple blossoms.

ALTHEA

Yes, Sire. But I find them to have an understated beauty.

CYMBELINE

(looking at the flowers)

With their faces looking out.

ALTHEA

The plant is humble, but makes itself known.

(smelling the flowers)

You can smell the flowers before you see them. You would know they're in the room even with your eyes closed.

CYMBELINE

A thoughtful gift.

(to his servants)

Take it to my daughter's chambers straight away. And tell Cornelius to brew the tonic for her.

DRACO

We are curious, Your Majesty, as to what the child's name will be?

CYMBELINE

Hermione.

DRACO

Lovely.

ALTHEA

And 'born well' she is.

CYMBELINE

You know of it.

ALTHEA

Of her birth or of her birth name, Highness? I trust meeting the King before me that her birth is well.

CYMBELINE

The name, Lady.

ALTHEA

Did I mistake the meaning?

CYMBELINE

No.

ALTHEA

Then for well-born and born-well both, praise the gods.

(CYMBELINE and DRACO
simultaneously.)

CYMBELINE

Yes, / praise the gods.

DRACO

Praise God.

CYMBELINE

Count Draco. You are more devout to the Emperor than us all.

DRACO

Thank you, Majesty.

CYMBELINE

And do you feel the pull of your God, though he lives in Rome? Looking down from a cross?

DRACO

I believe we feel the pull of many people from Rome.

(A messenger arrives and approaches BELARIUS.)

MESSENGER

Arrived this morning, my lord.

BELARIUS

Thank you.

(reads)

CYMBELINE

And you, the Lady Althea?

ALTHEA

I do not think that power can be contained to one place, Majesty.

BELARIUS

My King, urgent matters.

CYMBELINE

Say it now.

BELARIUS

I would suggest we seek private company.

CYMBELINE

If it can be said in front of me, it can be said before my allies. And friends.

BELARIUS

As you wish, Sire. But I caution you the message is sensitive.

TENANTIUS

That was an order from your King, Belarius.

BELARIUS

Roman forces have withdrawn from the wall, to the northwest keep.

CYMBELINE

Withdrawn? But the region—

ALTHEA

Is sick with unrest.

TENANTIUS

They've abandoned their post?

BELARIUS

Despite the violence of the barbarians to the north, yes.

ALTHEA

Danger will follow. The wall leans heavy on the Picts, and they will take the chance to shed its load.

BELARIUS

She speaks the truth, Sire. They've invaded a village.

TENANTIUS

Which?

ALTHEA

Already?

CYMBELINE

With such immediacy.

BELARIUS

Seemingly yes, my Lord.

ALTHEA

What village?

BELARIUS

None of significance to Debilisium.

ALTHEA

Name it.

BELARIUS

Keely.

(The shock ripples through
ALTHEA, and slowly through
DRACO.)

ALTHEA

Keely?

DRACO

(to BELARIUS)

Then my people are at risk too, Sir. The village sits near
my own keep.

ALTHEA

Keely has been taken.

BELARIUS

Ay, Lady.

ALTHEA

How many armed? Have they fully infiltrated? Did my people
battle? Tell me.

(BELARIUS looks to CYMBELINE.
ALTHEA takes the letter from
him.)

DRACO

(under his breath)

You are not king here.

CYMBELINE

Keely has been seized.

ALTHEA

While I am here...

(reading)

'Seized,' not destroyed. They've put a price on its return.

CYMBELINE

Why would they want—

ALTHEA

Silver. To negotiate with Rome.

TENANTIUS

That's absurd.

CYMBELINE

They will not receive an ounce from me as reward for this attack.

ALTHEA

(to CYMBELINE)

Will you bolster me then in arms?

TENANTIUS

With our defenses?

ALTHEA

Draco, we must send your soldiers to Keely immediately.

DRACO

Leaving my home exposed.

ALTHEA

Our people need arms in Keely.

DRACO

From a gracious King.

CYMBELINE

(to TENANTIUS)

Do we have the means?

TENANTIUS

Sire, there are threats within this court.

ALTHEA

There is suffering in Keely.

DRACO

The stronger for their holiness.

ALTHEA

Let us be strong and *united*. Count Draco?

(Silence.)

DRACO

If I leave Iomagain exposed, she will be the next to fall.

ALTHEA

General?

TENANTIUS

I accept orders from the King.

ALTHEA

Your Majesty, Cymbeline.

CYMBELINE

(to TENANTIUS)

What do you advise?

TENANTIUS

My advisement, Sire, is to keep your soldiers where they are most needed. Here.

ALTHEA

If no Romans, no Britons rise to our aid, it will be known across Britannia that an alliance made under the King's domain is empty. And we all will be more vulnerable because of it.

TENANTIUS

The *alliance* between you was made without any of us knowing.

ALTHEA

Our messengers were delayed—

CYMBELINE

But not made without my blessing.

(approaching ALTHEA)

I will be faithful to you, Lady Althea.

TENANTIUS

Sire—

CYMBELINE

Tenantius, prepare a battalion.

TENANTIUS

Ay, Sire.

CYMBELINE

To my quarters, all.

(CYMBELINE exits, BELARIUS at his heels. ALTHEA makes eye contact with DRACO, and then

follows them off. TENANTIUS
catches DRACO by the elbow.)

TENANTIUS

If any love for Britannia flows in your chest, let us speak
after moonrise.

DRACO

This night?

TENANTIUS

Ay.

DRACO

Where?

TENANTIUS

The northeast keep.

DRACO

I will meet you.

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IVScene 1

SETTING: ALTHEA and DRACO's guest chambers, Debilisium, that night.

AT RISE: ALTHEA and DRACO are there, and heated.

ALTHEA
You stood by. You stood by / and did nothing.

DRACO
I didn't beg on my knees like you did. Do you have any idea what you've done to our reputation?

ALTHEA
What does that matter if we're dead?

DRACO
My father's dead but the King respects him. Because of what he built here.

ALTHEA
Was your father a coward?

DRACO
What did you say.

ALTHEA
Then that's an impression you made all on your own.

DRACO
We need them. Do you get that? We exist because they say we get to. If we don't have them we're nothing.

ALTHEA
I have him Draco. Cymbeline will send arms, and it is because of me and only me.

DRACO
Without me you would not be allowed in these walls.

ALTHEA
Thank the gods I have Draco on my side. Who will risk nothing to defend what he believes in.

DRACO

What you believe in.

ALTHEA

It's always that isn't it.

DRACO

I can't protect you. And you can't protect me. That's the pinching reality Althea.

ALTHEA

If it were your home, I'd send my men and women armored this night.

DRACO

No you wouldn't.

ALTHEA

I would.

DRACO

You wouldn't.

ALTHEA

I swear I would.

DRACO

You wouldn't because you would never leave your own city exposed over mine.

ALTHEA

Then what is any of this for?

DRACO

You'd better hope Cymbeline doesn't change his mind then. Wear something pretty tonight.

ALTHEA

And what do you mean by that.

DRACO

You know very well.

ALTHEA

No, be perfectly clear.

DRACO

A compliment, dear, to your bewitching qualities.

ALTHEA

Are we speaking of that *again*? The only person who's afraid of me here is you.

DRACO

Say your incantations—

ALTHEA

You call them / prayers.

DRACO

And brew him something so sweet so he can't resist you if you want it so badly.

ALTHEA

You'd rather I sleep with him than you. You've been very honest about that.

DRACO

I try.

ALTHEA

All for the best; I'd rather die by your sword than bear your child.

DRACO

Any babe of yours will have your darkness—

ALTHEA

Go to hell.

DRACO

—that I can't wash clean.

ALTHEA

GO TO HELL.

DRACO

I tried to love you. I... Christ.

(Beat. ALTHEA looks to him,
but HE is already leaving.
SHE is alone as she asked. A
nausea comes over her. SHE

barely makes it to the bucket
and vomits.)

ALTHEA

Eostre, help me.

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IV

Scene 2

SETTING: The castle wall, later that night;
Debilisium.

AT RISE: TENANTIUS waits for DRACO. The
night waits for LIBITINA.

VOICE

Mountains cut up the horizon
Sharp against the sky,
Peering down at the battle below.

VOICE

The push and pull of battle's favor
Wandered between armies
Like a stumbling drunkard,

As a grove of legged shields crawled
Between the striking and splitting of bone.

VOICE

The strongest spear of the army
Drove its stake in the ground,
Tried to claim the earth from the mountains.

VOICE

It sent up a crack,
Running so wide it split the horizon
To pierce the blue of the sky.
It washed the tides of the battlefield
From their very seas.

VOICE

Here did death sprout from the fault line.

(LIBITINA enters, hints of
armor and fitted with a
sword. PISANIO follows her,
serves her.)

VOICE

From the battle for life was born a keeper of death.

VOICE

Her youthful cries rattling the smoky sky.

(We now see how pregnant
LIBITINA is.)

See how she now carries the world,
As the world once carried her?
Not long from now will her first born
Make war grandmother to life.

(The spell breaks. TENANTIUS
is waiting when LIBITINA
surprises her, PISANIO
following respectfully behind
and holding a torch for
light.)

LIBITINA
Called to court by my King, not my Commander. Most
unexpected.

TENANTIUS
Libitina.
(correcting)
Soldier.

(PISANIO turns away. LIBITINA
takes a knee and gives a sign
of respect to the General.)

LIBITINA
General.

TENANTIUS
I didn't know you would come.

LIBITINA
Cymbeline insisted I come to the blessing of the new child.

(TENANTIUS kneels too, close
to her.)

TENANTIUS
I should kneel to you.

LIBITINA
A general kneel for a soldier?

TENANTIUS

Your husband fought valiantly, died a warrior's death. I am sorry for your loss.

LIBITINA

Let him rest in his grave.

(Beat; they are very close to one another.)

I have longed for *your* voice.

(LIBITINA kisses TENANTIUS. Slowly, then fiercely. The two women rest in their embrace before TENANTIUS slides her hands down to LIBITINA's stomach.)

TENANTIUS

He lives still.

LIBITINA

Yes.

(Beat.)

I would have been there. Fighting beside you, and fighting beside him if I wasn't—

TENANTIUS

You fight every day. How are your sons?

LIBITINA

Home. They wish to be here.

TENANTIUS

They are still young.

(Beat.)

I didn't think you would want to see me.

LIBITINA

(kisses her again)

Neither did I. And again, I cannot go to the field beside you.

TENANTIUS

Who briefed you?

LIBITINA

Belarius. I want to come with you, to Keely.

TENANTIUS

No one is going to Keely.

LIBITINA

I understand Cymbeline's immovable.

TENANTIUS

Then we will move the orders.

PISANIO

Lady, a gentleman approaches.

(THEY stand.)

LIBITINA

Who?

TENANTIUS

An ally, but a temperamental one.

LIBITINA

Useful?

TENANTIUS

Critical. Will you trust me?

LIBITINA

I will second you.

(DRACO enters.)

DRACO

General?

TENANTIUS

Ay.

DRACO

Pray, who's this?

LIBITINA

The most trusted warrior to the General Tenantius. If you'll pray, kneel first.

DRACO

You assured me we'd be alone.

TENANTIUS

You cannot prevent a war alone.

DRACO

What is your office?

TENANTIUS

Our King's soft heart would send us to Keely. I need to protect *this* keep. *This* is my duty. And I cannot do that if I am in Keely.

DRACO

You told Cymbeline you'd prepare a battalion.

TENANTIUS

Yes.

DRACO

You lied.

TENANTIUS

I will prepare a battalion. The battalion will never deploy.

DRACO

If you expect that I put forth the silver / they ask for—

LIBITINA

No, Draco, why buy a victory when you can win one?

DRACO

You believe my army can take the village.

TENANTIUS

What village?

DRACO

Keely—

LIBITINA

(looks to TENANTIUS, who nods)

What village?

Draco—

Count.
DRACO

LIBITINA
To a hundred? To a thousand?

DRACO
Count Draco.

LIBITINA
Most honored, valiant, wise, handsome *Count Draco*—did you gift the Princess? In honor of her birth?

DRACO
Yes.

LIBITINA
With what?

DRACO
A gift fit for one as she.

TENANTIUS
A tree.

LIBITINA
A tree?

TENANTIUS
A tree. To 'make her strong.'

LIBITINA
Impressive, Count.

DRACO
You have no right / to speak to me—

LIBITINA
Even barbarians demand silver, and you gift the Princess a tree.

TENANTIUS
A tree from Keely too.

LIBITINA
Her own lands... now under attack.

DRACO

What do you need from me?

LIBITINA

Your tree cannot protect anyone.

(drawing sword)

Only this can make you strong.

TENANTIUS

Or this.

(takes the torch from

PISANIO)

I will send a company by night. Elite in numbers, to the village.

LIBITINA

What village?

TENANTIUS

The village is already lost. Let it be consumed by fire as a sacrifice to the gods.

DRACO

Their lives will be on my soul. And the alliance over.

TENANTIUS

Keely will be over. You'll be free from her.

DRACO

And Iomagain exposed.

TENANTIUS

Yes. As it was before. When you *fared better*.

LIBITINA

Has she proved a worthy ally? Your *wife*?

(Beat.)

TENANTIUS

Rome has cast Keely down. Rome, the champion of your god. And she will pull you down with her.

(LIBITINA offers him the torch.)

Are you a man of faith or not?

(DRACO accepts the torch.)

DRACO

Tell me what I need to do.

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IV

Scene 3

SETTING: The physician's chambers in
Debilisium; the road to Keely; the
prison cell.

AT RISE: BRONA is unwell.

VOICE

The night the moon hid her face from the sky,
The demons skittered out of the dark
Like roaches after the light's gone shy.

VOICE

The moon, she knew how the night could plunder
And had to look away,

VOICE

Her gentle eyes blurred with tears
That dripped into the inky skies.

VOICE

Manea wiped his brow.
Tired, carrying souls all the way down.

(BRONA sits with CORNELIUS,
bent over with coughing. The
hand kerchief she uses is
bloody. We see the tree from
ALTHEA in the corner.)

CORNELIUS

Lady, you must try to breathe.

BRONA

(coughing all the while)
Sorry—maybe I'll just try—harder. TO BREATHE.

CORNELIUS

Breathe in this, it will help calm the lungs.

(ALTHEA enters.)

ALTHEA

Cornelius? I was sent to you.

CORNELIUS
Her Majesty is unwell.

BRONA
Bad, just-say it-bad.

CORNELIUS
You sent this plant?

ALTHEA
Yes.

CORNELIUS
You know of healing. Examine her.

BRONA
No.

CORNELIUS
Majesty, she may know this illness.

ALTHEA
Lady, may I?

(BRONA shakes her head. SHE
seizes into another coughing
fit, calmed by CORNELIUS.)

May I?

(BRONA nods. ALTHEA begins to
examine her, the hand
kerchief. LIBITINA enters, as
a VOICE.)

VOICE (LIBITINA)
The goddess of death hiked her skirts
And climbed up into life,
With bloody boots and raven hair
Unraveling rapturous shrouds.

(Enter TENANTIUS with two
soldiers, carrying the
torch.)

VOICE
And all was in place to set the unknowing ablaze,
And smolder with ash those shouldering shame.

TENANTIUS

Prepare to strike up the / fire.

ALTHEA

She's on fire.

TENANTIUS

You must move as shadows to Keely.

ALTHEA

Do you have any elderflower?

CORNELIUS

Yes, here.

(ALTHEA and CORNELIUS go
through her ingredients,
ALTHEA pulling various things
out.)

VOICE (LIBITINA)

Before death can take,
She leaves this offering.

(LIBITINA falls out of the
VOICE, and PISANIO catches
her. HE walks her into the
space.)

PISANIO

Physician, it's time.

LIBITINA

My water's broken.

TENANTIUS

We are past the river. / Ride swiftly.

CORNELIUS

Breathe, my Lady.

PISANIO

(to CORNELIUS)

She's in more pain than she lets on.

CORNELIUS

Althea.

ALTHEA

I'm at your service.

SOLDIER 1

Just beyond that pass.

SOLDIER 2

I hear them.

SOLDIER 1

Don't fear. We will succeed.

SOLDIER 2

That is what I fear.

(As the attention shifts to
LIBITINA, BRONA slips from
the room.)

VOICE (BRONA)

The Queen had to see the wretched ones,
To know if they spoke truly.
To know that their voices still spoke
Like skipping rocks.

SOLDIER 1

The watch; be still.

(Silence. BRONA creeps into
the prison, slowly.)

BRONA

My poor kinsmen. Where do you sleep?

(nothing)

Where do you -lay?

(more coughing)

The air is sour. I fear I've caught your sick breath in my
throat. I do feel as wretched as you.

(Silence.)

Are you honest? Do I wear a hand-me-down crown? Rich in
empty promise?

(starts to see the two
prisoners, still)

My kinsmen. You sleep deeply. I never can sleep. Never
chase the waves into that dark oblivion, free of crawling

and swimming things. Crabs do scuttle in my skull when I lay.

(lowers herself)

Can I-lay with you?

(As BRONA settles among the prisoners, she finds they are both dead.)

BRONA

Dead?

VOICE

Dead and gone, Lady.

BRONA

How? How?

(she touches their hair, and whispers)

Rest-rest-rest-rest-rest-rest-rest-rest-rest-rest /
rest-rest-rest-rest-rest...

(BRONA continues under her breath after she is cut off.)

ALTHEA

You are a warrior. Stay with me.

LIBITINA

Warriors die on the field.

CORNELIUS

It feels like dying until it's over, now push.

LIBITINA

Pisano-

PISANIO

Ay, my Lady.

LIBITINA

Find-

(a groan of pain)

Tenantius.

CORNELIUS

Push and that's an order Libitina.

BRONA

Rest—rest—rest—rest—rest—rest / rest—rest—rest—rest—rest...

LIBITINA

BRING TENANTIUS NOW.

(PISANIO runs off.)

SOLDIER 1

Now.

SOLDIER 2

May the gods forgive us.

BRONA

Rest now.

(The SOLDIERS light the
village ablaze. Clamorous
sound.)

LIBITINA

Choose the child.

CORNELIUS

We still will try—

LIBITINA

Slay the lion to save the cub.

ALTHEA

Give me your hand.

LIBITINA

Where is she?

ALTHEA

The General is on her way, I'm sure.

CORNELIUS

She's already lost a lot of blood, I need you right behind
me to close the wound.

ALTHEA

Yes. Libitina—

LIBITINA

Save—the baby.

ALTHEA

The gods will remember the sacrifice.

LIBITINA

You know of sacrifice too.

ALTHEA

No, not like this.

LIBITINA

You will sacrifice all. Tonight.

SOLDIER 1

The fire's spreading, run.

SOLDIER 2

It's finished.

SOLDIER 1

Run, now!

ALTHEA

No, Lady.

LIBITINA

Goodbye to all.

ALTHEA

I will give the General your goodbye.

LIBITINA

You, you say goodbye. All you know dies with me.

CORNELIUS

Althea.

ALTHEA

All I... what are you...

CORNELIUS

Althea.

ALTHEA

Ready.

CORNELIUS

My Lady. Breathe. Your child comes.

(CORNELIUS cuts into her, and
LIBITINA screams.)

BRONA

Sleep. Sleep.

(rises)

Without eyes watching or kings pacing. The sour air has
taken you up.

(A baby cries. CORNELIUS and
ALTHEA finish the delivery.)

(BRONA sinks into VOICE,
turns and sees the bed.)

VOICE (BRONA)

The blood.

The blood seeping
Over the bed.
She came like this
In a dream.

Here she leaves
A stain of death,
With all of us caught
In between.

ALTHEA

I can't stop the bleeding it's too much—

CORNELIUS

The boy lives.

ALTHEA

Cornelius help.

CORNELIUS

He breathes and cries.

ALTHEA

She's dying—

CORNELIUS

She's already dead. She cannot survive this.

ALTHEA

She's here, her spirit still close to us.

CORNELIUS

She's gone Althea. There's one here we can still help.

(CORNELIUS hands ALTHEA the baby, and continues working. PISANIO and TENANTIUS run in.)

TENANTIUS

Libitina! Where is...

PISANIO

She was across the... I couldn't find her.

TENANTIUS

Gods.

PISANIO

My Lady—

TENANTIUS

No. No no no.

(TENANTIUS grieves. SHE holds LIBITINA's face, moves about her, falls to her knees in loss. All ALTHEA can do is stand, hold the baby. PISANIO is struck still, horrified.)

TENANTIUS

(to CORNELIUS)

You gave up on her.

CORNELIUS

She made her sacrifice.

TENANTIUS

She may have lived.

ALTHEA

She said goodbye. To you.

(Beat.)

TENANTIUS

This child is born an orphan.

PISANIO

A girl or boy?

ALTHEA

Boy.

PISANIO

Let me hold him.

(does)

Posthumous. He'll be called Posthumous. Wear the name with pride, little cub.

(TENANTIUS removes her own sword and lays it across LIBITINA's chest. ALTHEA follows PISANIO and the baby, her hand floating to her own stomach.)

(The air changes. LIBITINA locks eyes with ALTHEA, holds her there.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IVScene 4

SETTING: DRACO and ALTHEA's guest chamber,
Debilisium.

AT RISE: DRACO is kneeling, praying, and not
okay.

VOICE

(to DRACO)

These hands can sculpt mountains
And carve canyons
And pluck stones from the deep earth's purple.

VOICE

These hands labored for the stones
That built you brick by brick.
Sculpting of this rock a temple.

VOICE

The temple of your body
Overlooks the valley of death.

DRACO

Make me Your temple... / I will not stray into the valley.

VOICE

The rain will tumble down,
The floods will seep up,
But these cannot uproot
A temple built on rock.

DRACO

Make me strong / in You..

VOICE

And the sky will unfurl wind from its belly;
The storm will strike
The steeple rising high,
But these cannot sway
A temple built on rock.

VOICE

But the fires are coming.

VOICE (ALTHEA'S MOTHER)

The fire has come already.

VOICE

Your spark of faith—

VOICE

Your spirit on fire has caught fire the plains.

VOICE

Forgive me. I did it for you, / to serve you.

VOICE (MOTHER)

The perilous fires—

VOICE

Are hungry for feasting.

VOICE

Starved for justice.

VOICE (MOTHER)

They will consume / us—

VOICE

Consume those with faith dried up.

DRACO

Please save them.

VOICE (MOTHER)

Save our lives, not our deaths.

DRACO

I'm / sorry.

VOICE

And the fire will growl,
Insatiable still.

VOICE

Growing more famished
The more that it takes.

(The VOICE lines begin
overlapping, slowly building
a cacophony around DRACO,

making him smaller and
smaller.)

VOICE

(this voice repeats this line
over and over, under the
following lines)

It burns and it burns and it burns even now,
Swallowing homes, swallowing groans.

VOICE

The valley of death is ablaze with the loss.

DRACO

No, no I did it for their souls. To / save them in
martyrdom.

VOICE

The stones are slipping down sandy terrain.

DRACO

Rome cast down Keely. / You cast down Keely.

VOICE

And the fire sweeps over us,
Crackling low,
As you feel the fire seep through the floorboards.

VOICE

The whole temple creaks as the foundation gives.
Swallows the spark that birthed flame.

DRACO

Though I walk / through the valley of death..

VOICE

And the stone walls now tumbling,
Dust spraying and crumbling,
Smoke billows its way up the steeple.

DRACO

Though I walk / through the valley..

(The cacophony builds to a
peak. DRACO covers his ears.)

VOICE (MOTHER)

Do not be afraid,
If your soul will rise through the smoke.

DRACO

Leave me. LEAVE ME.

VOICE (LIBITINA)

They are lying to you.
Wash yourself clean of this darkness.

VOICE

Purge yourself of her darkness.

VOICE (LIBITINA)

Or you will burn beyond recognition.

(The swarm of noise sweeps
out of the room like air
escaping a balloon. DRACO is
left alone. ALTHEA enters,
her hands bloody from working
with the physician.)

DRACO

Althea.

(HE embraces her, still
shaken. SHE slowly returns
the embrace, joining him on
the floor.)

Oh, God. Oh God.

ALTHEA

Are... are you alright?

DRACO

Yes. Yes, it will be alright.

ALTHEA

(reaching to feel the
temperature of his forehead)

Are you sure you're...?

DRACO

Your hands. They're covered in blood.

ALTHEA

Yes. Yes they are.

(The two sit in silence for a long time, so exhausted. DRACO pulls the wash bucket over and begins cleaning her hands. After an eternity of silence...)

I'm sorry.

DRACO

What?

ALTHEA

I am sorry for blaming you.

DRACO

VOICE (LIBITINA)
(unseen, unheard by ALTHEA)
Cleanse her of the darkness.

(The silence continues. DRACO carefully finishes cleaning her hands.)

I need to go back. To help Cornelius.

ALTHEA

Alright.

DRACO

(ALTHEA starts to exit.)

Draco?

ALTHEA

Yes?

DRACO

Thank you.

ALTHEA

(ALTHEA exits. DRACO remains on his knees.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IV

Scene 5

SETTING: The nursery, Debilisium.

AT RISE: BRONA sits in the nursery, holding baby Guiderius. She looks skeletal.

VOICE

One tree cannot keep a fire burning.

BRONA

(sung)

*Lullaby, lullaby
Child of mine
Lullaby, lullaby
Washed up in the brine.*

*Lullaby, lullaby
Never enough time
Lullaby, lullaby
To spend with your shrine.*

*Lullaby, lullaby
Lulla-lullaby.
Lullaby, lullaby
La, la la la, lullaby.*

(BELARIUS enters.)

BELARIUS

Lady! My Queen, are you alright? Let me call Cornelius—

BRONA

You'll call no one.

BELARIUS

You don't look well.

BRONA

I feel taller than the waves of Neptune and brighter than the rays of Sol.

BELARIUS

(retrieving a washcloth and
pitcher)

Let me cool your face...

BRONA

Should you hold my cheek it would sear.

BELARIUS

My Lady...

(kneeling as if to kiss her)

Brona.

BRONA

You don't love me.

BELARIUS

What?

BRONA

You. Never. Loved me.

(Beat.)

Not for a day. Not for a moment. Maybe in a moment, maybe you loved one kiss at a time, one stroke of my leg at a time, but not me.

BELARIUS

I think the fever is on you.

BRONA

The fever. Or perhaps my uterus has wandered to my mind. Or I'm starved of loving and sleep and completely mad.

BELARIUS

A fever. You are ill.

BRONA

Why didn't you tell me?

BELARIUS

If I have kept something from you, my Queen, it would be for your peace of mind.

BRONA

I opened it myself and saw. Spiders wove silver drapes over empty ground and over walls ashamed of their nakedness.

BELARIUS

Tell me where and I'll explain—

BRONA

In the vault. Debilisium is penniless. She has nothing to her name but this ring, emptily gifted.

(takes it off)

The treasury's empty.

BELARIUS

I didn't know it was so dire.

BRONA

(to the baby)

This bad man promised to guide your Mama, to teach her. Noble, wise Belarius held her hand so he could read over her shoulder.

BELARIUS

You slander my love.

BRONA

You're using me.

BELARIUS

Let me hold the baby.

BRONA

You used me. I want to hear you say it.

(Enter EURIPHILE in a flush.)

EURIPHILE

Belarius.

(sees BRONA)

My Queen.

(EURIPHILE goes to take the baby, but BRONA holds him close.)

BRONA

He's my son not yours.

EURIPHILE

Belarius, my Lord, can I serve you?

BELARIUS & BRONA

No.

EURIPHILE

Allow me to escort you out.

(goes to him, then hushed)

The whole castle is searching for you. You need to hide.

BRONA

Belarius does not want to go out.

BELARIUS

Why?

BRONA

(to the baby)

Belarius is a traitor.

BELARIUS

Brona, what is this about? The silver? I would never steal, from you—

BRONA

Shhhh... No, no no.

BELARIUS

Cymbeline made me swear not to tell you. You cannot name me a *traitor* for that, for being *loyal* if anything—

BRONA

(laughs)

You swore? You didn't tell me because you swore?

EURIPHILE

Sir, I think it best if I take the Queen back to her chambers.

BELARIUS

I am not a traitor.

BRONA

You are a traitor because you sent a letter to Rome. You swore to keep the truth about the silver from me, but you had no problem telling them.

(Beat.)

BELARIUS

I don't understand.

BRONA

I do, isn't that marvelous? I had your correspondence watched after I saw our barren treasury, the poor old maid. And then I understood.

BELARIUS

That's a lie.

BRONA

I thought I was doing the best I could for Debilisium, learning from you. But I was feeding you secrets you feed to our tyrants. And now you will be punished.

EURIPHILE

You have to leave. You'll be captured.

BRONA

And executed. Your treachery has been proclaimed for all.

BELARIUS

I wrote no letter to Rome.

BRONA

Yes, you did. It's in your hand.

(Gives him a letter from her pocket. BELARIUS rips it open. HE looks to EURIPHILE.)

EURIPHILE

And the King believes you?

BRONA

Every word. But he is more foolish than me.

EURIPHILE

My Queen, I will call the guard to arrest this man.

(BRONA goes into an awful coughing fit, but she's so weak. EURIPHILE takes the baby from her arms as BRONA heaves. All BELARIUS can do is stare at EURIPHILE.)

EURIPHILE

(in a low voice)

Belarius go into my quarters there; there is a bag of provisions under the laundry.

(to BRONA)

My Lady.

(BRONA coughs blood onto the floor; she cannot catch her breath. EURIPHILE tries to prop her up.)

BELARIUS

She needs the physician.

EURIPHILE

Find my brown apron, in the front pocket you'll find silver.

BELARIUS

You're a traitor.

EURIPHILE

Am I? The letter was in *your* writing.

(BRONA convulses, weakly now.)

BELARIUS

Yours.

EURIPHILE

No one will believe that.

(The QUEEN dies.)

EURIPHILE

Majesty. Majesty!

(she's gone)

Oh God. God save her soul.

BELARIUS

Who are you?

(We hear sounds of the search for BELARIUS, loud voices and running steps; they pass.)

EURIPHILE

You need to go.

BELARIUS

Do you care for me?

EURIPHILE

You need to go—

BELARIUS

Oh *Jupiter*. Oh great... Oh my—

EURIPHILE

Christ Belarius, move.

(EURIPHILE retrieves the bag
and the silver from
offstage.)

BELARIUS

I thought when I spent time with you / there was something
new.

EURIPHILE

Go. Before they find you.

BELARIUS

You wanted from me—

EURIPHILE

Exactly what you wanted from her. We're the same. Are you
satisfied?

BELARIUS

Did you care for me at all.

EURIPHILE

I'm your servant. Now your savior, so take my offer.
(presenting the bag)

BELARIUS

Do you care for me at all.

(BELARIUS picks up the baby,
swaddled in the chair and
crying.)

EURIPHILE

No.

BELARIUS

At all?

(SHE shakes her head. HE
steps closer.)

BELARIUS

At all?

EURIPHILE

Stop.

BELARIUS

(so close their lips almost
meet)

At all?

EURIPHILE

You loved her, didn't you? In a way.

BELARIUS

Oh heavens.

(seeing BRONA laying)

Heavens...

EURIPHILE

She was dead before she set foot in here. Caught the
sickness.

BELARIUS

Go with me.

EURIPHILE

No.

BELARIUS

It's not safe for you anymore. You've been found out.

EURIPHILE

You've been found out.

BELARIUS

For now. We were being careful Euriphile, but we weren't
perfect. Someone will come forward, say they saw us
together and 'isn't that strange.' And 'how long has she

been here;' 'where was she before?' You'll be caught; and you'll be killed.

EURIPHILE

We were careful.

BELARIUS

Do you want to stay here? Why stay?

EURIPHILE

(taking the baby from his arms)

I have people to take care of.

(BELARIUS exits, quickly returns with the sleeping toddler ARVIGARUS.)

EURIPHILE

What are you doing?

BELARIUS

We're escaping. And the children are with the only people who love them.

(Beat.)

EURIPHILE

The King...

BELARIUS

Is useless and we both know it.

EURIPHILE

We'll need nursery supplies.

(SHE stuffs various things into a sack, including some parchment and ink.)

BELARIUS

Euriphile. Against the will of my mind, spirit, and country, I love you.

EURIPHILE

Follow me.

(The patched family flees
into the night.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT VScene 1

SETTING: The same, moments later.

AT RISE: BRONA rises as VOICE.

BRONA/VOICE

Sick blood chewed through her veins
And chased the spirit right out of her.
Her throat was too filled with insects to
Let her own death speech pass through.

She might have, with her lungs' last heaves,
Tell of a death come to bathe her.
Bathe her of stringent eyes that combed her hair still
And fretful hands wringing rosy around her.

She might have asked the King
If he was afraid that she was weak
Or afeared she was strong.

Or taken him by the throat
And in a voice most dark, most prophetic
Let a sound out raspy and full of knowing,
"Herald! Our bed is filled with blood.
"And you've killed me with your crying."

She really did lay like that on the floor.
Growing cold until sunrise found her.

(BRONA collapses back onto
the floor, CYMBELINE catching
her before hitting the
ground. HE weeps. CORNELIUS
stands by.)

CORNELIUS

Sire you cannot touch her.

CYMBELINE

Where were you.

CORNELIUS

Libitina was in labor. But please, you cannot—

CYMBELINE

You couldn't save her either.

CORNELIUS

No, Sire.

CYMBELINE

You could have helped her.

CORNELIUS

Sire, I do not know this sickness—

CYMBELINE

You knew she was sick.

CORNELIUS

There were two others found dead, in the dungeon. With the same symptoms.

CYMBELINE

She is not a prisoner she is a Queen.

CORNELIUS

It is possible she caught / the same.

CYMBELINE

Why was she in the dungeon? My wife would not be in the dungeon.

CORNELIUS

Nine more people around the castle have been reported dead this morning, and I fear it is all one cause.

CYMBELINE

My beautiful bride..

CORNELIUS

Your Majesty. I must advise you not to touch her body.

CYMBELINE

Get out of my sight.

CORNELIUS

Please, Sire, I don't know how to treat you if you—

CYMBELINE

Lady Libitina is dead? You killed them both. Out of my sight.

(CORNELIUS exits briefly, bringing back TENANTIUS and several servants. They carry a shroud.)

TENANTIUS
(to the servants)
Wrap her body.

CYMBELINE
No.

TENANTIUS
Sire, I apologize. Wrap her body.

CYMBELINE
Get out!

(TENANTIUS and another pull CYMBELINE up; he fights weakly. The others take BRONA from his arms and wrap her body into the cloth.)

SERVANT
(to CORNELIUS)
Outside the gates, with the others?

CYMBELINE
No.

CORNELIUS
Outside the gates.

CYMBELINE
No, she will have a proper burial.

TENANTIUS
Sire—

CYMBELINE
I don't care. Lay her before the tomb. Let holy priestesses circle her and let the kingdom come to weep and dry their

eyes with her hair. At sunrise next we will lay her to rest, and where she is laid, we will bless my daughter.

CORNELIUS

Sire...

CYMBELINE

I command you. Let it be done.

TENANTIUS

Yes, my Liege.

(CORNELIUS and the servants
exit, carrying BRONA off.)

CYMBELINE

What news of my sons?

TENANTIUS

I have sent horses north, east, south, and west in search of Belarius.

CYMBELINE

My sons.

TENANTIUS

Their nurse has fled too. She may have taken the boys.

CYMBELINE

Why?

TENANTIUS

The fates are punishing us. Death by our hands is punished with death in our hearts.

CYMBELINE

Double your search.

TENANTIUS

Ay, my Liege.

CYMBELINE

I will take my daughter to her young mother's grave. She will be young unendingly.

(END OF SCENE)

ACT V

Scene 2

SETTING: The convent.

AT RISE: The SISTERS are performing, well.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

(performing Sisinnius)

Soldiers, where are these impudent hussies who are to be put to the torture? Keep Irena back, and bring the others here.

SISTER 4 (SOLDIER)

Why is one to be treated differently?

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

She is young.

SISTER 4 (SOLDIER)

We have brought the girls you asked for.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

Agape, and you, Chionia, take my advice.

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)

And if we do, what then?

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

You will sacrifice to the gods.

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)

We offer a perpetual sacrifice of praise to the true God. You have no power over us and can never compel us to sacrifice to demons.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

Do not be obstinate. Sacrifice to the gods, or by order of the Emperor Diocletian I must put you to death.

SISTER 3 (CHIONIA)

Your Emperor has ordered you to put us to death, and you must obey, as we scorn his decree.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

Come, soldiers! Seize these blasphemers and fling them alive into the flames.

SISTER 4 (SOLDIER)

We will build a pyre at once. The fierceness of the fire will soon put an end to their insolence.

SISTER 2 (AGAPE)

O Lord, we know Thy power! It would not be anything strange or new if the fire forgot its nature and obeyed Thee. But we are weary of this world, and we implore Thee to break the bonds that chain our souls, and to let our bodies be consumed that we may rejoice with Thee in heaven.

SISTER 4 (SOLDIER)

O wonderful, most wonderful! Their spirits have left their bodies, but there is no sign of any hurt. Neither their hair, nor their garments, much less their bodies, have been touched by the flames!

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

Irena, take warning from the fate of your sisters, and tremble, for if you follow their example you will perish.

(EURIPHILE appears, not in the convent, but in presence.)

EURIPHILE (IRENA)

I long to follow their example, and to die, that I may share their eternal joy.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

Yield, yield!

EURIPHILE (IRENA)

I will yield to no man who persuades me to sin.

SISTER 1 (SISINNIUS)

If you persist in your refusal, I shall not grant you a swift death. I shall eke it out, and every day I shall increase and renew your torments.

EURIPHILE (IRENA)

The greater my pain, the greater my glory!

(END OF SCENE)

ACT VScene 3

Setting: CYMBELINE's throne room,
Debilisium, the same day as BRONA's
death.

At Rise: CYMBELINE, TENANTIUS, ALTHEA, and
DRACO, are gathered. The place
BELARIUS would stand is cavernous.
CORNELIUS speaks to the King.
PISANIO is close by watching. ALL
are exhausted.

CORNELIUS
Lady Althea and I have been working tirelessly toward a
remedy.

CYMBELINE
How close.

CORNELIUS
Lady?

ALTHEA
This sickness looks familiar to me, similar to one I have
treated in my people.

CORNELIUS
We'll treat it with the same remedy then?

ALTHEA
I am trying, but I won't make promises. I'm working from
what I know, and I believe we might be close.

CORNELIUS
There is a patient with me now. I will try, your Majesty.

CYMBELINE
Go.

CORNELIUS
Pisanio, your aid?

(PISANIO nods. They bow and
exit.)

CYMBELINE

The company, Tenantius—

TENANTIUS

Is ready to deploy Sire.

ALTHEA

General, I cannot thank you enough for your support. It is my hope, when Keely emerges stronger, that we repay you tenfold for your act of selfless loyalty.

TENANTIUS

There is no thanks required for my duty, Lady.

ALTHEA

And King. Your love for your family, your wife and children, brings my tears close to spilling. I recognize your love, mirrored in my own family. And the sacrifice you make for mine will not be forgotten. Keely, and all of Britannia thanks you in striving for peace.

CYMBELINE

Deploy your company, Tenantius.

TENANTIUS

Ay, Sire.

(TENANTIUS is prepared to part when the ROMANS storm in.)

CYMBELINE

My honored guests.

ROMAN 1

The proud *King* sits in his throne. How comfortable, King? Quite content?

CYMBELINE

Speak to the purpose.

ROMAN 1

The morning brings news singing.

ALTHEA

Last night forbid us from our beds; excuse us for not joining in song.

ROMAN 1

Cymbeline, we depart today.

CYMBELINE

I thank the gods.

ROMAN 2

With silver to pay for the burials / of our fallen.

CYMBELINE

No. No you will not.

ROMAN 1

You must have riches enough in your vault now, short of barbarians trying to skim its cream.

TENANTIUS

My soldiers leave in the hour. There will be no ransom paid before battle is fought.

ROMAN 1

There will be neither.

(throws letter to CYMBELINE)

Keely has been burned to the ground.

CYMBELINE

Keely.

ROMAN 2

The barbarians grew tired of waiting, it seems.

ROMAN 1

Easier to bury the city and take what they want, when the defenders move as slugs.

ALTHEA

Survivors.

ROMAN 1

Your men Tenantius are the / survivors here.

ALTHEA

Survivors in Keely. There must be survivors.

ROMAN 1

The whole city's been scalded by deadly fire, Lady. I imagine a handful of lucky Picts ran home to their blanket forts north of the wall.

(Exit DRACO.)

TENANTIUS

The fates have decided; my troupes stay to protect you tonight Sire.

ROMAN 1

We are ready for our condolences.

ALTHEA

Your condolences.

ROMAN 1

For the burial of our fallen men and women.

ALTHEA

How many? Five? Six??

CYMBELINE

Go back to Rome.

ROMAN 2

Silver first.

ALTHEA

Six men.

TENANTIUS

The culprits are dead. My soldiers you called treasonous, murderous, the ones who attacked you are dead, none left to execute. There is your justice.

CYMBELINE

You are free to return to Rome.

ROMAN 1

The Emperor will be most interested.

CYMBELINE

I'm certain.

ALTHEA

(to the ROMANs)

You abandoned the wall and left us exposed. An entire city has paid for *six men*.

ROMAN 1

I once saw your city. Keely, you call it. I admit I longed to take it into the arms of the empire. There is not much left to hold.

(Exit ROMANs.)

CYMBELINE

I would like to see my daughter.

TENANTIUS

Ay, Sire. I will call off the deployment.

ALTHEA

How are we too late.

(Exit TENANTIUS, without making eye contact with ALTHEA.)

All lost.

CYMBELINE

I...

(can't find the words)

I... Excuse me.

(Exit CYMBELINE. We are left with a devastated ALTHEA. Something flicks on—there is a rage mounting. SHE bolts from the room, and we follow her. We follow her all the way to her and DRACO's guest chambers. HE is waiting, filling a nearly full basin with water. HE does not look up when she approaches.)

ALTHEA

YOU DID NOTHING. NOTHING.

(HE continues.)

Do you feel nothing? Can nothing reach your heart except judgement?

DRACO

Get in.

ALTHEA

You have nothing at all to say to me.

DRACO

We've made the gravest mistake.

ALTHEA

'We.' 'We' have. What have we done.

DRACO

(kneeling by the basin)

Take off your dress.

ALTHEA

I'd sooner take out my eyes.

DRACO

It's clear now, Althea.

ALTHEA

Get up. Please, get up.

DRACO

I've broken a promise. And it's cursed us.

ALTHEA

GET UP.

DRACO

I swore to bring you to God. And he knows that I've lied.
I've failed him, and failed you.

ALTHEA

I'm going home. I'm going home to my city to douse the fire
with my own grief.

DRACO

My wife, my unlawful wife, come here.

(HE reaches out a hand in a
way that would be inviting.)

ALTHEA

Are you unfazed? Do you know how many lives...

DRACO

Rome did not interfere.

ALTHEA

No one did. / Exactly, no one did.

DRACO

Rome is guided by God. If they did not interfere, it is the will of the Father. I didn't realize...

ALTHEA

I'm leaving. / Tonight.

DRACO

I didn't realize until I spoke with General Tenantius.

(ALTHEA freezes.)

ALTHEA

What.

DRACO

Come, get in.

ALTHEA

When did you speak with Tenantius.

DRACO

Come, to me.

ALTHEA

WHEN.

DRACO

Come into the water and you'll see.

(Slowly, ALTHEA steps into the basin.)

ALTHEA

When.

DRACO

Down into it.

(ALTHEA sinks down until SHE
is seated, facing him.)

ALTHEA

Tell me when you spoke with Tenantius.

DRACO

Before He sent the plague.

ALTHEA

What did you talk about.

DRACO

Keely.

(ALTHEA is almost shaking.)

ALTHEA

You talked about Keely. How?

DRACO

Rome cast down Keely. Doesn't it make sense?

ALTHEA

What did she say about Keely?

DRACO

They've been saved. Consumed with fire like martyrs at the
stake. And I prayed for their souls all night. And God will
have mercy on them.

ALTHEA

You knew.

DRACO

I prayed their pagan souls be forgiven, and they will live
now in Heaven.

ALTHEA

You knew. *Tenantius* knew. Oh gods... OH!

(at her limit)

Who else. WHO ELSE.

DRACO

The dark lady.

ALTHEA

Libitina?

DRACO

You helped care for her despite that. I thought that was beautiful.

(Enter LIBITINA, as a VOICE.)

VOICE (LIBITINA)

You say goodbye. All that you know dies with me.

ALTHEA

This is mad.

(DRACO takes her by the shoulders, suddenly tall.)

DRACO

You are my last to save. I will baptize you, and He will be satisfied.

ALTHEA

Let go of me.

DRACO

The curse of wickedness will be shed like autumn leaves, and we will find love, Althea.

(DRACO presses HER into the water. ALTHEA fights.)

ALTHEA

(calling between gasps for air)

LET. GO.

DRACO

I baptize you, in the name of the Father...
(pushes her under)

And the son...

(pushes her again)

ALTHEA

HELP! HELP—

(DRACO wrestles her under the water for a dangerously long

time. SHE fights, but seems
to grow weaker.)

DRACO

And the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Suddenly silence. MOTHER
enters and begins softly
singing BRONA's lullaby
song.)

MOTHER

*Lullaby, lullaby
Child of mine
Lullaby, lullaby
Washed up in the brine.*

*Lullaby, lullaby
Never enough time
Lullaby, lullaby
To spend with your shrine.*

(DRACO freezes. ALTHEA is
slowly rising to watch her
MOTHER. We see PISANIO
enter.)

*Lullaby, lullaby
Lulla-lullaby.
Lullaby, lullaby
La, la la la, lullaby.*

(MOTHER gives her a sign of
blessing. Time resumes, and
ALTHEA wrestles free of
DRACO.)

DRACO

My love, be blessed—

(ALTHEA strikes him, hard.
DRACO stumbles, hitting his
head on the tub. HE staggers,
and ALTHEA pushes his head
into the water. HIS arms
flail, but she is
unrelenting. The life leaves

his body. When his body goes
limp, LIBITINA and MOTHER
exit.)

ALTHEA

Oh... Oh gods... Oh...

(PISANIO is frozen in horror,
watching. ALTHEA finally sees
him.)

I... He tried to... I could have died... Please-

PISANIO

Lady. It is a shame the sickness reached him before you
perfected the remedy.

ALTHEA

I... I haven't...

PISANIO

He will likely be bedridden all day and found dead in the
morning.

(Long beat.)

ALTHEA

Why?

PISANIO

You saved the baby Posthumous when Libitina was lost.

ALTHEA

(to herself)

Libitina... She... oh gods.

PISANIO

Please help Cornelius. Finish the medicine.

ALTHEA

I can't.

PISANIO

You will. She needs you.

(HE starts to exit.)

Or maybe I saw something here.

(PISANIO exits, leaving
ALTHEA with DRACO's body. She

pulls him from the water and
lays him out, softly drying
his face.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT VScene 4

SETTING: The countryside, that night. A cold wind stirs.

AT RISE: EURIPHILE and BELARIUS walk, each holding a young prince.

BELARIUS
Only a bit further, Arviragus. I know a place we can sleep for the night.

EURIPHILE
I have a place.

BELARIUS
Close to here?

EURIPHILE
No. Another day's journey.

BELARIUS
We need to sleep, to get out of the wind a bit. Here, here's the grove I thought of.

EURIPHILE
I could walk all night.

BELARIUS
Let's rest.
(sits, cradling the toddler who is out cold)
We are covered by night, and more alone than ever.

(BELARIUS lays the child in his lap, and takes a blanket from the sack.)

EURIPHILE
We need to keep moving.

BELARIUS
Look at him sleep. He has no idea.
(Beat.)
We could live like this. A family.

(EURIPHILE gently lays the
baby with BELARIUS.)

EURIPHILE

You could.

BELARIUS

Euriphile. We're freed from that place. And we've freed
these beautiful boys, who for the first time sleep under
the stars, laying with love to blanket them.

EURIPHILE

Sleep then, I'll keep watch for a bit.

BELARIUS

No, you sleep first.

EURIPHILE

I can't. Please, sleep.

(BELARIUS drifts off, with
his arms protectively around
the children.)

VOICE

Euriphile felt a fist in her throat,
An emberous coal slide down
And talked to one she had not in years.

VOICE (EURIPHILE)

'God,' she said,
With a voice like crow feathers,
And words pressing the coal deeper down,
'God. Please forgive me.'

(EURIPHILE removes the
nursery things from her bag
and sets them near BELARIUS.
She slides her hand into his
bag and takes an apple.)

VOICE

To Wales. To the convent expectant,
With money in her name
And robes that would hide her even from herself.

VOICE

Was it to protect your daughter?

(SHE considers responding.
SHE does not. Exit
EURIPHILE.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT V

Scene 5

SETTING: The tomb at sunrise. It is a funeral and a blessing of new life.

AT RISE: BRONA's body lays before the tomb. The baby princess is swaddled in her father's arms.

CYMBELINE

(sung)

*Safe passage over the river wide
A coin upon my dearest treasure, lie.*

TENANTIUS

You'll see my lover on the other side.

CYMBELINE

Don't turn back toward your daughter's cries.

ALL

*On the river wide
On the river wide, wide.
On the river wide
On the river wide, wide.*

ALTHEA

(to her own unborn child)

*When you leave this tomb of mine
And crawl into the tomb of a wide grey sky,
When you crown will I call you king of mine?
Or be taken from me in a Caesarian line?*

ALL

*To the river wide
On the river wide, wide.
On the river wide
On the river wide, wide.*

(BRONA is laid in the tomb.)

ALTHEA

*Outside these walls I will certainly die,
Follow my sisters who could not survive.
To stay here is to surrender my life.*

*Who holds the match for a fire,
Tell me who holds the match for a fire?*

ALL

*Oh the river wide
Oh the river wide, wide.
Oh the river wide
Oh the river wide, wide.*

(PISANIO comes to bow to
CYMBELINE, the baby
Posthumous in his arms. The
King kisses the babe on the
head, and blesses PISANIO.
While this happens, the
VOICES speak.)

VOICE (MOTHER)

*Our lady watched these men,
So loosely stitched together,
Torn up by the fates like old grain sacks.
Yet, these were the fortuitous survivors.*

VOICE (LIBITINA)

*Life wrapped its wings around them,
Whispering, 'You are chosen.'
'You are the ones who can stay.'*

VOICE (BRONA)

*The breeze reached fingers up her dress,
Grazing her belly starting to swell round,
But she felt only hot.*

VOICE (EURIPHILE)

*Hot tears simmering in her wells,
Hot breath steaming up her chest,
And hot blood pressing in her temples.*

VOICE (MOTHER)

She burned with us still.

VOICE (LIBITINA)

She burned with the cost.

VOICE (BRONA)

The cost of herself.

VOICE (EURIPHILE)

But she would pay.
She would molt into a smaller self
To be born up by life a while longer.

(The VOICES melt back into
the funeral party.)

ALTHEA

Are you ready to present your daughter?

CYMBELINE

I should be.

ALTHEA

But each muscle aches with the loss.

CYMBELINE

Yes.

ALTHEA

My mother would tell me grief is the feeling of each fiber
in you, each bone and vein and hair reaching for that soul
you've lost until they quiver with exhaustion. It can make
you sore.

CYMBELINE

I am so tired.

(ALTHEA gently takes his
hand, the VOICES watching.)

ALTHEA

Sleep will help.

CYMBELINE

No. I have terrible dreams.

(Beat.)

I don't know how you left your chamber.

ALTHEA

Sire?

CYMBELINE

How can you even stand? You've lost two homes. Keely, and
then Iomagain.

ALTHEA

I cannot close my eyes without seeing fire.

CYMBELINE

If only you'd gotten to Draco in time. Before the sickness consumed him.

ALTHEA

Yes. If only.

(CYMBELINE looks down at his daughter.)

CYMBELINE

She will be safe. With your remedy.

ALTHEA

I hope so, Majesty.

CYMBELINE

I am her only family.

ALTHEA

Your sons will be found.

CYMBELINE

She's motherless.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA

I'm going to have a child. Fatherless.

CYMBELINE

What?

ALTHEA

Eostre's truth.

CYMBELINE

My Lady...

ALTHEA

Althea, please.

CYMBELINE

Althea.

ALTHEA

We both will have much to learn. Of children. Forgiveness.
And love.

CYMBELINE

The gods are calling to me.

ALTHEA

What do you hear?

CYMBELINE

They show me what I've lost.

Right before me. Two children.

(touches ALTHEA's stomach)

Your son, and the babe Posthumous. Like the boys I've lost.

(HE does not hear her; HE is
in his own reality now.)

ALTHEA

Your boys will return.

CYMBELINE

And a mother to them. So beautiful.

ALTHEA

Sire...

CYMBELINE

Stay.

ALTHEA

Where?

CYMBELINE

Let Debilisium father this new life. And from you I'll
learn how to mother too.

ALTHEA

I couldn't.

CYMBELINE

I couldn't bear it otherwise. You've brought us healing,
hope. Please. Where else can you go?
Stay with me.

(ALTHEA is caught between.
SHE looks to the men who
still stand. SHE looks to the
women, the VOICES who could
not survive.)

VOICE (MOTHER)

(to the audience)

Did you hear it?
The breaking?

ALTHEA

Until you bid me leave.

(CYMBELINE kisses her hand.
ALTHEA gives a grateful
smile. CYMBELINE turns to
face 'the people,' and ALTHEA
sobers with what she's done.)

CYMBELINE

My people. I thank you for gathering under Saturn to bless
and meet my daughter, who's still but seen one cycle of the
moon. The moon should be bathed in blood as we are. My
Queen... and I... we chose the name Hermione to honor her with.
But I find that I cannot. Was she born well? She was born
into a bloody place with little, clean hands.

(presenting the baby)

She will be called Innogen. Of these dark days was she
innocent, and may her purity guide us to brighter places.

(The people begin to sing, a
continuation of *The River
Wide*. CYMBELINE softly takes
her hand. ALTHEA speaks with
us.)

VOICE (ALTHEA)

When they touched hands,
She felt his body open to her.
A crocus slowly waking,
Tipping toward the sun.

If she was the sun, she was a midnight sun,
The darkness so absolute around them,
That in flickering, she blinded him.

If she was sun, she was its smolder,
Its patient, low burn
That carried with her, from then on, a scorched heart.

If she was sun, she wrapped herself
In his celestial canopy,
To shade her Son,
So the King may look to them for day and night,
For rise and set,
And she may be keeper of his skies.

The sun cannot be burned.
The sun cannot be drowned.
You cannot banish your own life light.
And the sun is not killed by its
Bursting births of light,
But grows stronger by its own bake.

Our sun draws orbits round herself,
Not to be gazed at by thousands of eyes,
Each planet, moon, and comet blinking;

The sun does not need the audience of moons.
She sends them round her to keep watch.
Each meteor standing guard.
So when the fates crawl from the fathoms of far off stars
To corrupt her skies,
Bring her plagues ten,
Or infect her earthly womb,
She will see them coming,
Raise the snuffer in her fist
And cover her own raised eyes with a veil eternal—
And her death will be by her hand alone.

(END OF SCENE)

(END OF PLAY)