Ririro
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Cymbeline (Short Story)

Shakespeare

Cymbeline was the King of Britain. He had three children. The two sons were stolen away from him when they were quite little children, and he was left with only one daughter, Imogen. The King married a second time, and brought up Leonatus, the son of a dear friend, as Imogen's playfellow; and when Leonatus was old enough, Imogen secretly married him. This made the King and Queen very angry, and the King, to punish Leonatus, banished him from Britain.

Poor Imogen was nearly heart-broken at parting from Leonatus, and he was not less unhappy. For they were not only lovers and husband and wife, but they had been friends and comrades ever since they were quite little children. With many tears and kisses they said “Good-bye.” They promised never to forget each other, and that they would never care for anyone else as long as they lived.

“This diamond was my mother's, love,” said Imogen; “take it, my heart, and keep it as long as you love me.”

“Sweetest, fairest,” answered Leonatus, “wear this bracelet for my sake.”

“Ah!” cried Imogen, weeping, “when shall we meet again?”



And while they were still in each other's arms, the King came in, and Leonatus had to leave without more farewell.

When he was come to Rome, where he had gone to stay with an old friend of his father's, he spent his days still in thinking of his dear Imogen, and his nights in dreaming of her. One day at a feast some Italian and French noblemen were talking of their sweethearts, and swearing that they were the most faithful and honorable and beautiful ladies in the world. And a Frenchman reminded Leonatus how he had said many times that his wife Imogen was more fair, wise, and constant than any of the ladies in France.

“I say so still,” said Leonatus.

“She is not so good but that she would deceive,” said Iachimo, one of the Italian

nobles.

“She never would deceive,” said Leonatus.

“I wager,” said Iachimo, “that, if I go to Britain, I can persuade your wife to do whatever I wish, even if it should be against your wishes.”

“That you will never do,” said Leonatus. “I wager this ring upon my finger,” which was the very ring Imogen had given him at parting, “that my wife will keep all her vows to me, and that you will never persuade her to do otherwise.”

So Iachimo wagered half his estate against the ring on Leonatus's finger, and started forthwith for Britain, with a letter of introduction to Leonatus's wife. When he reached there he was received with all kindness; but he was still determined to win his wager.

He told Imogen that her husband thought no more of her, and went on to tell many cruel lies about him. Imogen listened at first, but presently perceived what a wicked person Iachimo was, and ordered him to leave her. Then he said--

“Pardon me, fair lady, all that I have said is untrue. I only told you this to see whether you would believe me, or whether you were as much to be trusted as your husband thinks. Will you forgive me?”

“I forgive you freely,” said Imogen.

“Then,” went on Iachimo, “perhaps you will prove it by taking charge of a trunk, containing a number of jewels which your husband and I and some other gentlemen have bought as a present for the Emperor of Rome.”

“I will indeed,” said Imogen, “do anything for my husband and a friend of my husband's. Have the jewels sent into my room, and I will take care of them.”



“It is only for one night,” said Iachimo, “for I leave Britain again to-morrow.”

So the trunk was carried into Imogen's room, and that night she went to bed and to sleep. When she was fast asleep, the lid of the trunk opened and a man got out. It was Iachimo. The story about the jewels was as untrue as the rest of the things he had said. He had only wished to get into her room to win his wicked wager. He looked about him and noticed the furniture, and then crept to the side of the bed where Imogen was asleep and took from her arm the gold bracelet which had been the parting gift of her husband. Then he crept back to the trunk, and next morning sailed for Rome.

When he met Leonatus, he said--

“I have been to Britain and I have won the wager, for your wife no longer thinks about you. She stayed talking with me all one night in her room, which is hung with tapestry and has a carved chimney-piece, and silver andirons in the shape of two winking Cupids.”

“I do not believe she has forgotten me; I do not believe she stayed talking with you in her room. You have heard her room described by the servants.”

“Ah!” said Iachimo, “but she gave me this bracelet. She took it from her arm. I see her yet. Her pretty action did outsell her gift, and yet enriched it too. She gave it me, and said she prized it once.”

“Take the ring,” cried Leonatus, “you have won; and you might have won my life as well, for I care nothing for it now I know my lady has forgotten me.”

And mad with anger, he wrote letters to Britain to his old servant, Pisanio, ordering him to take Imogen to Milford Haven, and to murder her, because she had forgotten him and given away his gift. At the same time he wrote to Imogen herself, telling her to go with Pisanio, his old servant, to Milford Haven, and that he, her husband, would be there to meet her.

Now when Pisanio got this letter he was too good to carry out its orders, and too wise to let them alone altogether. So he gave Imogen the letter from her husband, and started with her for Milford Haven. Before he left, the wicked Queen gave him a drink which, she said, would be useful in sickness. She hoped he would give it to Imogen, and that Imogen would die, and the wicked Queen's son could be King. For the Queen thought this drink was a poison, but really and

truly it was only a sleeping-draft.

When Pisanio and Imogen came near to Milford Haven, he told her what was really in the letter he had had from her husband.

“I must go on to Rome, and see him myself,” said Imogen.

And then Pisanio helped her to dress in boy's clothes, and sent her on her way, and went back to the Court. Before he went he gave her the drink he had had from the Queen.

Imogen went on, getting more and more tired, and at last came to a cave. Someone seemed to live there, but no one was in just then. So she went in, and as she was almost dying of hunger, she took some food she saw there, and had just done so, when an old man and two boys came into the cave. She was very much frightened when she saw them, for she thought that they would be angry with her for taking their food, though she had meant to leave money for it on the table. But to her surprise they welcomed her kindly. She looked very pretty in her boy's clothes and her face was good, as well as pretty.

“You shall be our brother,” said both the boys; and so she stayed with them, and helped to cook the food, and make things comfortable. But one day when the old man, whose name was Bellarius, was out hunting with the two boys, Imogen felt ill, and thought she would try the medicine Pisanio had given her. So she took it, and at once became like a dead creature, so that when Bellarius and the boys came back from hunting, they thought she was dead, and with many tears and funeral songs, they carried her away and laid her in the wood, covered with flowers.

They sang sweet songs to her, and strewed flowers on her, pale primroses, and the azure harebell, and eglantine, and furred moss, and went away sorrowful. No sooner had they gone than Imogen awoke, and not knowing how she came there, nor where she was, went wandering through the wood.



Now while Imogen had been living in the cave, the Romans had decided to attack Britain, and their army had come over, and with them Leonatus, who had grown sorry for his wickedness against Imogen, so had come back, not to fight with the Romans against Britain, but with the Britons against Rome. So as Imogen wandered alone, she met with Lucius, the Roman General, and took service with him as his page.

When the battle was fought between the Romans and Britons, Bellarius and his

two boys fought for their own country, and Leonatus, disguised as a British peasant, fought beside them. The Romans had taken Cymbeline prisoner, and old Bellarius, with his sons and Leonatus, bravely rescued the King. Then the Britons won the battle, and among the prisoners brought before the King were Lucius, with Imogen, Iachimo, and Leonatus, who had put on the uniform of a Roman soldier. He was tired of his life since he had cruelly ordered his wife to be killed, and he hoped that, as a Roman soldier, he would be put to death.

When they were brought before the King, Lucius spoke out--



“A Roman with a Roman's heart can suffer,” he said. “If I must die, so be it. This one thing only will I entreat. My boy, a Briton born, let him be ransomed. Never master had a page so kind, so duteous, diligent, true. He has done no Briton harm, though he has served a Roman. Save him, Sir.”

Then Cymbeline looked on the page, who was his own daughter, Imogen, in disguise, and though he did not recognize her, he felt such a kindness that he not only spared the boy's life, but he said--

“He shall have any boon he likes to ask of me, even though he ask a prisoner, the noblest taken.”

Then Imogen said, “The boon I ask is that this gentleman shall say from whom he got the ring he has on his finger,” and she pointed to Iachimo.

“Speak,” said Cymbeline, “how did you get that diamond?”

Then Iachimo told the whole truth of his villainy. At this, Leonatus was unable to contain himself, and casting aside all thought of disguise, he came forward, cursing himself for his folly in having believed Iachimo's lying story, and calling again and again on his wife whom he believed dead.

“Oh, Imogen, my love, my life!” he cried. “Oh, Imogen!



Then Imogen, forgetting she was disguised, cried out, “Peace, my lord--here, here!”

Leonatus turned to strike the forward page who thus interfered in his great trouble, and then he saw that it was his wife, Imogen, and they fell into each other's arms.

The King was so glad to see his dear daughter again, and so grateful to the man who had rescued him (whom he now found to be Leonatus), that he gave his

blessing on their marriage, and then he turned to Bellarius, and the two boys. Now Bellarius spoke--

“I am your old servant, Bellarius. You accused me of treason when I had only been loyal to you, and to be doubted, made me disloyal. So I stole your two sons, and see,--they are here!” And he brought forward the two boys, who had sworn to be brothers to Imogen when they thought she was a boy like themselves.

The wicked Queen was dead of some of her own poisons, and the King, with his three children about him, lived to a happy old age.

So the wicked were punished, and the good and true lived happy ever after. So may the wicked suffer, and honest folk prosper till the world's end.

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