

I-5

(Kurwenal exits. Brangäne, barely conscious, moves Upstage. Isolde, using all her strength to collect herself, walks slowly and with great dignity toward the couch and leans against the head of it as she watches the entryway. Tristan comes in and remains courteously at the entryway. Isolde, very upset, is lost in his gaze. Long silence)

T:
What is Madam's heart's desire?

I:
Surely you know what I desire.
Did not the fear I would fulfill it
keep you from coming here?

T:
Honor kept me away.

I:
Yet you showed little honor to me,
with blatant scorn
refusing all obedience
to my command.

T:
Obedience alone held me back.

I:
So then did your duty to your lord
call for the improper behavior
you show to his wife?

T:
Proper men, where I come from,
who bring brides to meet bridegrooms,
keep away from brides!

I:
And why is that?

T:
Ask what's proper!

I:
Since you're so proper,

my lord Tristan,
Propriety dictates also this:
Your foe's not forgiven
until you're friendly with him.

T:
And who's this foe?

I:
Ask what you fear!
Blood-guilt hangs between us.

T:
That was resolved.

I:
Not between us!

T:
Out on a field,
before a crowd
we swore our satisfaction.

I:
That was not
where I Tantris hid,
where Tristan to me fell.

He stood in public
healed and whole.
But what he swore,
I swore it not.
I'd learned my silence to keep.

When he lay in silence
sick in bed,
with the sword I stood
before the man.
Then, my words I banned.
Then, I stayed my hand.
Yet I took with hand and words an oath
and swore in silence
to keep it.
Now this is my chance --
I'll seize it.

T:
What oath was that?

I:
Vengeance for Morold!

T:
Why the fuss?

I:
Dare you to mock me?
Morold was my betrothed,
an Irish hero great.
Twas for him I blessed weapons of war.
Twas for me Morold fought.
When he was lost, my
honor was, too.
From my suffering heart, I
swore of his death:
If no man took retribution
then this maid herself would do it.

Sick and weak and in my power.
Why did I not kill you then?
You know yourself how this will end.
I healed and cured him
so that when I restored him,
he'd be killed by the man
who will win me back from Tristan.

Your fate? Well, you yourself can assess it:
If all men have pledged Tristan their friendship,
Who's left to bring him vengeance?

T:
(pale and grim)
Was Morold such a friend?
Then take the sword again
and this time hold it just so
so you don't happen to let go!

(he offers her the sword)

I:
So badly could I treat your master?
Whatever would Marke think of me

if I should smite his servant good
who for him won Ireland--
his best, most loyal man?
Care you so little for his reward?
You bring him Ireland's queen to wed!
Would he not scold if
I slew the envoy
who won him a truce
and brings the pledge for his use?

Put down your sword.
I took it when
I saw the chance for Morold's revenge.
When you looked in my eyes to calculate
if I Lord Mark might please as his mate,
I dropped the sword that moment.
Come, toast to our atonement!

(She summons Brangäne. Brangäne shudders and moves hesitantly. Isolde spurs her on with ever more emphatic gestures. Brangäne turns to the preparation of the drink.)

Sailors:
(from Off)
Ho! He! Ha! He!
Take in, take in
the topsail now!

T:
(speaks from the depths of his gloom)
Where are we?

I:
Near the end!
Tristan, gain I atonement?
What words have you to tell me?

T:
(darkly)
The queen of silence
Bid me silent:
I see what she wants to say
I say not what she can't see.

I:
I see your silent
hedging around.

Grudge you my atonement now?

(at Isolde's impatient gesture, Brangäne hands her the goblet, which has been filled)

Sailors:

Ho! He! Ha! He!

Ho! He! Ha! He!

I:

(walks to Tristan with the goblet. He stares fixedly into her eyes)

You hear the call?

We're at the end.

In just a bit

we'll stand before King Marke.

(lightly mocking)

When you walk me in

won't it be sweet

if you thus address him:

"Uncle and Lord,

come check her out.

A nice girl you'll never find.

Even after I struck

her fiancé dead

and sent her home his head,

the wounds her

fiancé's weapon made

she healed so helpfully.

"My life lay in her power mild.

She gave it to me,

the gentle child,

along with Ireland defiled,

a second gift, so she

your wedded wife could be.

"Such bounteous graciousness,

I think,

earned me atonement's sweetest drink.

She mixed it meek and mild,

all guilt to reconcile."

Sailors: *(Off)*

Man the ropes!
Anchors up!

T:
(wildly startling)
Up the anchor
and into the tide!
To wind the sails and mast!

(grabs the goblet from her)
I know the Queen of Ireland well
and well I know her wondrous skill.
The tonic took I that she gave.
The goblet take I now
so fully I'll recover.
Regard now the atonement oath
I pledge as well, to thank you:

Tristan's heart vows loyalty!
Tristan's heartache vows revolt!
Heart's betrayal!
Dream's presentment!
Boundless sorrow's only balm:
oblivion's gentle drink.
From you I shall not shrink!

(he puts his lips to the goblet and drinks)

I:
Betrayed here, too?
Half is mine still!

(snatches the goblet away from him)

Betrayer!
I drink to you!

(She drinks. Then she throws the goblet aside. The two, gripped by terror, gaze rigidly but with great agitation into each others' eyes. Their expressions soon turn from deathly defiance to the glow of love. Trembling, they embrace. The grab, cramped, at their hearts, touch their hands to their brows. Then they look into each others' eyes again. They sink again into confusion and come together again with increasing longing.)