

SHAKESPEARIENCE!

Cymbeline

ACT BREAKDOWN

KEY CHARACTERS:

Cymbeline...*King of Britain*

Queen of Britain...*Imogen's wicked stepmother*

Imogen...*Cymbeline's daughter, wife of Posthumus*

Posthumus...*husband of Imogen*

Pisanio...*servant to Posthumus*

Cloten...*son of the Queen, by a former husband*

Belarius (called Morgan)...*a banished lord*

Guiderius (called Polydore)...*long, lost son of Cymbeline*

Arviragus (called Cadwal)...*another long, lost son of Cymbeline*

Iachimo...*an Italian gentleman*

ACT ONE:

Imogen is King Cymbeline's daughter. Unfortunately, her mother dies and Cymbeline re-marries an awful woman, naming her son Cloten as heir to the throne. Cymbeline wants Imogen to marry Cloten. She refuses because he is a fool and a coward. In secret, she instead marries Posthumus who is a good, honorable guy.

Of course, the king finds out and banishes Posthumus.

Before the couple part, Imogen gives Posthumus a ring, and he gives her a bracelet.

The queen is thrilled with the banishment, but pretends to be in Imogen and Posthumus' corner. As her wicked ways dictate, she gives a box of "healing potions" to Posthumus's servant, Pisanio, for his master's health...but indeed, they are actually poisons. Luckily, the prescribing doc doesn't trust the queen, so he substitutes poison with sleeping potions, which bring on the illusion that one is dead, temporarily...a la Juliet in R&J.

Meanwhile, Posthumus finds his way to his friend, Iachimo in Rome. He tells his pal all about the faithfulness and incredible beauty of his bride,

Iachimo arguing that such a woman cannot exist. It escalates so much, that finally they bet on Imogen's honor: if Iachimo can seduce Imogen, Posthumus will give him her ring. If Iachimo does not seduce Imogen, he will pay Posthumus a tidy sum in gold.

So, off he goes to Britain...

And fails epically. To cover his plight, he tells her that he was testing her honor. But he also knows that he's lost the bet, and a hefty chunk of change. He asks Imogen to safely keep a trunk full of his treasures and jewels for the night. She agrees to keep it in her own bedchamber.

ACT TWO:

Once the trunk is placed in her room, she falls asleep. Oh Iachimo. It is indeed he who is in the trunk, not his treasure. He climbs out and steals the bracelet from her wrist and while doing so, notices a mole on her chest.

This will certainly be useful if he wants to prove that he DID seduce her and compromise her honor. With bracelet and knowledge, he gets back in the trunk and waits to be taken away in the morning.

When she awakens, Imogen can't find her bracelet...Posthumus's gift to her.

Iachimo triumphantly returns to Rome. First, he tells Posthumus about Imogen's bedchamber. Next, he further persuades by showing the bracelet. Finally, the crowning blow, he tells Posthumus about the mole on Imogen's chest...now Posthumus is convinced that she was intimate with Iachimo. He gives the ring to his friend as payment for losing the bet, curses his wife and all women.

ACT THREE:

Meanwhile, back in Britain...

Trouble for daddy. Cymbeline has not been paying for Britain's tribute to Rome.

Caesar sends an ambassador to collect payment, or be faced with open war---now going to war with Caesar and Rome is a very very bad idea. Yet, the queen convinces Cymbeline to declare war!

Posthumus asks Imogen to meet him in Wales. Simultaneously, he asks Pisanio to escort Imogen and then kill her. Pisanio is a stand up guy and tells Imogen the truth once they've stopped in a forest along the way. He tells her how troubling the letter from Posthumus was. They discuss how she should follow the Roman ambassador when he returns to Rome, that she can disguise herself as a guy. Oh, he also gives her the potions from the queen...thinking they are healing potions. But they're really sleeping potions. And the queen thinks they're poison. Oy.

Suddenly, in the forest appear an old man (Morgan) with his two sons (Polydore and Cadwal), who live there because long ago Morgan was banished from Cymbeline's court...wrongfully. The reality is that Morgan (who is really Belarius) kidnapped King Cymbeline's two sons (Guiderius and Arviragus) in anger over his wrongful banishment. He never told them who they really were. Imogen is lost in the forest and meets them all, feeling a strange kinship to the brothers. They become fast friends. Hmmmmm.

And then there's Cloten. The queen's squeaky son. Since Imogen has disappeared, Cloten is just sure that Pisanio is involved and directly threatens him. Pisanio finally tells Cloten about Imogen's Rome plan. Cloten comes up with a real doozy...he will dress in Posthumus's clothes, find and kill Posthumus, and then surprise Imogen! Truly, a dazzling intellect.

ACT FOUR:

Imogen stays with the guys in the forest (in reality, Belarius and the king's sons) because she's not feeling so well. She takes some of the potion which Pisanio gave her. Cloten shows up looking for Posthumus and Imogen. Cloten insults and then attacks Guiderius, who beheads Cloten. Arviragus discovers Imogen "dead", so they lay Imogen next to Cloten. Imogen comes to, sees the headless Cloten, dressed in her husband's clothes, and passes out in despair. Mr. Roman Ambassador finds her there, she makes up a story about bandits attacking them, and he offers to take Imogen with them. Wisely, she goes.

ACT FIVE:

Pothumus marches with the Romans, but sides with Britain. Then he loses the Roman outfit and pretends to be a British peasant. Lo and behold, he winds up fighting Iachimo, (who is with the Roman Army) and winning, but he leaves him unharmed.

Britain is losing the battle, Cymbeline is captured.
Belarius and the boys try to rally the British Army. Posthumus joins them!
Then they rescue the king and win the war.!

Politics are being sorted on the field when Cymbeline gets word that his wife, the queen, is dead...and a full report of all of her crimes.

Imogen is with all of the Roman captives, still as a guy. Bumps into Iachimo. With her ring! Which she gave to Posthumus! She goes after him and demands to hear the story of how he came by it. Finally, his guilt gets him and he tells her the truth.
Posthumus hears the story and reveals himself, also guilty thinking he caused Imogen's death.
Imogen reveals herself, much to the joy of Posthumus and Cymbeline.
In the spirit of reveal, Belarius does too! So do Guiderius and Arviragus...the king's long lost sons!

And there we end...Guiderius is the rightful heir to the throne, the evil queen and her spawn are gone, Imogen and Posthumus are reunited, Britain and Rome decide they can work it out, Posthumus takes high ground and forgives Iachimo, and there we have it!
Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy.