

CHAPTER ONE OF CANCER

IN WHICH

*Cancer explains Dimplification,
Scorpio defies,
and Pisces personifies*

I imagine them as children.

I bring them back to doughy flesh and small-toothed smiles. I give them big eyes and laugh-away curls. I de-spike vodka with juice and devolve mature speech patterns into gurgles.

Hark!

A gurgled phrase,

Signals a child to raise,

as Mom-Mammy

was wont to say.

Indeed, it does.

Lo, in order that I may care for the chickens as Cancer is wont to do, I must put them through a rigorous process of dimplification.

Verily, I must dimplify the chickens so that I may comfort them more exceptionally, as Cancer is wont to do. To give them the Comfort. The Sigh. The Honey. The Darling. The Wrap-Around Hug that contents like a shawl—and Cancer knows contentment as given by a shawl.

Hark!

Ne'er does an ill befall,

She who keeps beneath

her shawl,

as Grammy-Toots

was wont to say.

Indeed.

I turn my attentions to Scorpio.

She runs her hand along the museum's wooden planking.

"Don't get splinters, honey," I warn, attempting to dimplify her.

But, alas, Scorpio is impossible to dimplify. Her eyes refuse to soften. Like now, she is attempting to heighten my warmth to a sizzle, but, verily, I won't allow it.

Hark!

To give in to whim,

Is to give in to sin,

as Mammy Superior
was wont to say.

Indeed.

Of course, Scorpio's seedy breed of audacity wouldn't be a problem if I were wearing my shawl.

Absolutely not.

Whilst wearing a shawl, matronly mastery flattens such fiddle-faddle like a pancake.

Zod give me strength.

A shawl does for women what pipes do for men. I'd be edified as a pillar of stability and comfort. I'd acquire a scent that people were reminded of when opening phonographs or sifting through well-preserved tissue paper.

Indeed, matronly mastery as ascended to by virtue of a shawl is indomitable once attained.

I'd rule Scorpio without need of a ruler.

But, sadly, lo, I couldn't wear my shawl tonight. Crochet clashes with stilettos.

I turn my attentions away from Scorpio.

Pisces is easier to dimplify. Her emotional state hovers at a consistent cradling point. The poor girl struggles to keep herself together.

Hark!

A Pisces to her caprices,

Is a Pisces falling to pieces,

as I'm wont to say.

Like now, she's sobbing.

I take her into my arms because she needs me. I handle her like a package of crumbled macaroons.

"Darling, what's the matter?" I inquire.

Her sobs are unintelligible but I understand. I absorb her heaves like smoke signals thinning into the sky. I read them. I return their request with more of my maternal being.

"There. There," I coo.

Then, Pisces begins to articulate herself through the sobs by using real words. And, hence, verily, to comfort as exceptionally as Cancer is wont to do, I must negate this sign of maturity—I cover her mouth:

Her words devolve into gurgles.

"Momma understands," I say, clogging her mouth, "Momma's going to care for you."

I draw her close, squeezing her as if
tears were her juices.

Scorpio laughs.

Zod Eternal.

If I had my shawl, I could flap it
around myself and show Scorpio who's
who in this mother-flock relationship.

Verily, the Flap and Wrap.

Then they corral themselves into my
arms like so many sheep.

I ignore Scorpio and muzzle Pisces
further into my bosom.

Hark!

When life throws you off,

Find a bosom and quaff,

as Olden Saggy

was wont to say.

'Tis true.

Pisces releases herself from my
tender embrace and walks out the door.

"My child," I inquire, "Where are you
going? What? What?"

She doesn't respond. She's overtired,
the poor girl. That's what happens when
they don't take their naps.

But, alas, it's my duty to follow her,
so, I throw one last disappointed glance
at Scorpio before covering my neck
against the chill and following Pisces
with the utmost curiosity and haste.