

*That you were once unkind befriends me now,
 And for that sorrow, which I then did feel,
 Needs must I under my transgression bow,
 Unless my nerves were brass or hammered steel.
 For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
 As I by yours, y' have passed a hell of time,
 And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
 To weigh how once I suffered in your crime.
 O that our night of woe might have rememb' red
 My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits,
 And soon to you as you to me then tend' red
 The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits!
 But that your trespass now becomes a fee;
 Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.*

This sonnet has a new emotional air about it, at first a conciliatory tone based on the revelation of the friend's unkindness, which, paradoxically, "befriends" the speaker. Because of that unkindness, the friend has a debt to pay him. Though this poem is relatively direct, we are never told what the unkindness is. Specifics must yield to feelings and argument. The sorrow that the speaker has felt for his own "transgression" (l. 3) is now balanced by his friend's bad behavior. If his friend were flawless, he argues, he would have to "bow" to him, unless his sinews ("nerves," l. 4) were brass or steel. But that is not the case.

The pattern of logic begins to unfold with "For if" at the start of the second quatrain. The speaker posits the idea that if his friend were shaken just as much by his unkindness as he has been by his friend's, the friend would have suffered hellishly. Reversing his earlier role of slave, the speaker had assumed the role of tyrant because he had not had time to reflect on how he himself had suffered from his friend's crime.

The speaker mourns that he might have remembered "our night of woe" (l. 9), which could be a quarrel or just a period of estrangement. Then the feeling of true sorrow had hit him hard. Nevertheless their mutual wounds were also quickly healed by the

“salve” (balm, l. 12) of humility. The wording, especially *bosoms* (l. 12), underscores the closeness of the two men and the intensity of their emotions.

The poem is at base a persuasive argument. Yet we never know whether the young man was won over, that he accepted the speaker’s apology as readily as the speaker accepted his. Though the tone of the couplet is lighter, a touch of the tyrant reappears in the last phrase: your trespass “must ransom me.” The note of warning may be detected.