

SCENE THREE.

The Porpentine. SPENCER and ANDREW enter, and look around at the dingy interior to the pub. A BARMAN stands behind the bar, polishing glasses. Other drunks populate the cramped room.

ANDREW

Ah me, the Porpentine.

SPENCER

Keep your hand on your purse, I'd suggest.

ANDREW

Geoffrey used to brag about how he'd sneak in here for ale when we were boys.

SPENCER

Geoffrey bragged about a lot of things, Andy.

ANDREW

Have you ever been here?

SPENCER

Here? Drink in a dockside cutthroat's bar with the direst-looking criminals on the coast?

BARMAN

Oi, you! You're barred!

ANDREW

Me?

BARMAN

No, your mate. Out!

SPENCER

I'll behave myself tonight. I promise.

ANDREW looks at SPENCER quizzically.

Okay, I might have been in once or twice.

They sidle up to the bar. ANDREW nods to the BARMAN.

BARMAN

Not sure you're in the right place, sir fancy. This here's the Porpentine.

ANDREW

Ay.

BARMAN

And you know what that means?

ANDREW

It means that were I to need a place to trade my pretty friend here for a flagon of rhenish, the Porpentine would be where I would come.

SPENCER

Wh-what?

ANDREW

It means that would I need to drink hard liquor in the company of scoundrels and men of character, the Porpentine would be where I would come.

BARMAN

Ay.

ANDREW

And it means that were I looking for a man named the Bulldog, then the Porpentine would be where I would come.

BARMAN

Ah. You seek the Bulldog.

ANDREW

He sought me. Is he here? Are you he?

BARMAN

The Bulldog in't from around here, boy. And he's nowhere near as pretty as me!

SPENCER

So where... where can we find the Bulldog?

BARMAN

He drank everything I could throw at him all afternoon. He's asleep in the back.

SPENCER

Could you... rouse him?

BARMAN

Who for?

ANDREW

A knight of the realm.

BARMAN

Who? You two?

SPENCER

Well, him.

BARMAN

Him! A knight? This beanpole?

ANDREW

Valor is not measured by stature, friend.
(offers a coin)

BARMAN

(Takes the coin. Tests it. Beat.)

Alright, I'll see what I can do. But you're responsible for anything he breaks once he's awake.

The BARMAN goes out to a backroom,
leaving SPENCER and ANDREW alone.
SPENCER looks worried.

SPENCER

Is this a good idea? Coming to the worst tavern in the region, bidden by an anonymous, foreign, drunken monster, called the Bulldog, and for what? What if you're about to be kidnapped for ransom?

ANDREW

Just follow my lead. I'm not going to give this man anything. A wise person once said the best way to hide is in plain sight. I'll play dumb and see what comes.

SPENCER

Play dumb?

ANDREW

No one watches their tongue around a man they consider a fool.

SPENCER

And me?

ANDREW

Stay silent. I'll call you my... eunuch.

SPENCER

Your what? How about servant?

ANDREW

Eunuch is more believable. You don't really think he means us harm?

SPENCER

It can't be anything good, in a place like this.

A roar from the back room, and the BARMAN enters.

BARMAN

He's awake. The consequences are yours, my friends.

A large bear of a man, SIR TOBY BELCH, appears in the door. Richly dressed in clothes that were grand ten years ago but now are stained and often slept-in. He's filthy dirty, bleary-eyed. He looks around, catches the BARMAN's eye and roars.

BELCH

Ale! Mead! Sack! Canary! Brandy! Get me something wet and in a bowl, i'faith! Dost think me a camel? I thirst!

BARMAN

Yes... yes sir.

BELCH

And who is the man who asks for the Bulldog? And, who, more the point, rouses me from my lovely kip?

ANDREW

(simpering, not the ANDREW we know. This new ANDREW is a fool.)

Me, sir. That's me. I want the Bulldog.

BELCH

And who would you be?

ANDREW

(flamboyant bow)

Sir Andrew Agler-Coote, at your service!

BELCH

Sir Andrew.

(slurring)

Sir Andrew Ague-Cheek. Knight!

ANDREW

No, it's...

(SPENCER gives him a look)

Ay. Sir Andrew... Ague-Cheek. And this is my eunuch.

SPENCER shoots him daggers.

BELCH

Your what?

ANDREW

My... man. My servant. My servant-man.

BELCH

Ah! Tidings, sot!

ANDREW

You are the Bulldog?

BELCH

Ha ha! Today, yea, verily! A game I play. Last month I was the Badger. Next week... the... the...

ANDREW

Herring?

BELCH

Herring! La! Very excellent good, i'faith, fair knight! Next month I will be your Herring, to honor thy name. Sir Andrew Ague-Cheek, knight!

ANDREW

Should I call you Bulldog until next month?

BELCH

Ah! My manners! The Bulldog is but a ruse to avoid debtors and leeches. Please. Call me Toby. Sir Toby Belch.

ANDREW

A knight!

BELCH

Ay! Knight! Knight and man o' th' people! Master o' song and wine! Jousting and cavorting! Emissary and wanderer!
(a command)

Barkeep! Canary!

ANDREW

Belch is a fine name for a knight!

BELCH

'Twas the name given me, so I wish for no other.

ANDREW

Do you drink Canary because your name is Belch, or Belch because you drink Canary?

BELCH

Good! Good, i'faith! The answer is lost in my youth, and no man can reach so far behind to answer such riddles. And you, knight! Ague-Cheek! A grand name for a grand hero!

ANDREW

A name given me by a wand'ring knight, i'faith!

BELCH

The best kinds of names, sot.

ANDREW

(starting to react poorly to this old insult)

Sot?

BELCH

None but the best of men are sots, my grand knight. My wealthy knight. My worthy knight. We need beef! Capons! Barkeep, see to us!

BARMAN

Ay, Sir Toby.

The BARMAN exits.

ANDREW

Have you been in Epirus long, Sir Toby?

BELCH

A day. Or a week. One or t'other. When I am in my cups time is not my friend. I have traveled far and long, and heard tale of a grand knight. So I stopped and sought to find the man. The Bulldog prevails!

ANDREW

To travel, Sir Toby? 'Tis my greatest wish. To fight monsters and triumph at wars, and woo wenches, and...

BELCH

Then travel, knight! Wert not at the wars?

ANDREW

(caught)

Ah, no... I... you see... as lord of the Manor, I am for diplomacy. We are a peaceful province, here in Epirus, so I did not go.

BELCH

Ah, politics! What did you do instead?

ANDREW

I follow the lively arts, Sir Toby. Fencing, dancing, bearbaiting...

BELCH

Very excellent good, i'faith!

ANDREW

Now that the wars are behind, knight, I would that I could travel.

BELCH

Ay, knight, 'tis what makes a man. I have traveled so far, now I merely long for the shores of Illyria.

ANDREW

Illyria? You are a knight of Illyria?

BELCH

Ay, knight! You must come and visit. I will show you the sights!

ANDREW

Wondrous, Sir Toby! I would that we could!

BELCH

'Tis settled, then!
 (toasting)
 To Illyria!

ANDREW

Yes! To Illyria!
 (toasting)
 And Epirus!

BELCH

Ay, to Epirus too.

ANDREW

(toasting)
 And the wars!

BELCH

Toast war, knight? Nay, the things I have seen in the field would change that idea in you. Why d'y think I drink?

ANDREW

Oh, I...

BELCH

Forgive me if I have upset your knightly honor, knight, but I see no glory in battle. The glory is here, in the tavern.

ANDREW

(toasting)
 To the tavern, then!

BELCH

(toasting)
 Ay, to the tavern, i'faith!

ANDREW

(toasting)
 And to the end of the war!

BELCH

(toasting)
 To the end of all wars!

ANDREW

(toasting)
 And to the memory of Count Marco!

BELCH puts his cup down immediately and draws a concealed dagger, which he holds to ANDREW's throat. He's not as nimble as he was in his youth, but he's still more than a match for the surprised ANDREW.

BELCH

Drunkard I may be, boy, but blind I am not.

ANDREW

Wha... Sir Toby! Why... why...

BELCH

Stammer not, Sir Andrew, and tell me this: why do you use my nephew's name?

ANDREW

Your... nephew?

BELCH

Ay, fool, young Marco is of my house, long estranged. What d'y know of him?

ANDREW

He is... he was... the Illyrian commander. Poisoned in...

BELCH

Treachery!

ANDREW

Yes! In treachery. But that is far from here, knight. I knew not that you were his uncle.

BELCH

Who do you work for?

SPENCER

He is but a foolish knight, m'lord. He has never left this province, and knows few outside it.

BELCH

Your boy speaks, Sir Andrew. Doth he speak troth?

ANDREW

Ay... ay, Sir Toby. I am but a knight. I toasted to the memory of a man whose loss meant the war could end.

BELCH

You sound... different now.

SPENCER

(confidentially)

The threat of death will focus even the dullest mind, my lord. This knight is no spy, Sir Toby.

BELCH

(withdrawing his knife, genial again)
Excellent, i'faith. I didn't get to this place in my life by being a man of caution. Forgive me, Sir Andrew Ague-Cheek. Eight years in exile will do much to a man's nerves.

ANDREW

Eight years!

BELCH

Ay, my brother sent me away: a disgrace to the name...

ANDREW

Of Belch?

BELCH

Do you really believe the Countess Olivia's family name is Belch? Nay, knight, this name was given like a curse that I have embraced as my own. For what else in life is there, if you may belch after a fine meal and ample wine? A belch is contentment. I am content.

ANDREW

Very good, i'faith, Sir Toby!

BELCH

Ay!

ANDREW

But wherefore your exile, Sir Toby?

BELCH

I was sent away for the disgrace I was. Drinking, whoring, dancing: the joys of our lives, all forbidden in that home. Cast out, I rambled, until the wars caught me and I fought on. Now that peace is here and my brother and nephew are both dead, I return home to resume my place at my good niece's right hand.

ANDREW

A wondrous story, Sir Toby. But why did you call for me?

BELCH

I seek custom. A vessel, a means, a passage to Illyria. I drank my last few ducats and these old legs will not carry me there. I thought, that were I to associate with the nobility of the area, I might exchange such kindness for allegiance to my family's noble house.

ANDREW

The house of the Countess Olivia?

BELCH

Ay, lad.

SPENCER

Sire, might we confer for a moment?

ANDREW looks around, wondering who he means, then realizes he means him.

ANDREW

Oh! Yea, verily. Excuse us, Sir Toby.

BELCH

By all means, m'boy.

ANDREW and SPENCER step aside to talk.

ANDREW

What is it?

SPENCER

Are you forgetting what you just sat through at the house? Your mother is positioning you to be aligned with the Duke Orsino, through his nephew Titus.

ANDREW

So?

SPENCER

One house must be chosen over another. Patronage does not work with multiple partners. Would that this knight had asked for us before Titus had arrived, you might have entertained this suit. But as it stands, decorum demands you wait.

ANDREW

But Titus holds us hostage while he makes up his mind. What if we use this knight to force his hand?

SPENCER

This man's a mess: Titus won't be pressured by this fool.

ANDREW

You underestimate Titus's ego. Imagine this knight during one of Titus's story times! Let me woo him to us.

SPENCER

Ha! Well, I suppose there's not much to lose...

They turn back to BELCH.

ANDREW

Sir Toby Belch, good Sir Toby Belch! My apologies, Sir Toby Belch.

BELCH

Never, Sir knight! Another cup!

ANDREW

My man was telling me the state of the... grains? And ships?

BELCH

Impressive, knight! A grand burgher!

ANDREW

I take being a knight very seriously, knight.

BELCH

Excellent, i'faith!

ANDREW

But now, Sir Toby... tell me tales of Illyria.

BELCH

Ah, fair knight, 'tis a wonderful, fair land, with white sand and glorious palaces. Would that you would join me on my journey back, you would be treated like a king. The finest of kings.

ANDREW

Sir Toby Belch! Do you know of Lord Titus of Rhodes?

BELCH

Never heard of him! A minor lord! No knight, it seems!

ANDREW

He is an Ottoman vizier.

SPENCER

Vizier.

ANDREW

Ay! He lodges at my estate to win the custom of my house.

BELCH

Let me see this Vizier, knight! I will tell him that his service is no longer required now that you have the love of the uncle of the Illyrian Countess!

ANDREW

But Sir Toby, Lord Titus is nephew to Orsino of Illyria.

BELCH

Orsino! That pipsqueak? His father was Duke when I was sent away: known him since he was a child. To know that boy sits

in his place 'stonishes my heart. Never fear, lad, uncle is a closer link than nephew. Our house will assure your custom.

ANDREW

Would that you could come to my home to say so!

BELCH

I will! With all my heart, knight! But first, let us convene a jot to the cellarage. The best ale is kept there, and the barkeep doesn't know I know it's there. One nip to the cellar, then one nip in the cellar, and then away. I'faith! Lay on!

ANDREW

Od's bodkins! Lay on!

BELCH exits.

SPENCER

Andy...

ANDREW

Trust me, Spence. He'll rid us of Titus for good. One look at this blustering fool and his Illyrian wealth and he'll either beat a hasty retreat or stop messing us around.

SPENCER

He's an exile, Andy: he may not have the money you think.

ANDREW

It's not about the money, Spence. It's about getting my mother off my back, and be honest: if you could choose between Sir Toby and Lord Titus, who would you pick?

SPENCER

I can't argue with that. Lead on, Sir Andrew.

Exeunt omnes.