

For Alchemy Anew, March 2014

***Done with the compass, done with the chart***

or **Tristan and Yseult**

**The story**

Tristan is fetching Yseult the Beauty from Ireland  
so she can marry his beloved uncle,  
the rough and ready King Mark of Cornwall.  
Yseult knows she must love King Mark  
so she's got hold of a sure-fire potion  
that will make them fall in love  
but – naughty girl – she shares it with Tristan  
because she's fallen hopelessly in love with him  
(even though he killed her brother)  
and he thinks she's just about the fittest girl ever.  
The potion sends them mad as a box of fish  
and they make a lot of incredibly hot love  
on a slow boat to Cornwall  
where she marries King Mark  
whom she also loves, but in a different way.  
She continues to enjoy wild sex with Tristan  
which makes them both feel good, but also bad  
so Tristan marries another Yseult  
(from Brittany, just over the sea)  
and no-one lives happily ever after,  
although they all, in a strange way,  
respect each other, and of course,  
it ends in death, and bitter tears.

**The poem**

On that boat journey after the potion,  
and after the howls of the Irish cliffs,  
they cling to each other like barnacles.  
They grab and claw like crabs in a trap.

They delve and giggle through one long day  
and one stargazy, crazy night.

They kiss, they stroke, they squeeze  
and bite, and so much more.

When Yseult meets King Mark,  
she sees a cuttlefish, no cuddle-fish,  
with two greedy tentacles  
and pads covered in suckers,  
ready to hypnotise his prey.

She gets used to his ways  
though she keeps swimming off  
to explore the deep ocean floor  
in the flowing body of her lover.

But all is not fine  
because natural light cannot shine  
into the oh so beautiful dark  
and Tristan cannot breathe  
so he rises up and up and up  
until he finds another mate,  
another Yseult, another beauty.  
He lithely swims away with her  
to an ocean of forgetting  
and leaves his true love floundering  
with old cuttlebones.

Though he kisses away his new wife's  
white face, strokes and squeezes,  
all Tristan can see is his first Yseult  
so he seeks thrilling distraction.  
He rescues a damsel in distress  
from six spiny, slithery knights  
but one scars poison into his skin  
making a wound that will not heal  
until his one and only love  
touches it with her knowing fingers  
so he sings across the seas  
again and again and again  
until she hears his echo-music  
but Yseult the wife, Yseult the liar,  
arrives first and tells him his soulmate  
lies in the blackness of the depths  
where fangteeth and viperfish  
swim through her skull.

Tristan flips himself out of the life-water  
to die on the harsh swelter of a rock.  
When Yseult the sweetheart arrives,  
well, you can guess the rest –  
their cuddling bones picked clean  
by briny crows who caw out their tragedy.

Some say old cuttlebones found them,

gave them some dignity on a gaunt headland  
where two trees, honeysuckle and hazel,  
grew out of their graves  
and the branches entwined like lovers' fingers.  
Still devoted to his Irish Queen  
and jealous of that clinging clutch,  
King Mark cut and cut and cut  
but each time the trees grew back  
and the branches entwined like lover's fingers  
so he gave up, and let them grow  
and grow and grow.