

A Remedy for Heartache
gathered from Culpeper's *Complete Herbal*

I wonder in my heart
how the juice of the seed,
medicinal for grief,
the juice made into a syrup
as gentle as Venus herself, with leaves
put into a cup of wine, comforts

the head and brain, warms and comforts
a weak stomach, and revives the heart.
If you cannot get the leaves,
make use of the bark. You may beat the seed
into powder, it may be kept in a syrup
always by you, for the inward griefs;

and if of the former griefs
parts remain, the berries are good to comfort
the fainting spirits. Make a syrup
in the summer, it makes the heart
merry when the seed
begins to ripen while the leaves

continue green. Leave
off covetousness and those griefs
that proceed of a cold cause. Any good seed
doth bring much ease and comfort
by fortifying the heart;
with seeds made into syrup,

two spoonfuls of the syrup
help much to procure rest. Leave
Dr. Reason awhile, expel melancholy from the heart,
free the heart from the pains and griefs

that take away all the comfort
of the sun. The seed

being ripe, a vital spirit in every seed
will produce you the syrup
you desire to comfort
and strengthen the parts. I leave
to the judicious reader a remedy for griefs,
good against the gnawing of the heart.

Here is enough, only remember, the seed is of more use than the leaves;
a syrup made thereof is very effectual for all inward griefs
and hurts, good for those that are weak in long sickness, and to comfort the heart.

ABOUT THE POEM

“A Remedy for Heartache” was created from the *Complete Herbal* by Nicholas Culpeper (1653). About the poem and the process of composing it, M. E. Goelzer writes:

“Regard the heart, keep that upon the wheels, because the sun is the foundation of life, and therefore those universal remedies ... cure all diseases by fortifying the heart.”

- from Culpeper’s *Complete Herbal*

As I began to read Culpeper’s *Complete Herbal*, I became curious to learn something about Nicholas Culpeper himself. I found that his life was marked by a series of tragedies and hardships, and also that he showed great generosity in the ways he shared and practiced his knowledge of herbal medicine. As I read pieces of the *Complete Herbal*, thinking of how much heartache was inherent in the circumstances that surrounded Nicholas Culpeper, I was repeatedly struck by ways in which he sought to offer comfort. I chose to write this sestina, using sentences and phrases from the text (rearranged, with words sometimes erased, but not added, and with just a few tweaks for subject-verb agreement), as if Nicholas Culpeper had written it—for himself, perhaps, as well as for others—as a way to suggest a general remedy for both universal and personal heartache.

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