

If I were in a position to give you advice—and let me assure you that I am decidedly not in such a position and must thus confine myself to the realms of the purely hypothetical here—I would urge you to commit to memory the eighth line of Shakespeare’s 51st sonnet and to put it into play whenever you feel the need of something in a talisman.

The line in and of itself is not particularly striking. It occurs in the second of a pair of poems each of which employs equestrian imagery to express the speaker’s neurotic concern about being away from his beloved. By the time one is halfway through the second of the two, the speaker’s talking about how, when he returns to his beloved, no horse will be able to move fast enough towards said beloved to please him, not if that horse be Pegasus himself. Enter the eighth line: “In wingèd speed no motion shall I know.”

I do not recall for sure when first I realized this line had magical powers. It may have been in a large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. Jay Curling, my colleague and buddy at Pawhuska Polytech, where we are both English teachers, felt as if we ought to try for a bit of variety in conference going. He therefore urged that we apply for a grant to procure funds to attend a conference of vitamin cleaner salesmen in the aforementioned large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. I am not at liberty to give the city’s name. Jay has perfected the difficult art of writing grant applications in mellifluous Eugene Onegin sonnet form. If I don’t miss my guess, he also knows the eighth line of Shakespeare’s 51st sonnet. The boy tends to get his grant. We got this one.

[SCOPE]

I am not comfortable at conferences. I knew nobody but Jay at this one near the Rhine, and my hands were clammy with angst. At the mixer, fretting nigh on to the point of tears, I found myself near a woman with deep brown tresses for hair, a pair of ladder legs for perambulation, a pair of large brown eyes for reminding one that, despite all the utter misery rampant in this vale of tears, there is a benevolent God somehow in charge, and a pineapple martini for refreshment, an alarmingly pretty woman, to tell the truth, a woman who seemed to contain both the mystery of the universe and the solution to that mystery in some aromatic corner or tother of herself, a woman wearing a nametag that said "Suzanne Bocuse," a woman away from whose most intimate company I did not think I would be able to go on living, and yet a woman with whom I knew I was unequipped by dint of looks, charm, or largesse to get even a third of the way to first base.

I was in despair. You would have been as well.

It thundered in the distance. Geoffrey Chaucer turned in his grave. Somewhere someone ate a banana. Somewhere someone wore a bandanna. It was that kind of evening.

And I found myself turning to Suzanne Bocuse and saying, "In wingèd speed no motion shall I know."

Suzanne Bocuse gave me her phone number.

And, later, a drunken vitamin cleaner salesman approached me and said, "Doo Rag, that Suzanne Bocuse wants to get bad lizard on yo butt." He was speaking Czech, so the translation here is a little wobbly.

[PROSE]

It's gone that way ever since. I've had men come up to me on the streets of Saskatoon and offer me insurance with Gorilla Inc. at rates so cut you could use them for bait.

Steven Wright offered to take me bass fishing after I said to him, "In wingèd speed no motion shall I know."

Stephen King offered to teach me how to "toss the horse," as he put it in his inimitable Maineiacal way, after I phoned him and muttered the line. I was drunk on Rum Grizzlies at the time.

I don't know how it'll work for you, but I urge you not to knock it before you've tried it.

I like to deliver the line sotto voce myself, but that may just be me. A friend of mine in the Caucasus has informed me that a Latin version of the line ("In cursu alato nullum motum sciam") has done wonders for both his vegetable garden, and his love life.

I'm just saying.