Poem #4

“Invictus” by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

At age 12 Henley was diagnosed with tubercular arthritis that necessitated the amputation of one of his legs just below the knee. As he healed in the infirmary, Henley began to write poems, including “Invictus.”

The poem has received more positive publicity with the introduction of the Invictus Games, an international sporting event for wounded, injured, and sick service personnel.
Taking it apart

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“Fell” means to knock down, like felling a tree, but it can also mean of a cruel nature.

He says here that even though what awaits him after this life is death, he is still brave.

“This is a biblical allusion to the saying, “Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leads to eternal life.” (Matthew 7:14)

“No matter how dark it gets, he is still in charge of himself.

“To bludgeon” is to beat. So he is saying that even though he’s been harshly treated by fate, he is still standing proud.

“Shade” here refers to the darkness of death.

“Strait” means narrow, tight, difficult.

The scroll is a metaphor for the law.

When he says “captain of my soul,” he makes an image of his life as a ship, and he’s the one sailing it.
Memorizing it

“Invictus”

Out of the n______ that c_______ me,

B_____ as the P____ from pole to p_____,

I t_____ whatever g_____ may be

For my u_______ soul.

In the fell c_______ of c_______

I have not w_______ nor cried a______.

Under the b________ of chance

My head is b________, but u________.

B______ this place of w_____ and tears

Looms but the h_______ of the s______

And yet the m_______ of the y______

Finds, and s___ find me, u_______.

It m_______ not how s_______ the gate,

How c_______ with p________ the scroll,

I am the m_______ of my f_______:

I am the c_______ of my s______.
Memorizing it

“Invictus”

O___o__t__n____t___c______m__,

B____a_t_P___f___p_t_p___,

I t___w___g___m__b_

F__m__u________s__.

I__t__f__c________o__c________

I h___n___w______n___c___a_____,

U___t___b________o_c___

M__h___i__b________,b__u________.

B____t__p____o_w_____a__t__

L___b__t__h________o__the s___,

A___y___t__m________o_t_y____

F__,a__s__f__m_,u________.

I__m____n__h__t__g___

H__c______w____p______t__s___,

I a_t_m______o_m___f___:

I a_t_c______o_m_s______.