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ACT I

SCENE I. King Lear's palace.

Enter KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND

KENT

I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER

It did always seem so to us: but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most; for equalities are so weighed, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

KENT

Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to it.

KENT

I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER

Sir, this young fellow's mother could: whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

KENT

I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

GLOUCESTER

But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account: though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged. Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND

No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

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My lord of Kent: remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

EDMUND

My services to your lordship.

KENT

I must love you, and sue to know you better.

EDMUND

Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER

He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. The king is coming.

Sennet. Enter KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and Attendants

KING LEAR

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

I shall, my liege.

Exeunt GLOUCESTER and EDMUND

KING LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,--
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,--
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest-born, speak first.

GONERIL

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Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;

A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA

[Aside] What shall Cordelia do?
Love, and be silent.

LEAR

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made
Of the self-same metal that my sister is,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;
Only she comes too short: that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses;
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA

[Aside] Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
More richer than my tongue.

KING LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
No less in space, validity, and pleasure,
Than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

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KING LEAR

Nothing!

CORDELIA

Nothing.

KING LEAR

Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave

My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

KING LEAR

How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

KING LEAR

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, good my lord.

KING LEAR

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

KING LEAR

Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist, and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me

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Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and relieved,
As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT

Good my liege,--

KING LEAR

Peace, Kent!

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
I loved her most, and thought to set my rest
On her kind nursery. Hence, and avoid my sight!

So be my grave my peace, as here I give
Her father's heart from her! Call France; who stirs?
Call Burgundy. Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:
Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
I do invest you jointly with my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop with majesty. Ourself, by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights,
By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
The name, and all the additions to a king;
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours: which to confirm,
This coronet part betwixt you.

Giving the crown

KENT

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers,--

KING LEAR

The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

KENT

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly,
When Lear is mad. What wilt thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound,

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When majesty stoops to folly. Reverse thy doom;
And, in thy best consideration, cheque
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
Reverbs no hollowness.

KING LEAR

Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thy enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

KING LEAR

Out of my sight!

KENT

See better, Lear; and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye.

KING LEAR

Now, by Apollo,--

KENT

Now, by Apollo, king,

Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

KING LEAR

O, vassal! miscreant!

Laying his hand on his sword

ALBANY CORNWALL

Dear sir, forbear.

KENT

Do:

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow

Upon thy foul disease. Revoke thy doom;

Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,

I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

KING LEAR

Hear me, recreant!

On thine allegiance, hear me!

Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,

Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride

To come between our sentence and our power,

Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,

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Our potency made good, take thy reward.

Five days we do allot thee, for provision

To shield thee from diseases of the world;

And on the sixth to turn thy hated back

Upon our kingdom: if, on the tenth day following,

Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,

The moment is thy death. Away! by Jupiter,

This shall not be revoked.

KENT

Fare thee well, king: sith thus thou wilt appear,

Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.

To CORDELIA

The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,

That justly think'st, and hast most rightly said!

To REGAN and GONERIL

And your large speeches may your deeds approve,

That good effects may spring from words of love.

Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;

He'll shape his old course in a country new.

Exit

Flourish. Re-enter GLOUCESTER, with KING OF FRANCE, BURGUNDY, and

Attendants

GLOUCESTER

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

KING LEAR

My lord of Burgundy.

We first address towards you, who with this king
Hath rivall'd for our daughter: what, in the least,
Will you require in present dower with her,
Or cease your quest of love?

BURGUNDY

Most royal majesty,
I crave no more than what your highness offer'd,
Nor will you tender less.

KING LEAR

Right noble Burgundy,
When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
9

But now her price is fall'n. Sir, there she stands:
If aught within that little seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,
And nothing more, may fitly like your grace,
She's there, and she is yours.

BURGUNDY

I know no answer.

KING LEAR

Will you, with those infirmities she owes,
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her, or leave her?

BURGUNDY

Pardon me, royal sir;
Election makes not up on such conditions.

KING LEAR

Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,
I tell you all her wealth.

To KING OF FRANCE

For you, great king,
I would not from your love make such a stray,
To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
To avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed
Almost to acknowledge hers.

KING OF FRANCE

This is most strange,
That she, that even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,

Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favour. Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree,
That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
Fall'n into taint: which to believe of her,
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Could never plant in me.

CORDELIA

I yet beseech your majesty,--
If for I want that glib and oily art,
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
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I'll do't before I speak,--that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonour'd step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour;
But even for want of that for which I am richer,
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

KING LEAR

Better thou
Hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better.

KING OF FRANCE

Is it but this,--a tardiness in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do? My lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stand
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY

Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

KING LEAR

Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm.

BURGUNDY

I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA

Peace be with Burgundy!
Since that respects of fortune are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

KING OF FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect.
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:

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Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind:
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

KING LEAR

Thou hast her, France: let her be thine; for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. Therefore be gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.
Come, noble Burgundy.

Flourish. Exeunt all but KING OF FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA

KING OF FRANCE

Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA

The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
Cordelia leaves you: I know you what you are;
And like a sister am most loath to call
Your faults as they are named. Use well our father:
To your professed bosoms I commit him
But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So, farewell to you both.

REGAN

Prescribe not us our duties.

GONERIL

Let your study
Be to content your lord, who hath received you
At fortune's alms. You have obedience scanted,
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.

CORDELIA

Time shall unfold what plaited cunning hides:
Who cover faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper!

KING OF FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.
Exeunt KING OF FRANCE and CORDELIA

GONERIL

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Sister, it is not a little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence to-night.

REGAN

That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

GONERIL

You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

REGAN

'Tis the infirmity of his age: yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

GONERIL

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

REGAN

Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

GONERIL

There is further compliment of leavetaking between France and him. Pray you, let's hit together: if our father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us.

REGAN

We shall further think on't.

GONERIL

We must do something, and i' the heat.

Exeunt

SCENE II. The Earl of Gloucester's castle.

Enter EDMUND, with a letter

EDMUND

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I

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Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?

When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well, then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate: fine word,--legitimate!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

Kent banish'd thus! and France in choler parted!
And the king gone to-night! subscribed his power!
Confined to exhibition! All this done
Upon the gad! Edmund, how now! what news?

EDMUND

So please your lordship, none.

Putting up the letter

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What paper were you reading?

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

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No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch of
it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath
not such need to hide itself. Let's see: come,
if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

EDMUND

I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter
from my brother, that I have not all o'er-read;
and for so much as I have perused, I find it not
fit for your o'er-looking.

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND

I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The contents, as in part I understand them, are to blame.

GLOUCESTER

Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND

I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.

GLOUCESTER

[Reads] 'This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, EDGAR.'

Hum--conspiracy!--'Sleep till I waked him,--you should enjoy half his revenue,'--My son Edgar! Had he a hand to write this? a heart and brain to breed it in?--When came this to you? who brought it?

EDMUND

It was not brought me, my lord; there's the cunning of it; I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet.

GLOUCESTER

You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMUND

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If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but, in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

GLOUCESTER

It is his.

EDMUND

It is his hand, my lord; but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

GLOUCESTER

Hath he never heretofore sounded you in this business?

EDMUND

Never, my lord: but I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit, that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as

ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

GLOUCESTER

O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend him: abominable villain! Where is he?

EDMUND

I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, you shall run a certain course; where, if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour, and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down my life for him, that he hath wrote this to feel my affection to your honour, and to no further pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER

Think you so?

EDMUND

If your honour judge it meet, I will place you where you shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance have your satisfaction; and that without any further delay than this very evening.

GLOUCESTER

He cannot be such a monster--
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EDMUND

Nor is not, sure.

GLOUCESTER

To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him. Heaven and earth! Edmund, seek him out: wind me into him, I pray you: frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself, to be in a due resolution.

EDMUND

I will seek him, sir, presently: convey the business as I shall find means and acquaint you withal.

GLOUCESTER

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in

cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing; do it carefully. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'Tis strange.

Exit

EDMUND

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,--often the surfeit of our own behavior,--we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish

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disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. Edgar--

Enter EDGAR

And pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy: my cue is villanous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. O, these eclipses do portend these divisions! fa, sol, la, mi.

EDGAR

How now, brother Edmund! what serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND

I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses.

EDGAR

Do you busy yourself about that?

EDMUND

I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR

How long have you been a sectary astronomical?

EDMUND

Come, come; when saw you my father last?

EDGAR

Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND

Spake you with him?

EDGAR

Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND

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Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him by word or countenance?

EDGAR

None at all.

EDMUND

Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him: and at my entreaty forbear his presence till some little time hath qualified the heat of his displeasure; which at this instant so rageth in him, that with the mischief of your person it would scarcely allay.

EDGAR

Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND

That's my fear. I pray you, have a continent forbearance till the spied of his rage goes slower; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak: pray ye, go; there's my key: if you do stir abroad, go armed.

EDGAR

Armed, brother!

EDMUND

Brother, I advise you to the best; go armed: I am no honest man if there be any good meaning towards you: I have told you what I have seen

and heard; but faintly, nothing like the image
and horror of it: pray you, away.

EDGAR

Shall I hear from you anon?

EDMUND

I do serve you in this business.

Exit EDGAR

A credulous father! and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none: on whose foolish honesty
My practises ride easy! I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.

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Exit

SCENE III. The Duke of Albany's palace.

Enter GONERIL, and OSWALD, her steward

GONERIL

Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

By day and night he wrongs me; every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other,
That sets us all at odds: I'll not endure it:
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us
On every trifle. When he returns from hunting,
I will not speak with him; say I am sick:
If you come slack of former services,
You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.

OSWALD

He's coming, madam; I hear him.

Horns within

GONERIL

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows; I'll have it come to question:
If he dislike it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine, I know, in that are one,
Not to be over-ruled. Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again; and must be used
With cheques as flatteries,--when they are seen abused.
Remember what I tell you.

OSWALD

Well, madam.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you;
What grows of it, no matter; advise your fellows so:
I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall,
That I may speak: I'll write straight to my sister,
To hold my very course. Prepare for dinner.

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Exeunt

SCENE IV. A hall in the same.

Enter KENT, disguised

KENT

If but as well I other accents borrow,
That can my speech defuse, my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I razed my likeness. Now, banish'd Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lovest,
Shall find thee full of labours.

Horns within. Enter KING LEAR, Knights, and Attendants

KING LEAR

Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready.

Exit an Attendant

How now! what art thou?

KENT

A man, sir.

KING LEAR

What dost thou profess? what wouldst thou with us?

KENT

I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve
him truly that will put me in trust: to love him
that is honest; to converse with him that is wise,
and says little; to fear judgment; to fight when I
cannot choose; and to eat no fish.

KING LEAR

What art thou?

KENT

A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the king.

KING LEAR

If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a
king, thou art poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT

Service.

KING LEAR

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Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT

You.

KING LEAR

Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT

No, sir; but you have that in your countenance
which I would fain call master.

KING LEAR

What's that?

KENT

Authority.

KING LEAR

What services canst thou do?

KENT

I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious
tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message
bluntly: that which ordinary men are fit for, I am
qualified in; and the best of me is diligence.

KING LEAR

How old art thou?

KENT

Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor
so old to dote on her for any thing: I have years
on my back forty eight.

KING LEAR

Follow me; thou shalt serve me: if I like thee no
worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet.
Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave? my fool?
Go you, and call my fool hither.

Exit an Attendant

Enter OSWALD

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD

So please you,--

Exit

22

KING LEAR

What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back.

Exit a Knight

Where's my fool, ho? I think the world's asleep.

Re-enter Knight

How now! where's that mongrel?

Knight

He says, my lord, your daughter is not well.

KING LEAR

Why came not the slave back to me when I called him.

Knight

Sir, he answered me in the roundest manner, he would not.

KING LEAR

He would not!

Knight

My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my judgment, your highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection as you were wont; there's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the duke himself also and your daughter.

KING LEAR

Ha! sayest thou so?

Knight

I beseech you, pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken; for my duty cannot be silent when I think your highness wronged.

KING LEAR

Thou but rememberest me of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness: I will look further into't. But where's my fool? I have not seen him this two days.

Knight

Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away.

23

KING LEAR

No more of that; I have noted it well. Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her.

Exit an Attendant

Go you, call hither my fool.

Exit an Attendant

Re-enter OSWALD

O, you sir, you, come you hither, sir: who am I, sir?

OSWALD

My lady's father.

KING LEAR

'My lady's father'! my lord's knave: your whoreson dog! you slave! you cur!

OSWALD

I am none of these, my lord; I beseech your pardon.

KING LEAR

Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?

Striking him

OSWALD

I'll not be struck, my lord.

KENT

Nor tripped neither, you base football player.

Tripping up his heels

KING LEAR

I thank thee, fellow; thou servest me, and I'll love thee.

KENT

Come, sir, arise, away! I'll teach you differences: away, away! if you will measure your lubber's length again, tarry: but away! go to; have you wisdom? so.

Pushes OSWALD out

24

KING LEAR

Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee: there's earnest of thy service.

Giving KENT money

Enter Fool

Fool

Let me hire him too: here's my coxcomb.

Offering KENT his cap

KING LEAR

How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?

Fool

Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

KENT

Why, fool?

Fool

Why, for taking one's part that's out of favour:

nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits,

thou'lt catch cold shortly: there, take my coxcomb:

why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters,

and did the third a blessing against his will; if

thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.

How now, nuncle! Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

KING LEAR

Why, my boy?

Fool

If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs

myself. There's mine; beg another of thy daughters.

KING LEAR

Take heed, sirrah; the whip.

Fool

Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped
out, when Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink.

KING LEAR

A pestilent gall to me!

Fool

Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

KING LEAR

25

Do.

Fool

Mark it, nuncle:

Have more than thou showest,

Speak less than thou knowest,

Lend less than thou owest,

Ride more than thou goest,

Learn more than thou trowest,

Set less than thou throwest;

Leave thy drink and thy whore,

And keep in-a-door,

And thou shalt have more

Than two tens to a score.

KENT

This is nothing, fool.

Fool

Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer; you
gave me nothing for't. Can you make no use of
nothing, nuncle?

KING LEAR

Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing.

Fool

[To KENT] Prithee, tell him, so much the rent of
his land comes to: he will not believe a fool.

KING LEAR

A bitter fool!

Fool

Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a
bitter fool and a sweet fool?

KING LEAR

No, lad; teach me.

Fool

That lord that counsell'd thee

To give away thy land,

Come place him here by me,

Do thou for him stand:

The sweet and bitter fool

Will presently appear;

The one in motley here,
The other found out there.

KING LEAR

26

Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool

All thy other titles thou hast given away; that
thou wast born with.

KENT

This is not altogether fool, my lord.

Fool

No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if
I had a monopoly out, they would have part on't:
and ladies too, they will not let me have all fool
to myself; they'll be snatching. Give me an egg,
nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns.

KING LEAR

What two crowns shall they be?

Fool

Why, after I have cut the egg i' the middle, and eat
up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou
clovest thy crown i' the middle, and gavest away
both parts, thou borest thy ass on thy back o'er
the dirt: thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown,
when thou gavest thy golden one away. If I speak
like myself in this, let him be whipped that first
finds it so.

Singing

Fools had ne'er less wit in a year;
For wise men are grown foppish,
They know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.

KING LEAR

When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?

Fool

I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy
daughters thy mothers: for when thou gavest them
the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches,

Singing

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among.

27

Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach
thy fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie.

KING LEAR

An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped.

Fool

I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipped for lying; and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than a fool: and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' the middle: here comes one o' the parings.

Enter GONERIL

KING LEAR

How now, daughter! what makes that frontlet on? Methinks you are too much of late i' the frown.

Fool

Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing.

To GONERIL

Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing. Mum, mum, He that keeps nor crust nor crum, Weary of all, shall want some.

Pointing to KING LEAR

That's a shealed peascod.

GONERIL

Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool, But other of your insolent retinue Do hourly carp and quarrel; breaking forth In rank and not-to-be endured riots. Sir, I had thought, by making this well known unto you, To have found a safe redress; but now grow fearful, By what yourself too late have spoke and done. That you protect this course, and put it on

28

By your allowance; which if you should, the fault Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep, Which, in the tender of a wholesome weal, Might in their working do you that offence, Which else were shame, that then necessity Will call discreet proceeding.

Fool

For, you trow, nuncle, The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,

That it's had its head bit off by its young.
So, out went the candle, and we were left darkling.

KING LEAR

Are you our daughter?

GONERIL

Come, sir,

I would you would make use of that good wisdom,
Whereof I know you are fraught; and put away
These dispositions, that of late transform you
From what you rightly are.

Fool

May not an ass know when the cart
draws the horse? Whoop, Jug! I love thee.

KING LEAR

Doth any here know me? This is not Lear:
Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied--Ha! waking? 'tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

Fool

Lear's shadow.

KING LEAR

I would learn that; for, by the
marks of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason,
I should be false persuaded I had daughters.

Fool

Which they will make an obedient father.

KING LEAR

Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL

This admiration, sir, is much o' the savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
29

To understand my purposes aright:
As you are old and reverend, you should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy: be then desired
By her, that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train;
And the remainder, that shall still depend,
To be such men as may besort your age,

And know themselves and you.

KING LEAR

Darkness and devils!
Saddle my horses; call my train together:
Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee.
Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL

You strike my people; and your disorder'd rabble
Make servants of their betters.

Enter ALBANY

KING LEAR

Woe, that too late repents,--
To ALBANY

O, sir, are you come?
Is it your will? Speak, sir. Prepare my horses.
Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster!

ALBANY

Pray, sir, be patient.

KING LEAR

[*To GONERIL*] Detested kite! thou liest.
My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
That all particulars of duty know,
And in the most exact regard support
The worships of their name. O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!

30

That, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
From the fix'd place; drew from heart all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in,
Striking his head
And thy dear judgment out! Go, go, my people.

ALBANY

My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved you.

KING LEAR

It may be so, my lord.
Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,

Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt; that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! Away, away!

Exit

ALBANY

Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONERIL

Never afflict yourself to know the cause;
But let his disposition have that scope
That dotage gives it.

Re-enter KING LEAR

KING LEAR

What, fifty of my followers at a clap!
Within a fortnight!

ALBANY

31

What's the matter, sir?

KING LEAR

I'll tell thee:

To GONERIL

Life and death! I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
The untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
Bewep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out,
And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
To temper clay. Yea, it is come to this?
Let it be so: yet have I left a daughter,
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable:
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolfish visage. Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever: thou shalt,
I warrant thee.

Exeunt KING LEAR, KENT, and Attendants

GONERIL

Do you mark that, my lord?

ALBANY

I cannot be so partial, Goneril,

To the great love I bear you,--

GONERIL

Pray you, content. What, Oswald, ho!

To the Fool

You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

Fool

Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry and take the fool
with thee.

A fox, when one has caught her,

And such a daughter,

Should sure to the slaughter,

If my cap would buy a halter:

So the fool follows after.

32

Exit

GONERIL

This man hath had good counsel:--a hundred knights!

'Tis politic and safe to let him keep

At point a hundred knights: yes, that, on every dream,

Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,

He may enguard his dotage with their powers,

And hold our lives in mercy. Oswald, I say!

ALBANY

Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL

Safer than trust too far:

Let me still take away the harms I fear,

Not fear still to be taken: I know his heart.

What he hath utter'd I have writ my sister

If she sustain him and his hundred knights

When I have show'd the unfitness,--

Re-enter OSWALD

How now, Oswald!

What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

Take you some company, and away to horse:

Inform her full of my particular fear;

And thereto add such reasons of your own

As may compact it more. Get you gone;

And hasten your return.

Exit OSWALD

No, no, my lord,

This milky gentleness and course of yours

Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,

You are much more attask'd for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness.

ALBANY

How far your eyes may pierce I can not tell:
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

GONERIL

33

Nay, then--

ALBANY

Well, well; the event.

Exeunt

SCENE V. Court before the same.

Enter KING LEAR, KENT, and Fool

KING LEAR

Go you before to Gloucester with these letters.
Acquaint my daughter no further with any thing you
know than comes from her demand out of the letter.
If your diligence be not speedy, I shall be there afore you.

KENT

I will not sleep, my lord, till I have delivered
your letter.

Exit

Fool

If a man's brains were in's heels, were't not in
danger of kibes?

KING LEAR

Ay, boy.

Fool

Then, I prithee, be merry; thy wit shall ne'er go
slip-shod.

KING LEAR

Ha, ha, ha!

Fool

Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly;
for though she's as like this as a crab's like an
apple, yet I can tell what I can tell.

KING LEAR

Why, what canst thou tell, my boy?

Fool

She will taste as like this as a crab does to a
crab. Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i'
the middle on's face?

KING LEAR

No.

34

Fool

Why, to keep one's eyes of either side's nose; that
what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.

KING LEAR

I did her wrong--

Fool

Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

KING LEAR

No.

Fool

Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

KING LEAR

Why?

Fool

Why, to put his head in; not to give it away to his
daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

KING LEAR

I will forget my nature. So kind a father! Be my
horses ready?

Fool

Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the
seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.

KING LEAR

Because they are not eight?

Fool

Yes, indeed: thou wouldst make a good fool.

KING LEAR

To take 't again perforce! Monster ingratitude!

Fool

If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten
for being old before thy time.

KING LEAR

How's that?

Fool

Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst
been wise.

KING LEAR

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven
Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!

35

Enter Gentleman

How now! are the horses ready?

Gentleman

Ready, my lord.

KING LEAR

Come, boy.

Fool

She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure,
Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter.

Exeunt

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ACT II

SCENE I. GLOUCESTER's castle.

Enter EDMUND, and CURAN meets him

EDMUND

Save thee, Curan.

CURAN

And you, sir. I have been with your father, and
given him notice that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan
his duchess will be here with him this night.

EDMUND

How comes that?

CURAN

Nay, I know not. You have heard of the news abroad;
I mean the whispered ones, for they are yet but
ear-kissing arguments?

EDMUND

Not I pray you, what are they?

CURAN

Have you heard of no likely wars toward, 'twixt the
Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

EDMUND

Not a word.

CURAN

You may do, then, in time. Fare you well, sir.

Exit

EDMUND

The duke be here to-night? The better! best!
This weaves itself perforce into my business.
My father hath set guard to take my brother;
And I have one thing, of a queasy question,
Which I must act: briefness and fortune, work!
Brother, a word; descend: brother, I say!

Enter EDGAR

My father watches: O sir, fly this place;
Intelligence is given where you are hid;
You have now the good advantage of the night:

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Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither: now, i' the night, i' the haste,
And Regan with him: have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?
Advise yourself.

EDGAR

I am sure on't, not a word.

EDMUND

I hear my father coming: pardon me:

In cunning I must draw my sword upon you

Draw; seem to defend yourself; now quit you well.

Yield: come before my father. Light, ho, here!

Fly, brother. Torches, torches! So, farewell.

Exit EDGAR

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion.

Wounds his arm

Of my more fierce endeavour: I have seen drunkards

Do more than this in sport. Father, father!

Stop, stop! No help?

Enter GLOUCESTER, and Servants with torches

GLOUCESTER

Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,

Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon

To stand auspicious mistress,--

GLOUCESTER

But where is he?

EDMUND

Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could--

GLOUCESTER

Pursue him, ho! Go after.

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Exeunt some Servants

By no means what?

EDMUND

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;

But that I told him, the revenging gods

'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;

Spoke, with how manifold and strong a bond

The child was bound to the father; sir, in fine,

Seeing how loathly opposite I stood

To his unnatural purpose, in fell motion,

With his prepared sword, he charges home

My unprovided body, lanced mine arm:

But when he saw my best alarm'd spirits,

Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to the encounter,

Or whether gasted by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

GLOUCESTER

Let him fly far:

Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And found--dispatch. The noble duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron, comes to-night:
By his authority I will proclaim it,
That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMUND

When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight to do it, with curst speech
I threaten'd to discover him: he replied,
'Thou unpossessing bastard! dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee
Make thy words faith'd? No: what I should deny,--
As this I would: ay, though thou didst produce
My very character,--I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practise:
And thou must make a dullard of the world,
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spurs
To make thee seek it.'

GLOUCESTER

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Strong and fasten'd villain
Would he deny his letter? I never got him.

Tucket within

Hark, the duke's trumpets! I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar; the villain shall not 'scape;
The duke must grant me that: besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have the due note of him; and of my land,
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, and Attendants

CORNWALL

How now, my noble friend! since I came hither,
Which I can call but now, I have heard strange news.

REGAN

If it be true, all vengeance comes too short
Which can pursue the offender. How dost, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

O, madam, my old heart is crack'd, it's crack'd!

REGAN

What, did my father's godson seek your life?

He whom my father named? your Edgar?

GLOUCESTER

O, lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

REGAN

Was he not companion with the riotous knights

That tend upon my father?

GLOUCESTER

I know not, madam: 'tis too bad, too bad.

EDMUND

Yes, madam, he was of that consort.

REGAN

No marvel, then, though he were ill affected:

'Tis they have put him on the old man's death,

To have the expense and waste of his revenues.

I have this present evening from my sister

Been well inform'd of them; and with such cautions,

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That if they come to sojourn at my house,

I'll not be there.

CORNWALL

Nor I, assure thee, Regan.

Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father

A child-like office.

EDMUND

'Twas my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER

He did bewray his practise; and received

This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him.

CORNWALL

Is he pursued?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

CORNWALL

If he be taken, he shall never more

Be fear'd of doing harm: make your own purpose,

How in my strength you please. For you, Edmund,

Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant

So much commend itself, you shall be ours:

Natures of such deep trust we shall much need;

You we first seize on.

EDMUND

I shall serve you, sir,

Truly, however else.

GLOUCESTER

For him I thank your grace.

CORNWALL

You know not why we came to visit you,--

REGAN

Thus out of season, threading dark-eyed night:
Occasions, noble Gloucester, of some poise,
Wherein we must have use of your advice:
Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,
Of differences, which I least thought it fit
To answer from our home; the several messengers
From hence attend dispatch. Our good old friend,
Lay comforts to your bosom; and bestow
Your needful counsel to our business,
Which craves the instant use.

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GLOUCESTER

I serve you, madam:
Your graces are right welcome.

Exeunt

SCENE II. Before Gloucester's castle.

Enter KENT and OSWALD, severally

OSWALD

Good dawning to thee, friend: art of this house?

KENT

Ay.

OSWALD

Where may we set our horses?

KENT

I' the mire.

OSWALD

Prithee, if thou lovest me, tell me.

KENT

I love thee not.

OSWALD

Why, then, I care not for thee.

KENT

If I had thee in Lipsbury pifold, I would make thee
care for me.

OSWALD

Why dost thou use me thus? I know thee not.

KENT

Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD

What dost thou know me for?

KENT

A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave, a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd, in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, 42

and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.

OSWALD

Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee!

KENT

What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days ago since I tripped up thy heels, and beat thee before the king? Draw, you rogue: for, though it be night, yet the moon shines; I'll make a sop o' the moonshine of you: draw, you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw.

Drawing his sword

OSWALD

Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT

Draw, you rascal: you come with letters against the king; and take vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father: draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado your shanks: draw, you rascal; come your ways.

OSWALD

Help, ho! murder! help!

KENT

Strike, you slave; stand, rogue, stand; you neat slave, strike.

Beating him

OSWALD

Help, ho! murder! murder!

Enter EDMUND, with his rapier drawn, CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and Servants

EDMUND

How now! What's the matter?

KENT

With you, goodman boy, an you please: come, I'll flesh ye; come on, young master.

GLOUCESTER

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Weapons! arms! What 's the matter here?

CORNWALL

Keep peace, upon your lives:

He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?

REGAN

The messengers from our sister and the king.

CORNWALL

What is your difference? speak.

OSWALD

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT

No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour. You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee: a tailor made thee.

CORNWALL

Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

KENT

Ay, a tailor, sir: a stone-cutter or painter could not have made him so ill, though he had been but two hours at the trade.

CORNWALL

Speak yet, how grew your quarrel?

OSWALD

This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared at suit of his gray beard,--

KENT

Thou whoreson zed! thou unnecessary letter! My lord, if you will give me leave, I will tread this unbolted villain into mortar, and daub the wall of a jakes with him. Spare my gray beard, you wagtail?

CORNWALL

Peace, sirrah!

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL

Why art thou angry?

KENT

That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,

44

Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain

Which are too intrinse t' unloose; smooth every passion

That in the natures of their lords rebel;

Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;

Reneg, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing nought, like dogs, but following.
A plague upon your epileptic visage!
Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool?
Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain,
I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL

Why, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER

How fell you out? say that.

KENT

No contraries hold more antipathy
Than I and such a knave.

CORNWALL

Why dost thou call him a knave? What's his offence?

KENT

His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

No more, perchance, does mine, nor his, nor hers.

KENT

Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain:
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stands on any shoulder that I see
Before me at this instant.

CORNWALL

This is some fellow,
Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature: he cannot flatter, he,
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth!
An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely.

KENT

45

Sir, in good sooth, in sincere verity,
Under the allowance of your great aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phoebus' front,--

CORNWALL

What mean'st by this?

KENT

To go out of my dialect, which you

discommend so much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer: he that beguiled you in a plain accent was a plain knave; which for my part I will not be, though I should win your displeasure to entreat me to 't.

CORNWALL

What was the offence you gave him?

OSWALD

I never gave him any:

It pleased the king his master very late
To strike at me, upon his misconstruction;
When he, conjunct and flattering his displeasure,
Tripp'd me behind; being down, insulted, rail'd,
And put upon him such a deal of man,
That worthied him, got praises of the king
For him attempting who was self-subdued;
And, in the fleshment of this dread exploit,
Drew on me here again.

KENT

None of these rogues and cowards
But Ajax is their fool.

CORNWALL

Fetch forth the stocks!

You stubborn ancient knave, you reverend braggart,
We'll teach you--

KENT

Sir, I am too old to learn:
Call not your stocks for me: I serve the king;
On whose employment I was sent to you:
You shall do small respect, show too bold malice
Against the grace and person of my master,
Stocking his messenger.

CORNWALL

46

Fetch forth the stocks! As I have life and honour,
There shall he sit till noon.

REGAN

Till noon! till night, my lord; and all night too.

KENT

Why, madam, if I were your father's dog,
You should not use me so.

REGAN

Sir, being his knave, I will.

CORNWALL

This is a fellow of the self-same colour
Our sister speaks of. Come, bring away the stocks!

Stocks brought out

GLOUCESTER

Let me beseech your grace not to do so:
His fault is much, and the good king his master
Will cheque him for 't: your purposed low correction
Is such as basest and contemned'st wretches
For pilferings and most common trespasses
Are punish'd with: the king must take it ill,
That he's so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrain'd.

CORNWALL

I'll answer that.

REGAN

My sister may receive it much more worse,
To have her gentleman abused, assaulted,
For following her affairs. Put in his legs.

KENT is put in the stocks

Come, my good lord, away.

Exeunt all but GLOUCESTER and KENT

GLOUCESTER

I am sorry for thee, friend; 'tis the duke's pleasure,
Whose disposition, all the world well knows,
Will not be rubb'd nor stopp'd: I'll entreat for thee.

KENT

47

Pray, do not, sir: I have watched and travell'd hard;
Some time I shall sleep out, the rest I'll whistle.
A good man's fortune may grow out at heels:
Give you good morrow!

GLOUCESTER

The duke's to blame in this; 'twill be ill taken.

Exit

KENT

Good king, that must approve the common saw,
Thou out of heaven's benediction comest
To the warm sun!
Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter! Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery: I know 'tis from Cordelia,
Who hath most fortunately been inform'd
Of my obscured course; and shall find time
From this enormous state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies. All weary and o'erwatch'd,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
This shameful lodging.

Fortune, good night: smile once more: turn thy wheel!

Sleeps

SCENE III. A wood.

Enter EDGAR

EDGAR

I heard myself proclaim'd;
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt. No port is free; no place,
That guard, and most unusual vigilance,
Does not attend my taking. Whiles I may 'scape,
I will preserve myself: and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast: my face I'll grime with filth;
Blanket my loins: elf all my hair in knots;
And with presented nakedness out-face
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent

48

Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.

Exit

SCENE IV. Before GLOUCESTER's castle. KENT in the stocks.

Enter KING LEAR, Fool, and Gentleman

KING LEAR

'Tis strange that they should so depart from home,
And not send back my messenger.

Gentleman

As I learn'd,
The night before there was no purpose in them
Of this remove.

KENT

Hail to thee, noble master!

KING LEAR

Ha!

Makest thou this shame thy pastime?

KENT

No, my lord.

Fool

Ha, ha! he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied

by the heads, dogs and bears by the neck, monkeys by the loins, and men by the legs: when a man's over-lusty at legs, then he wears wooden nether-stocks.

KING LEAR

What's he that hath so much thy place mistook
To set thee here?

KENT

It is both he and she;
Your son and daughter.

KING LEAR

No.

49

KENT

Yes.

KING LEAR

No, I say.

KENT

I say, yea.

KING LEAR

No, no, they would not.

KENT

Yes, they have.

KING LEAR

By Jupiter, I swear, no.

KENT

By Juno, I swear, ay.

KING LEAR

They durst not do 't;

They could not, would not do 't; 'tis worse than murder,

To do upon respect such violent outrage:

Resolve me, with all modest haste, which way

Thou mightst deserve, or they impose, this usage,

Coming from us.

KENT

My lord, when at their home

I did commend your highness' letters to them,

Ere I was risen from the place that show'd

My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,

Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth

From Goneril his mistress salutations;

Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,

Which presently they read: on whose contents,

They summon'd up their meiny, straight took horse;

Commanded me to follow, and attend

The leisure of their answer; gave me cold looks:

And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome, I perceived, had poison'd mine,--
Being the very fellow that of late
Display'd so saucily against your highness,--
Having more man than wit about me, drew:
He raised the house with loud and coward cries.
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth
The shame which here it suffers.

Fool

50

Winter's not gone yet, if the wild-geese fly that way.
Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind;
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.
Fortune, that arrant whore,
Ne'er turns the key to the poor.
But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours
for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.

KING LEAR

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy element's below! Where is this daughter?

KENT

With the earl, sir, here within.

KING LEAR

Follow me not;
Stay here.

Exit

Gentleman

Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

KENT

None.
How chance the king comes with so small a train?

Fool

And thou hadst been set i' the stocks for that
question, thou hadst well deserved it.

KENT

Why, fool?

Fool

We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee
there's no labouring i' the winter. All that follow
their noses are led by their eyes but blind men; and
there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him
that's stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel
runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with

following it: but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again: I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it.

51

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain,
And leave thee in the storm,
But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly:
The knave turns fool that runs away;
The fool no knave, perdy.

KENT

Where learned you this, fool?

Fool

Not i' the stocks, fool.

Re-enter KING LEAR with GLOUCESTER

KING LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick? they are weary?
They have travell'd all the night? Mere fetches;
The images of revolt and flying off.
Fetch me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER

My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality of the duke;
How unremoveable and fix'd he is
In his own course.

KING LEAR

Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!
Fiery? what quality? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester,
I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I have inform'd them so.

KING LEAR

Inform'd them! Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

KING LEAR

The king would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service:
Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood!
Fiery? the fiery duke? Tell the hot duke that--
No, but not yet: may be he is not well:
Infirmity doth still neglect all office

52

Whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves
When nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind
To suffer with the body: I'll forbear;
And am fall'n out with my more headier will,
To take the indisposed and sickly fit
For the sound man. Death on my state! wherefore

Looking on KENT

Should he sit here? This act persuades me
That this remotion of the duke and her
Is practise only. Give me my servant forth.
Go tell the duke and 's wife I'd speak with them,
Now, presently: bid them come forth and hear me,
Or at their chamber-door I'll beat the drum
Till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

Exit

KING LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! but, down!

Fool

Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels
when she put 'em i' the paste alive; she knapped 'em
o' the coxcombs with a stick, and cried 'Down,
wantons, down!' 'Twas her brother that, in pure
kindness to his horse, buttered his hay.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and Servants

KING LEAR

Good morrow to you both.

CORNWALL

Hail to your grace!

KENT is set at liberty

REGAN

I am glad to see your highness.

KING LEAR

Regan, I think you are; I know what reason
I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad,

53

I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulchring an adultress.

To KENT

O, are you free?

Some other time for that. Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught: O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here:

Points to his heart

I can scarce speak to thee; thou'lt not believe

With how depraved a quality--O Regan!

REGAN

I pray you, sir, take patience: I have hope.
You less know how to value her desert
Than she to scant her duty.

KING LEAR

Say, how is that?

REGAN

I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation: if, sir, perchance
She have restrain'd the riots of your followers,
'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.

KING LEAR

My curses on her!

REGAN

O, sir, you are old.
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine: you should be ruled and led
By some discretion, that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you,
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

KING LEAR

Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house:
'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;

Kneeling

54

Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.'

REGAN

Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks:
Return you to my sister.

KING LEAR

[Rising] Never, Regan:

She hath abated me of half my train;
Look'd black upon me; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart:
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!

CORNWALL

Fie, sir, fie!

KING LEAR

You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames

Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall and blast her pride!

REGAN

O the blest gods! so will you wish on me,
When the rash mood is on.

KING LEAR

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse:
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness: her eyes are fierce; but thine
Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And in conclusion to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in: thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude;
Thy half o' the kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.

REGAN

Good sir, to the purpose.

KING LEAR

Who put my man i' the stocks?

Tucket within

55

CORNWALL

What trumpet's that?

REGAN

I know't, my sister's: this approves her letter,
That she would soon be here.

Enter OSWALD

Is your lady come?

KING LEAR

This is a slave, whose easy-borrow'd pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.
Out, varlet, from my sight!

CORNWALL

What means your grace?

KING LEAR

Who stock'd my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on't. Who comes here? O heavens,

Enter GONERIL

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!
To GONERIL

Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONERIL

Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offence that indiscretion finds
And dotage terms so.

KING LEAR

O sides, you are too tough;
Will you yet hold? How came my man i' the stocks?

CORNWALL

I set him there, sir: but his own disorders
Deserved much less advancement.

KING LEAR

You! did you?

REGAN

56

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If, till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me:
I am now from home, and out of that provision
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.

KING LEAR

Return to her, and fifty men dismiss'd?
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
To wage against the enmity o' the air;
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,--
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her?
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought
To knee his throne, and, squire-like; pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom.

Pointing at OSWALD

GONERIL

At your choice, sir.

KING LEAR

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell:
We'll no more meet, no more see one another:
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine: thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee;

Let shame come when it will, I do not call it:
I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove:
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure:
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN

Not altogether so:
I look'd not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion

57

Must be content to think you old, and so--
But she knows what she does.

KING LEAR

Is this well spoken?

REGAN

I dare avouch it, sir: what, fifty followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more?
Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
Should many people, under two commands,
Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible.

GONERIL

Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants or from mine?

REGAN

Why not, my lord? If then they chanced to slack you,
We could control them. If you will come to me,--
For now I spy a danger,--I entreat you
To bring but five and twenty: to no more
Will I give place or notice.

KING LEAR

I gave you all--

REGAN

And in good time you gave it.

KING LEAR

Made you my guardians, my depositaries;
But kept a reservation to be follow'd
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five and twenty, Regan? said you so?

REGAN

And speak't again, my lord; no more with me.

KING LEAR

Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd,
When others are more wicked: not being the worst

Stands in some rank of praise.

To **GONERIL**

I'll go with thee:

Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

58

GONERIL

Hear me, my lord;

What need you five and twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN

What need one?

KING LEAR

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's: thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,--
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall--I will do such things,--
What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep
No, I'll not weep:

I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!

Exeunt KING LEAR, GLOUCESTER, KENT, and Fool
Storm and tempest

CORNWALL

Let us withdraw; 'twill be a storm.

REGAN

This house is little: the old man and his people
Cannot be well bestow'd.

GONERIL

59

'Tis his own blame; hath put himself from rest,
And must needs taste his folly.

REGAN

For his particular, I'll receive him gladly,
But not one follower.

GONERIL

So am I purposed.
Where is my lord of Gloucester?

CORNWALL

Follow'd the old man forth: he is return'd.
Re-enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

The king is in high rage.

CORNWALL

Whither is he going?

GLOUCESTER

He calls to horse; but will I know not whither.

CORNWALL

'Tis best to give him way; he leads himself.

GONERIL

My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds
Do sorely ruffle; for many miles a bout
There's scarce a bush.

REGAN

O, sir, to wilful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors:
He is attended with a desperate train;
And what they may incense him to, being apt
To have his ear abused, wisdom bids fear.

CORNWALL

Shut up your doors, my lord; 'tis a wild night:
My Regan counsels well; come out o' the storm.
Exeunt

60

ACT III

SCENE I. A heath.

Storm still. Enter KENT and a Gentleman, meeting

KENT

Who's there, besides foul weather?

Gentleman

One minded like the weather, most unquietly.

KENT

I know you. Where's the king?

Gentleman

Contending with the fretful element:
Bids the winds blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled water 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn
The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain.
This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear would couch,
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs,
And bids what will take all.

KENT

But who is with him?

Gentleman

None but the fool; who labours to out-jest
His heart-struck injuries.

KENT

Sir, I do know you;
And dare, upon the warrant of my note,
Commend a dear thing to you. There is division,
Although as yet the face of it be cover'd
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall;
Who have--as who have not, that their great stars
Throned and set high?--servants, who seem no less,
Which are to France the spies and speculations
Intelligent of our state; what hath been seen,
Either in snuffs and packings of the dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them have borne
Against the old kind king; or something deeper,
61

Whereof perchance these are but furnishings;
But, true it is, from France there comes a power
Into this scatter'd kingdom; who already,
Wise in our negligence, have secret feet
In some of our best ports, and are at point
To show their open banner. Now to you:
If on my credit you dare build so far
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find
Some that will thank you, making just report
Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow
The king hath cause to plain.
I am a gentleman of blood and breeding;
And, from some knowledge and assurance, offer
This office to you.

Gentleman

I will talk further with you.

KENT

No, do not.

For confirmation that I am much more
Than my out-wall, open this purse, and take
What it contains. If you shall see Cordelia,--
As fear not but you shall,--show her this ring;
And she will tell you who your fellow is
That yet you do not know. Fie on this storm!
I will go seek the king.

Gentleman

Give me your hand: have you no more to say?

KENT

Few words, but, to effect, more than all yet;
That, when we have found the king,--in which your pain
That way, I'll this,--he that first lights on him
Holla the other.

Exeunt severally

SCENE II. Another part of the heath. Storm still.

Enter KING LEAR and Fool

KING LEAR

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
62

Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man!

Fool

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry
house is better than this rain-water out o' door.
Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing:
here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

KING LEAR

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription: then let fall
Your horrible pleasure: here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:
But yet I call you servile ministers,

That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul!

Fool

He that has a house to put's head in has a good
head-piece.

The cod-piece that will house

Before the head has any,

The head and he shall louse;

So beggars marry many.

The man that makes his toe

What he his heart should make

Shall of a corn cry woe,

And turn his sleep to wake.

For there was never yet fair woman but she made
mouths in a glass.

KING LEAR

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;

I will say nothing.

Enter KENT

KENT

Who's there?

63

Fool

Marry, here's grace and a cod-piece; that's a wise
man and a fool.

KENT

Alas, sir, are you here? things that love night

Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies

Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,

And make them keep their caves: since I was man,

Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,

Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never

Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry

The affliction nor the fear.

KING LEAR

Let the great gods,

That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,

Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,

That hast within thee undivulged crimes,

Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;

Thou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue

That art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,

That under covert and convenient seeming

Hast practised on man's life: close pent-up guilts,

Rive your concealing continents, and cry

These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

KENT

Alack, bare-headed!
Gracious my lord, hard by here is a hovel;
Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest:
Repose you there; while I to this hard house--
More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised;
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in--return, and force
Their scanted courtesy.

KING LEAR

My wits begin to turn.
Come on, my boy: how dost, my boy? art cold?
I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come,
your hovel.
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee.

64

Fool

[Singing]
He that has and a little tiny wit--
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,--
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day.

KING LEAR

True, my good boy. Come, bring us to this hovel.
Exeunt KING LEAR and KENT

Fool

This is a brave night to cool a courtezan.
I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:
When priests are more in word than matter;
When brewers mar their malt with water;
When nobles are their tailors' tutors;
No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;
When every case in law is right;
No squire in debt, nor no poor knight;
When slanders do not live in tongues;
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
When usurers tell their gold i' the field;
And bawds and whores do churches build;
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion:
Then comes the time, who lives to see't,

That going shall be used with feet.
This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time.

Exit

SCENE III. Gloucester's castle.

Enter GLOUCESTER and EDMUND

GLOUCESTER

Alack, alack, Edmund, I like not this unnatural dealing. When I desire their leave that I might pity him, they took from me the use of mine own house; charged me, on pain of their perpetual displeasure, neither to speak of him, entreat for him, nor any way sustain him.

EDMUND

Most savage and unnatural!

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GLOUCESTER

Go to; say you nothing. There's a division betwixt the dukes; and a worse matter than that: I have received a letter this night; 'tis dangerous to be spoken; I have locked the letter in my closet: these injuries the king now bears will be revenged home; there's part of a power already footed: we must incline to the king. I will seek him, and privily relieve him: go you and maintain talk with the duke, that my charity be not of him perceived: if he ask for me. I am ill, and gone to bed. Though I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the king my old master must be relieved. There is some strange thing toward, Edmund; pray you, be careful.

Exit

EDMUND

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke Instantly know; and of that letter too: This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me That which my father loses; no less than all: The younger rises when the old doth fall.

Exit

SCENE IV. The heath. Before a hovel.

Enter KING LEAR, KENT, and Fool

KENT

Here is the place, my lord; good my lord, enter: The tyranny of the open night's too rough For nature to endure.

Storm still

KING LEAR

Let me alone.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

KING LEAR

Wilt break my heart?

KENT

I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter.

66

KING LEAR

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;

But where the greater malady is fix'd,

The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'ldst shun a bear;

But if thy flight lay toward the raging sea,

Thou'ldst meet the bear i' the mouth. When the
mind's free,

The body's delicate: the tempest in my mind

Doth from my senses take all feeling else

Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand

For lifting food to't? But I will punish home:

No, I will weep no more. In such a night

To shut me out! Pour on; I will endure.

In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!

Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all,--

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;

No more of that.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

KING LEAR

Prithee, go in thyself: seek thine own ease:

This tempest will not give me leave to ponder

On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.

To the Fool

In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,--

Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

Fool goes in

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,

That bid the pelting of this pitiless storm,

How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,

Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you

From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en

Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,

And show the heavens more just.

EDGAR

[Within] Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

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The Fool runs out from the hovel

Fool

Come not in here, nuncle, here's a spirit

Help me, help me!

KENT

Give me thy hand. Who's there?

Fool

A spirit, a spirit: he says his name's poor Tom.

KENT

What art thou that dost grumble there i' the straw?

Come forth.

Enter EDGAR disguised as a mad man

EDGAR

Away! the foul fiend follows me!

Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind.

Hum! go to thy cold bed, and warm thee.

KING LEAR

Hast thou given all to thy two daughters?

And art thou come to this?

EDGAR

Who gives any thing to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, and through ford and whirlpool e'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting-horse over four-inched bridges, to course his own shadow for a traitor. Bless thy five wits! Tom's a-cold,--O, do de, do de, do de. Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking! Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes: there could I have him now,--and there,--and there again, and there.

Storm still

KING LEAR

What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?

Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?

Fool

Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

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KING LEAR

Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air

Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT

He hath no daughters, sir.

KING LEAR

Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is it the fashion, that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.

EDGAR

Pillicock sat on Pillicock-hill:
Halloo, halloo, loo, loo!

Fool

This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDGAR

Take heed o' the foul fiend: obey thy parents;
keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with
man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud
array. Tom's a-cold.

KING LEAR

What hast thou been?

EDGAR

A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled
my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of
my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with
her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and
broke them in the sweet face of heaven: one that
slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it:
wine loved I deeply, dice dearly: and in woman
out-paramoured the Turk: false of heart, light of
ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth,
wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey.
Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of
silks betray thy poor heart to woman: keep thy foot
out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen
from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.
Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind:
Says suum, mun, ha, no, nonny.
Dolphin my boy, my boy, sessa! let him trot by.

69

Storm still

KING LEAR

Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer
with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.
Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou
owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep
no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on
's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself:

unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare,
forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!
come unbutton here.

Tearing off his clothes

Fool

Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night
to swim in. Now a little fire in a wild field were
like an old lecher's heart; a small spark, all the
rest on's body cold. Look, here comes a walking fire.

Enter GLOUCESTER, with a torch

EDGAR

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins
at curfew, and walks till the first cock; he gives
the web and the pin, squints the eye, and makes the
hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the
poor creature of earth.

S. Withold footed thrice the old;

He met the night-mare, and her nine-fold;

Bid her alight,

And her troth plight,

And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT

How fares your grace?

KING LEAR

What's he?

KENT

Who's there? What is't you seek?

GLOUCESTER

What are you there? Your names?

EDGAR

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Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad,
the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in
the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages,
eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows the old rat and
the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the
standing pool; who is whipped from tithing to
tithing, and stock-punished, and imprisoned; who
hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his
body, horse to ride, and weapon to wear;
But mice and rats, and such small deer,
Have been Tom's food for seven long year.

Beware my follower. Peace, Smulkin; peace, thou fiend!

GLOUCESTER

What, hath your grace no better company?

EDGAR

The prince of darkness is a gentleman:
Modo he's call'd, and Mahu.

GLOUCESTER

Our flesh and blood is grown so vile, my lord,
That it doth hate what gets it.

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

Go in with me: my duty cannot suffer
To obey in all your daughters' hard commands:
Though their injunction be to bar my doors,
And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,
Yet have I ventured to come seek you out,
And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

KING LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher.
What is the cause of thunder?

KENT

Good my lord, take his offer; go into the house.

KING LEAR

I'll talk a word with this same learned Theban.
What is your study?

EDGAR

How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.

KING LEAR

Let me ask you one word in private.

71

KENT

Importune him once more to go, my lord;
His wits begin to unsettle.

GLOUCESTER

Canst thou blame him?

Storm still

His daughters seek his death: ah, that good Kent!
He said it would be thus, poor banish'd man!
Thou say'st the king grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,
I am almost mad myself: I had a son,
Now outlaw'd from my blood; he sought my life,
But lately, very late: I loved him, friend;
No father his son dearer: truth to tell thee,
The grief hath crazed my wits. What a night's this!
I do beseech your grace,--

KING LEAR

O, cry your mercy, sir.
Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR

Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

In, fellow, there, into the hovel: keep thee warm.

KING LEAR

Come let's in all.

KENT

This way, my lord.

KING LEAR

With him;

I will keep still with my philosopher.

KENT

Good my lord, soothe him; let him take the fellow.

GLOUCESTER

Take him you on.

KENT

Sirrah, come on; go along with us.

KING LEAR

Come, good Athenian.

GLOUCESTER

No words, no words: hush.

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EDGAR

Child Rowland to the dark tower came,

His word was still,--Fie, foh, and fum,

I smell the blood of a British man.

Exeunt

SCENE V. Gloucester's castle.

Enter CORNWALL and EDMUND

CORNWALL

I will have my revenge ere I depart his house.

EDMUND

How, my lord, I may be censured, that nature thus gives way to loyalty, something fears me to think of.

CORNWALL

I now perceive, it was not altogether your brother's evil disposition made him seek his death; but a provoking merit, set a-work by a reprobable badness in himself.

EDMUND

How malicious is my fortune, that I must repent to be just! This is the letter he spoke of, which approves him an intelligent party to the advantages of France: O heavens! that this treason were not, or not I the detector!

CORNWALL

o with me to the duchess.

EDMUND

If the matter of this paper be certain, you have
mighty business in hand.

CORNWALL

True or false, it hath made thee earl of
Gloucester. Seek out where thy father is, that he
may be ready for our apprehension.

EDMUND

[Aside] If I find him comforting the king, it will
stuff his suspicion more fully.--I will persevere in
my course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore
between that and my blood.

CORNWALL

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I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a
dearer father in my love.

Exeunt

SCENE VI. A chamber in a farmhouse adjoining the castle.

Enter GLOUCESTER, KING LEAR, KENT, Fool, and EDGAR

GLOUCESTER

Here is better than the open air; take it
thankfully. I will piece out the comfort with what
addition I can: I will not be long from you.

KENT

All the power of his wits have given way to his
impatience: the gods reward your kindness!

Exit GLOUCESTER

EDGAR

Frateretto calls me; and tells me
Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness.
Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.

Fool

Prithee, nunce, tell me whether a madman be a
gentleman or a yeoman?

KING LEAR

A king, a king!

Fool

No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son;
for he's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman
before him.

KING LEAR

To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em,--

EDGAR

The foul fiend bites my back.

Fool

He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love, or a whore's oath.

KING LEAR

It shall be done; I will arraign them straight.

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To EDGAR

Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer;

To the Fool

Thou, sapient sir, sit here. Now, you she foxes!

EDGAR

Look, where he stands and glares!

Wantest thou eyes at trial, madam?

Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me,--

Fool

Her boat hath a leak,

And she must not speak

Why she dares not come over to thee.

EDGAR

The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale. Hopdance cries in Tom's belly for two white herring. Croak not, black angel; I have no food for thee.

KENT

How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed:

Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?

KING LEAR

I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.

To EDGAR

Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;

To the Fool

And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,

Bench by his side:

To KENT

you are o' the commission,

Sit you too.

EDGAR

Let us deal justly.

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?

Thy sheep be in the corn;

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And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,

Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Pur! the cat is gray.

KING LEAR

Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril. I here take my

oath before this honourable assembly, she kicked the poor king her father.

Fool

Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR

She cannot deny it.

Fool

Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.

KING LEAR

And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim

What store her heart is made on. Stop her there!

Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!

False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?

EDGAR

Bless thy five wits!

KENT

O pity! Sir, where is the patience now,

That thou so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR

[Aside] My tears begin to take his part so much,

They'll mar my counterfeiting.

KING LEAR

The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanch, and

Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR

Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt, you curs!

Be thy mouth or black or white,

Tooth that poisons if it bite;

Mastiff, grey-hound, mongrel grim,

Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,

Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail,

Tom will make them weep and wail:

For, with throwing thus my head,

Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled.

Do de, de, de. Sessa! Come, march to wakes and

fairs and market-towns. Poor Tom, thy horn is dry.

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KING LEAR

Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds

about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that

makes these hard hearts?

To EDGAR

You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred; only I

do not like the fashion of your garments: you will

say they are Persian attire: but let them be changed.

KENT

Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

KING LEAR

Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains:
so, so, so. We'll go to supper i' he morning. So, so, so.

Fool

And I'll go to bed at noon.

Re-enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

Come hither, friend: where is the king my master?

KENT

Here, sir; but trouble him not, his wits are gone.

GLOUCESTER

Good friend, I prithee, take him in thy arms;
I have o'erheard a plot of death upon him:
There is a litter ready; lay him in 't,
And drive towards Dover, friend, where thou shalt meet
Both welcome and protection. Take up thy master:
If thou shouldst dally half an hour, his life,
With thine, and all that offer to defend him,
Stand in assured loss: take up, take up;
And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

KENT

Oppressed nature sleeps:
This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken senses,
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure.

To the Fool

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Come, help to bear thy master;
Thou must not stay behind.

GLOUCESTER

Come, come, away.

Exeunt all but EDGAR

EDGAR

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers suffers most i' the mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind:
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'er skip,
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
How light and portable my pain seems now,
When that which makes me bend makes the king bow,
He childed as I father'd! Tom, away!
Mark the high noises; and thyself bewray,
When false opinion, whose wrong thought defiles thee,

In thy just proof, repeals and reconciles thee.
What will hap more to-night, safe 'scape the king!
Lurk, lurk.

Exit

SCENE VII. Gloucester's castle.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GONERIL, EDMUND, and Servants

CORNWALL

Post speedily to my lord your husband; show him
this letter: the army of France is landed. Seek
out the villain Gloucester.

Exeunt some of the Servants

REGAN

Hang him instantly.

GONERIL

Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL

Leave him to my displeasure. Edmund, keep you our
sister company: the revenges we are bound to take
upon your traitorous father are not fit for your
beholding. Advise the duke, where you are going, to
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a most festinate preparation: we are bound to the
like. Our posts shall be swift and intelligent
betwixt us. Farewell, dear sister: farewell, my
lord of Gloucester.

Enter OSWALD

How now! where's the king?

OSWALD

My lord of Gloucester hath convey'd him hence:
Some five or six and thirty of his knights,
Hot questrists after him, met him at gate;
Who, with some other of the lords dependants,
Are gone with him towards Dover; where they boast
To have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL

Get horses for your mistress.

GONERIL

Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL

Edmund, farewell.

Exeunt GONERIL, EDMUND, and OSWALD

Go seek the traitor Gloucester,
Pinion him like a thief, bring him before us.

Exeunt other Servants

Though well we may not pass upon his life
Without the form of justice, yet our power

Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control. Who's there? the traitor?
Enter GLOUCESTER, brought in by two or three

REGAN

Ingrateful fox! 'tis he.

CORNWALL

Bind fast his corky arms.

GLOUCESTER

What mean your graces? Good my friends, consider
You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends.

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CORNWALL

Bind him, I say.

Servants bind him

REGAN

Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

CORNWALL

To this chair bind him. Villain, thou shalt find--

REGAN plucks his beard

GLOUCESTER

By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done

To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN

So white, and such a traitor!

GLOUCESTER

Naughty lady,

These hairs, which thou dost ravish from my chin,

Will quicken, and accuse thee: I am your host:

With robbers' hands my hospitable favours

You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?

CORNWALL

Come, sir, what letters had you late from France?

REGAN

Be simple answerer, for we know the truth.

CORNWALL

And what confederacy have you with the traitors

Late footed in the kingdom?

REGAN

To whose hands have you sent the lunatic king? Speak.

GLOUCESTER

I have a letter guessingly set down,

Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,

And not from one opposed.

CORNWALL

Cunning.

REGAN

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And false.

CORNWALL

Where hast thou sent the king?

GLOUCESTER

To Dover.

REGAN

Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril--

CORNWALL

Wherefore to Dover? Let him first answer that.

GLOUCESTER

I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course.

REGAN

Wherefore to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Because I would not see thy cruel nails

Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.

The sea, with such a storm as his bare head

In hell-black night endured, would have buoy'd up,

And quench'd the stelled fires:

Yet, poor old heart, he help the heavens to rain.

If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that stern time,

Thou shouldst have said 'Good porter, turn the key,'

All cruels else subscribed: but I shall see

The winged vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL

See't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair.

Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

GLOUCESTER

He that will think to live till he be old,

Give me some help! O cruel! O you gods!

REGAN

One side will mock another; the other too.

CORNWALL

If you see vengeance,--

First Servant

Hold your hand, my lord:

I have served you ever since I was a child;

But better service have I never done you

Than now to bid you hold.

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REGAN

How now, you dog!

First Servant

If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?

CORNWALL

My villain!

They draw and fight

First Servant

Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

REGAN

Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!

Takes a sword, and runs at him behind

First Servant

O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. O!

Dies

CORNWALL

Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!

Where is thy lustre now?

GLOUCESTER

All dark and comfortless. Where's my son Edmund?

Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature,

To quit this horrid act.

REGAN

Out, treacherous villain!

Thou call'st on him that hates thee: it was he

That made the overture of thy treasons to us;

Who is too good to pity thee.

GLOUCESTER

O my follies! then Edgar was abused.

Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell

His way to Dover.

Exit one with GLOUCESTER

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How is't, my lord? how look you?

CORNWALL

I have received a hurt: follow me, lady.

Turn out that eyeless villain; throw this slave

Upon the dunghill. Regan, I bleed apace:

Untimely comes this hurt: give me your arm.

Exit CORNWALL, led by REGAN

Second Servant

I'll never care what wickedness I do,

If this man come to good.

Third Servant

If she live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,
Women will all turn monsters.

Second Servant

Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam
To lead him where he would: his roguish madness
Allows itself to any thing.

Third Servant

Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face. Now, heaven help him!
Exeunt severally

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ACT IV

SCENE I. The heath.

Enter EDGAR

EDGAR

Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,
Than still contemn'd and flatter'd. To be worst,
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear:
The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts. But who comes here?

Enter GLOUCESTER, led by an Old Man

My father, poorly led? World, world, O world!
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Lie would not yield to age.

Old Man

O, my good lord, I have been your tenant, and
your father's tenant, these fourscore years.

GLOUCESTER

Away, get thee away; good friend, be gone:
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

Old Man

Alack, sir, you cannot see your way.

GLOUCESTER

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw: full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath!
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again!

Old Man

How now! Who's there?

EDGAR

84

[Aside] O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?

I am worse than e'er I was.

Old Man

'Tis poor mad Tom.

EDGAR

[Aside] And worse I may be yet: the worst is not So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'

Old Man

Fellow, where goest?

GLOUCESTER

Is it a beggar-man?

Old Man

Madman and beggar too.

GLOUCESTER

He has some reason, else he could not beg.
I' the last night's storm I such a fellow saw;
Which made me think a man a worm: my son
Came then into my mind; and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him: I have heard
more since.

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods.
They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR

[Aside] How should this be?

Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Angering itself and others.--Bless thee, master!

GLOUCESTER

Is that the naked fellow?

Old Man

Ay, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

Then, prithee, get thee gone: if, for my sake,
Thou wilt o'ertake us, hence a mile or twain,
I' the way toward Dover, do it for ancient love;
And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Who I'll entreat to lead me.

Old Man

Alack, sir, he is mad.

GLOUCESTER

85

'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind.

Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure;
Above the rest, be gone.

Old Man

I'll bring him the best 'parel that I have,
Come on't what will.

Exit

GLOUCESTER

Sirrah, naked fellow,--

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold.

Aside

I cannot daub it further.

GLOUCESTER

Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR

[*Aside*] And yet I must.--Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Know'st thou the way to Dover?

EDGAR

Both stile and gate, horse-way and foot-path. Poor
Tom hath been scared out of his good wits: bless
thee, good man's son, from the foul fiend! five
fiends have been in poor Tom at once; of lust, as
Obidicut; Hobbididence, prince of dumbness; Mahu, of
stealing; Modo, of murder; Flibbertigibbet, of
mopping and mowing, who since possesses chambermaids
and waiting-women. So, bless thee, master!

GLOUCESTER

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
Makes thee the happier: heavens, deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR

86

Ay, master.

GLOUCESTER

There is a cliff, whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep:
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
With something rich about me: from that place
I shall no leading need.

EDGAR

Give me thy arm:
Poor Tom shall lead thee.

Exeunt

SCENE II. Before ALBANY's palace.

Enter GONERIL and EDMUND

GONERIL

Welcome, my lord: I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way.

Enter OSWALD

Now, where's your master'?

OSWALD

Madam, within; but never man so changed.
I told him of the army that was landed;
He smiled at it: I told him you were coming:
His answer was 'The worse:' of Gloucester's treachery,
And of the loyal service of his son,
When I inform'd him, then he call'd me sot,
And told me I had turn'd the wrong side out:
What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive.

GONERIL

[To EDMUND] Then shall you go no further.
It is the cowish terror of his spirit,
That dares not undertake: he'll not feel wrongs
Which tie him to an answer. Our wishes on the way
May prove effects. Back, Edmund, to my brother;
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers:
I must change arms at home, and give the distaff
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant

87

Shall pass between us: ere long you are like to hear,
If you dare venture in your own behalf,
A mistress's command. Wear this; spare speech;

Giving a favour

Decline your head: this kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air:
Conceive, and fare thee well.

EDMUND

Yours in the ranks of death.

GONERIL

My most dear Gloucester!

Exit EDMUND

O, the difference of man and man!
To thee a woman's services are due:
My fool usurps my body.

OSWALD

Madam, here comes my lord.

Exit

Enter ALBANY

GONERIL

I have been worth the whistle.

ALBANY

O Goneril!

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind

Blows in your face. I fear your disposition:

That nature, which contemns its origin,

Cannot be border'd certain in itself;

She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap, perforce must wither

And come to deadly use.

GONERIL

No more; the text is foolish.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile:

Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?

Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?

88

A father, and a gracious aged man,

Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd bear would lick,

Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.

Could my good brother suffer you to do it?

A man, a prince, by him so benefited!

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits

Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,

It will come,

Humanity must perforce prey on itself,

Like monsters of the deep.

GONERIL

Milk-liver'd man!

That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;

Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning

Thine honour from thy suffering; that not know'st

Fools do those villains pity who are punish'd

Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy drum?

France spreads his banners in our noiseless land;

With plumed helm thy slayer begins threats;

Whiles thou, a moral fool, sit'st still, and criest

'Alack, why does he so?'

ALBANY

See thyself, devil!

Proper deformity seems not in the fiend

So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL

O vain fool!

ALBANY

Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame,
Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones: howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood now--

Enter a Messenger

ALBANY

What news?

Messenger

89

O, my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead:
Slain by his servant, going to put out
The other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY

Gloucester's eye!

Messenger

A servant that he bred, thrill'd with remorse,
Opposed against the act, bending his sword
To his great master; who, thereat enraged,
Flew on him, and amongst them fell'd him dead;
But not without that harmful stroke, which since
Hath pluck'd him after.

ALBANY

This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge! But, O poor Gloucester!
Lost he his other eye?

Messenger

Both, both, my lord.

This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer;

'Tis from your sister.

GONERIL

[Aside] One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
May all the building in my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life: another way,
The news is not so tart.--I'll read, and answer.

Exit

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

Messenger

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

Messenger

No, my good lord; I met him back again.

ALBANY

Knows he the wickedness?

Messenger

90

Ay, my good lord; 'twas he inform'd against him;
And quit the house on purpose, that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I live

To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the king,
And to revenge thine eyes. Come hither, friend:
Tell me what more thou know'st.

Exeunt

SCENE III. The French camp near Dover.

Enter KENT and a Gentleman

KENT

Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back
know you the reason?

Gentleman

Something he left imperfect in the
state, which since his coming forth is thought
of; which imports to the kingdom so much
fear and danger, that his personal return was
most required and necessary.

KENT

Who hath he left behind him general?

Gentleman

The Marshal of France, Monsieur La Far.

KENT

Did your letters pierce the queen to any
demonstration of grief?

Gentleman

Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

KENT

O, then it moved her.

Gentleman

Not to a rage: patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
91

Were like a better way: those happy smilets,
That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,
If all could so become it.

KENT

Made she no verbal question?

Gentleman

'Faith, once or twice she heaved the name of 'father'
Pantingly forth, as if it press'd her heart:
Cried 'Sisters! sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters!
Kent! father! sisters! What, i' the storm? i' the night?
Let pity not be believed!' There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
And clamour moisten'd: then away she started
To deal with grief alone.

KENT

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and mate could not beget
Such different issues. You spoke not with her since?

Gentleman

No.

KENT

Was this before the king return'd?

Gentleman

No, since.

KENT

Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear's i' the town;
Who sometime, in his better tune, remembers
What we are come about, and by no means
Will yield to see his daughter.

Gentleman

Why, good sir?

KENT

A sovereign shame so elbows him: his own unkindness,
That stripp'd her from his benediction, turn'd her
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters, these things sting
His mind so venomously, that burning shame

Detains him from Cordelia.

92

Gentleman

Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT

Of Albany's and Cornwall's powers you heard not?

Gentleman

'Tis so, they are afoot.

KENT

Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear,
And leave you to attend him: some dear cause
Will in concealment wrap me up awhile;
When I am known aright, you shall not grieve
Lending me this acquaintance. I pray you, go
Along with me.

Exeunt

SCENE IV. The same. A tent.

Enter, with drum and colours, CORDELIA, Doctor, and Soldiers

CORDELIA

Alack, 'tis he: why, he was met even now
As mad as the vex'd sea; singing aloud;
Crown'd with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,
With bur-docks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn. A century send forth;
Search every acre in the high-grown field,
And bring him to our eye.

Exit an Officer

What can man's wisdom
In the restoring his bereaved sense?
He that helps him take all my outward worth.

Doctor

There is means, madam:
Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
The which he lacks; that to provoke in him,
Are many simples operative, whose power
Will close the eye of anguish.

CORDELIA

All blest secrets,
All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,

93

Spring with my tears! be aidant and remediate
In the good man's distress! Seek, seek for him;
Lest his ungovern'd rage dissolve the life
That wants the means to lead it.

Enter a Messenger

Messenger

News, madam;
The British powers are marching hitherward.

CORDELIA

'Tis known before; our preparation stands
In expectation of them. O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about;
Therefore great France
My mourning and important tears hath pitied.
No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our aged father's right:
Soon may I hear and see him!

Exeunt

SCENE V. Gloucester's castle.

Enter REGAN and OSWALD

REGAN

But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD

Ay, madam.

REGAN

Himself in person there?

OSWALD

Madam, with much ado:
Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN

Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

OSWALD

No, madam.

REGAN

What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD

I know not, lady.

94

REGAN

'Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.
It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,
To let him live: where he arrives he moves
All hearts against us: Edmund, I think, is gone,
In pity of his misery, to dispatch
His nighted life: moreover, to descry
The strength o' the enemy.

OSWALD

I must needs after him, madam, with my letter.

REGAN

Our troops set forth to-morrow: stay with us;
The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD

I may not, madam:
My lady charged my duty in this business.

REGAN

Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word? Belike,
Something--I know not what: I'll love thee much,
Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD

Madam, I had rather--

REGAN

I know your lady does not love her husband;
I am sure of that: and at her late being here
She gave strange oeillades and most speaking looks
To noble Edmund. I know you are of her bosom.

OSWALD

I, madam?

REGAN

I speak in understanding; you are; I know't:
Therefore I do advise you, take this note:
My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talk'd;
And more convenient is he for my hand
Than for your lady's: you may gather more.
If you do find him, pray you, give him this;
And when your mistress hears thus much from you,
I pray, desire her call her wisdom to her.
So, fare you well.
If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

95

OSWALD

Would I could meet him, madam! I should show
What party I do follow.

REGAN

Fare thee well.

Exeunt

SCENE VI. Fields near Dover.

Enter GLOUCESTER, and EDGAR dressed like a peasant

GLOUCESTER

When shall we come to the top of that same hill?

EDGAR

You do climb up it now: look, how we labour.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

EDGAR

Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect

By your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER

So may it be, indeed:

Methinks thy voice is alter'd; and thou speak'st

In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

EDGAR

You're much deceived: in nothing am I changed

But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks you're better spoken.

EDGAR

Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful

And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air

Show scarce so gross as beetles: half way down

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:

96

The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,

Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,

Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy

Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,

That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,

Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;

Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight

Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER

Set me where you stand.

EDGAR

Give me your hand: you are now within a foot

Of the extreme verge: for all beneath the moon

Would I not leap upright.

GLOUCESTER

Let go my hand.

Here, friend, 's another purse; in it a jewel

Well worth a poor man's taking: fairies and gods

Prosper it with thee! Go thou farther off;

Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

Now fare you well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR

Why I do trifle thus with his despair

Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER

[Kneeling] O you mighty gods!

This world I do renounce, and, in your sights,

Shake patiently my great affliction off:

If I could bear it longer, and not fall

To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,

My snuff and loathed part of nature should

Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O, bless him!

Now, fellow, fare thee well.

He falls forward

EDGAR

Gone, sir: farewell.

And yet I know not how conceit may rob

97

The treasury of life, when life itself

Yields to the theft: had he been where he thought,

By this, had thought been past. Alive or dead?

Ho, you sir! friend! Hear you, sir! speak!

Thus might he pass indeed: yet he revives.

What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Away, and let me die.

EDGAR

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,

So many fathom down precipitating,

Thou'dst shiver'd like an egg: but thou dost breathe;

Hast heavy substance; bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound.

Ten masts at each make not the altitude

Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:

Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

GLOUCESTER

But have I fall'n, or no?

EDGAR

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.

Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged lark so far

Cannot be seen or heard: do but look up.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, I have no eyes.

Is wretchedness deprived that benefit,

To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort,

When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage,

And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR

Give me your arm:

Up: so. How is 't? Feel you your legs? You stand.

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR

This is above all strangeness.

Upon the crown o' the cliff, what thing was that

Which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER

A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR

98

As I stood here below, methought his eyes

Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,

Horns whelk'd and waved like the enridged sea:

It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,

Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours

Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

I do remember now: henceforth I'll bear

Affliction till it do cry out itself

'Enough, enough,' and die. That thing you speak of,

I took it for a man; often 'twould say

'The fiend, the fiend:' he led me to that place.

EDGAR

Bear free and patient thoughts. But who comes here?

Enter KING LEAR, fantastically dressed with wild flowers

The safer sense will ne'er accommodate

His master thus.

KING LEAR

No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the

king himself.

EDGAR

O thou side-piercing sight!

KING LEAR

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your

press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a

crow-keeper: draw me a clothier's yard. Look,

look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted

cheese will do 't. There's my gauntlet; I'll prove

it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O, well

flown, bird! i' the clout, i' the clout: hewgh!

Give the word.

EDGAR

Sweet marjoram.

KING LEAR

Pass.

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

KING LEAR

Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! They flattered me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my
99

beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said!--'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was every thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER

The trick of that voice I do well remember:

Is 't not the king?

KING LEAR

Ay, every inch a king:

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause? Adultery?

Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:

The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fly

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son

Was kinder to his father than my daughters

Got 'tween the lawful sheets.

To 't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers.

Behold yond simpering dame,

Whose face between her forks presages snow;

That minces virtue, and does shake the head

To hear of pleasure's name;

The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to 't

With a more riotous appetite.

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,

Though women all above:

But to the girdle do the gods inherit,

Beneath is all the fiends';

There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,

Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie,

fie, fie! pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet,

good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination:

there's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER

O, let me kiss that hand!

KING LEAR

Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER

100

O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world
Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

KING LEAR

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny
at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid! I'll not
love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the
penning of it.

GLOUCESTER

Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

EDGAR

I would not take this from report; it is,
And my heart breaks at it.

KING LEAR

Read.

GLOUCESTER

What, with the case of eyes?

KING LEAR

O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your
head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in
a heavy case, your purse in a light; yet you see how
this world goes.

GLOUCESTER

I see it feelingly.

KING LEAR

What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes
with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yond
justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in
thine ear: change places; and, handy-dandy, which
is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen
a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, sir.

KING LEAR

And the creature run from the cur? There thou
mightst behold the great image of authority: a
dog's obeyed in office.

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;

Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind

For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
101

Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em:
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
To seal the accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes;
And like a scurvy politician, seem
To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now:
Pull off my boots: harder, harder: so.

EDGAR

O, matter and impertinency mix'd! Reason in madness!

KING LEAR

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester:
Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, alack the day!

KING LEAR

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools: this a good block;
It were a delicate stratagem, to shoe
A troop of horse with felt: I'll put 't in proof;
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Enter a Gentleman, with Attendants

Gentleman

O, here he is: lay hand upon him. Sir,
Your most dear daughter--

KING LEAR

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool of fortune. Use me well;
You shall have ransom. Let me have surgeons;
I am cut to the brains.

Gentleman

You shall have any thing.

KING LEAR

No seconds? all myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
102

To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

Gentleman

Good sir,--

KING LEAR

I will die bravely, like a bridegroom. What!
I will be jovial: come, come; I am a king,
My masters, know you that.

Gentleman

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

KING LEAR

Then there's life in't. Nay, if you get it, you
shall get it with running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.

Exit running; Attendants follow

Gentleman

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking of in a king! Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

EDGAR

Hail, gentle sir.

Gentleman

Sir, speed you: what's your will?

EDGAR

Do you hear aught, sir, of a battle toward?

Gentleman

Most sure and vulgar: every one hears that,
Which can distinguish sound.

EDGAR

But, by your favour,
How near's the other army?

Gentleman

Near and on speedy foot; the main descry
Stands on the hourly thought.

EDGAR

I thank you, sir: that's all.

Gentleman

Though that the queen on special cause is here,
Her army is moved on.

103

EDGAR

I thank you, sir.

Exit Gentleman

GLOUCESTER

You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me:
Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please!

EDGAR

Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER

Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR

A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows;
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some bidding.

GLOUCESTER

Hearty thanks:
The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot, and boot!

Enter OSWALD

OSWALD

A proclaim'd prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor,
Briefly thyself remember: the sword is out
That must destroy thee.

GLOUCESTER

Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to't.

EDGAR interposes

OSWALD

Wherefore, bold peasant,
Darest thou support a publish'd traitor? Hence;
Lest that the infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR

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Ch'ill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.

OSWALD

Let go, slave, or thou diest!

EDGAR

Good gentleman, go your gait, and let poor volk
pass. An chud ha' bin zwaggered out of my life,
'twould not ha' bin zo long as 'tis by a vortnight.
Nay, come not near th' old man; keep out, che vor
ye, or ise try whether your costard or my ballow be
the harder: ch'ill be plain with you.

OSWALD

Out, dunghill!

EDGAR

Ch'ill pick your teeth, zir: come; no matter vor
your foins.

They fight, and EDGAR knocks him down

OSWALD

Slave, thou hast slain me: villain, take my purse:
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body;
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund earl of Gloucester; seek him out
Upon the British party: O, untimely death!

Dies

EDGAR

I know thee well: a serviceable villain;
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit you down, father; rest you
Let's see these pockets: the letters that he speaks of
May be my friends. He's dead; I am only sorry
He had no other death's-man. Let us see:
Leave, gentle wax; and, manners, blame us not:
To know our enemies' minds, we'd rip their hearts;
Their papers, is more lawful.

Reads

105

'Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. You have
many opportunities to cut him off: if your will
want not, time and place will be fruitfully offered.
There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror:
then am I the prisoner, and his bed my goal; from
the loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply
the place for your labour.

'Your--wife, so I would say--

'Affectionate servant,

'GONERIL.'

O undistinguish'd space of woman's will!
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life;
And the exchange my brother! Here, in the sands,
Thee I'll rake up, the post unsanctified
Of murderous lechers: and in the mature time
With this ungracious paper strike the sight
Of the death practised duke: for him 'tis well
That of thy death and business I can tell.

GLOUCESTER

The king is mad: how stiff is my vile sense,
That I stand up, and have ingenious feeling
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract:
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs,
And woes by wrong imaginations lose

The knowledge of themselves.

EDGAR

Give me your hand:

Drum afar off

Far off, methinks, I hear the beaten drum:

Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

Exeunt

SCENE VII. A tent in the French camp. LEAR on a bed asleep,
soft music playing; Gentleman, and others attending.

Enter CORDELIA, KENT, and Doctor

CORDELIA

O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work,
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short,
And every measure fail me.

106

KENT

To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid.

All my reports go with the modest truth;

Nor more nor clipp'd, but so.

CORDELIA

Be better suited:

These weeds are memories of those worser hours:

I prithee, put them off.

KENT

Pardon me, dear madam;

Yet to be known shortens my made intent:

My boon I make it, that you know me not

Till time and I think meet.

CORDELIA

Then be't so, my good lord.

To the Doctor

How does the king?

Doctor

Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA

O you kind gods,

Cure this great breach in his abused nature!

The untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up

Of this child-changed father!

Doctor

So please your majesty

That we may wake the king: he hath slept long.

CORDELIA

Be govern'd by your knowledge, and proceed

I' the sway of your own will. Is he array'd?

Gentleman

Ay, madam; in the heaviness of his sleep
We put fresh garments on him.

Doctor

Be by, good madam, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.

CORDELIA

Very well.

Doctor

107

Please you, draw near. Louder the music there!

CORDELIA

O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning? to watch--poor perdu!--
With this thin helm? Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire; and wast thou fain, poor father,
To hovel thee with swine, and rogues forlorn,
In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all. He wakes; speak to him.

Doctor

Madam, do you; 'tis fittest.

CORDELIA

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

KING LEAR

You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like moulten lead.

CORDELIA

Sir, do you know me?

KING LEAR

You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

CORDELIA

Still, still, far wide!

Doctor

He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.

KING LEAR

108

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity,
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands: let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
Of my condition!

CORDELIA

O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:
No, sir, you must not kneel.

KING LEAR

Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA

And so I am, I am.

KING LEAR

Be your tears wet? yes, 'faith. I pray, weep not:
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:
You have some cause, they have not.

CORDELIA

No cause, no cause.

KING LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

In your own kingdom, sir.

KING LEAR

Do not abuse me.

Doctor

Be comforted, good madam: the great rage,
You see, is kill'd in him: and yet it is danger

109

To make him even o'er the time he has lost.
Desire him to go in; trouble him no more
Till further settling.

CORDELIA

Will't please your highness walk?

KING LEAR

You must bear with me:

Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish.
Exeunt all but KENT and Gentleman

Gentleman

Holds it true, sir, that the Duke of Cornwall was so slain?

KENT

Most certain, sir.

Gentleman

Who is conductor of his people?

KENT

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

Gentleman

They say Edgar, his banished son, is with the Earl
of Kent in Germany.

KENT

Report is changeable. 'Tis time to look about; the
powers of the kingdom approach apace.

Gentleman

The arbitrement is like to be bloody. Fare you
well, sir.

Exit

KENT

My point and period will be thoroughly wrought,
Or well or ill, as this day's battle's fought.

Exit

110

ACT V

SCENE I. The British camp, near Dover.

Enter, with drum and colours, EDMUND, REGAN, Gentlemen, and Soldiers.

EDMUND

Know of the duke if his last purpose hold,
Or whether since he is advised by aught
To change the course: he's full of alteration
And self-reproving: bring his constant pleasure.
To a Gentleman, who goes out

REGAN

Our sister's man is certainly miscarried.

EDMUND

'Tis to be doubted, madam.

REGAN

Now, sweet lord,
You know the goodness I intend upon you:
Tell me--but truly--but then speak the truth,
Do you not love my sister?

EDMUND

In honour'd love.

REGAN

But have you never found my brother's way
To the forfended place?

EDMUND

That thought abuses you.

REGAN

I am doubtful that you have been conjunct
And bosom'd with her, as far as we call hers.

EDMUND

No, by mine honour, madam.

REGAN

I never shall endure her: dear my lord,
Be not familiar with her.

EDMUND

Fear me not:

She and the duke her husband!

Enter, with drum and colours, ALBANY, GONERIL, and Soldiers

111

GONERIL

[Aside] I had rather lose the battle than that sister
Should loosen him and me.

ALBANY

Our very loving sister, well be-met.
Sir, this I hear; the king is come to his daughter,
With others whom the rigor of our state
Forced to cry out. Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant: for this business,
It toucheth us, as France invades our land,
Not bolds the king, with others, whom, I fear,
Most just and heavy causes make oppose.

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN

Why is this reason'd?

GONERIL

Combine together 'gainst the enemy;
For these domestic and particular broils
Are not the question here.

ALBANY

Let's then determine
With the ancient of war on our proceedings.

EDMUND

I shall attend you presently at your tent.

REGAN

Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

'Tis most convenient; pray you, go with us.

GONERIL

[Aside] O, ho, I know the riddle.--I will go.

As they are going out, enter EDGAR disguised

EDGAR

If e'er your grace had speech with man so poor,
Hear me one word.

ALBANY

I'll overtake you. Speak.

112

Exeunt all but ALBANY and EDGAR

EDGAR

Before you fight the battle, ope this letter.
If you have victory, let the trumpet sound
For him that brought it: wretched though I seem,
I can produce a champion that will prove
What is avouched there. If you miscarry,
Your business of the world hath so an end,
And machination ceases. Fortune love you.

ALBANY

Stay till I have read the letter.

EDGAR

I was forbid it.

When time shall serve, let but the herald cry,
And I'll appear again.

ALBANY

Why, fare thee well: I will o'erlook thy paper.

Exit EDGAR

Re-enter EDMUND

EDMUND

The enemy's in view; draw up your powers.
Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery; but your haste
Is now urged on you.

ALBANY

We will greet the time.

Exit

EDMUND

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
Each jealous of the other, as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? one? or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd,
If both remain alive: to take the widow
Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril;
And hardly shall I carry out my side,
Her husband being alive. Now then we'll use
His countenance for the battle; which being done,
Let her who would be rid of him devise

113

His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,
The battle done, and they within our power,
Shall never see his pardon; for my state
Stands on me to defend, not to debate.

Exit

SCENE II. A field between the two camps.

Alarum within. Enter, with drum and colours, KING LEAR, CORDELIA, and Soldiers, over the stage; and exeunt

Enter EDGAR and GLOUCESTER

EDGAR

Here, father, take the shadow of this tree
For your good host; pray that the right may thrive:
If ever I return to you again,
I'll bring you comfort.

GLOUCESTER

Grace go with you, sir!

Exit EDGAR

Alarum and retreat within. Re-enter EDGAR

EDGAR

Away, old man; give me thy hand; away!
King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en:
Give me thy hand; come on.

GLOUCESTER

No farther, sir; a man may rot even here.

EDGAR

What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
Ripeness is all: come on.

GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.

Exeunt

SCENE III. The British camp near Dover.

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Enter, in conquest, with drum and colours, EDMUND, KING LEAR and CORDELIA, prisoners; Captain, Soldiers, & c

EDMUND

Some officers take them away: good guard,
Until their greater pleasures first be known
That are to censure them.

CORDELIA

We are not the first
Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown.
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

KING LEAR

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.

EDMUND

Take them away.

KING LEAR

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep: we'll see 'em starve
first. Come.

Exeunt KING LEAR and CORDELIA, guarded

EDMUND

Come hither, captain; hark.

Take thou this note;

Giving a paper

115

go follow them to prison:

One step I have advanced thee; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes: know thou this, that men
Are as the time is: to be tender-minded

Does not become a sword: thy great employment
Will not bear question; either say thou'lt do 't,
Or thrive by other means.

Captain

I'll do 't, my lord.

EDMUND

About it; and write happy when thou hast done.
Mark, I say, instantly; and carry it so
As I have set it down.

Captain

I cannot draw a cart, nor eat dried oats;
If it be man's work, I'll do 't.

Exit

Flourish. Enter ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, another Captain, and Soldiers

ALBANY

Sir, you have shown to-day your valiant strain,
And fortune led you well: you have the captives
That were the opposites of this day's strife:
We do require them of you, so to use them
As we shall find their merits and our safety
May equally determine.

EDMUND

Sir, I thought it fit
To send the old and miserable king
To some retention and appointed guard;
Whose age has charms in it, whose title more,
To pluck the common bosom on his side,
An turn our impress'd lances in our eyes
Which do command them. With him I sent the queen;
My reason all the same; and they are ready
To-morrow, or at further space, to appear
Where you shall hold your session. At this time
We sweat and bleed: the friend hath lost his friend;
And the best quarrels, in the heat, are cursed
By those that feel their sharpness:

116

The question of Cordelia and her father
Requires a fitter place.

ALBANY

Sir, by your patience,
I hold you but a subject of this war,
Not as a brother.

REGAN

That's as we list to grace him.
Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded,
Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers;

Bore the commission of my place and person;
The which immediacy may well stand up,
And call itself your brother.

GONERIL

Not so hot:
In his own grace he doth exalt himself,
More than in your addition.

REGAN

In my rights,
By me invested, he compeers the best.

GONERIL

That were the most, if he should husband you.

REGAN

Jesters do oft prove prophets.

GONERIL

Holla, holla!
That eye that told you so look'd but a-squint.

REGAN

Lady, I am not well; else I should answer
From a full-flowing stomach. General,
Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony;
Dispose of them, of me; the walls are thine:
Witness the world, that I create thee here
My lord and master.

GONERIL

Mean you to enjoy him?

ALBANY

The let-alone lies not in your good will.

EDMUND

Nor in thine, lord.

ALBANY

117

Half-blooded fellow, yes.

REGAN

[To EDMUND] Let the drum strike, and prove my title thine.

ALBANY

Stay yet; hear reason. Edmund, I arrest thee
On capital treason; and, in thine attaint,
This gilded serpent
Pointing to Goneril
For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife:
'Tis she is sub-contracted to this lord,
And I, her husband, contradict your bans.
If you will marry, make your loves to me,
My lady is bespoke.

GONERIL

An interlude!

ALBANY

Thou art arm'd, Gloucester: let the trumpet sound:
If none appear to prove upon thy head
Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,
There is my pledge;
Throwing down a glove
I'll prove it on thy heart,
Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less
Than I have here proclaim'd thee.

REGAN

Sick, O, sick!

GONERIL

[Aside] If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

EDMUND

There's my exchange:
Throwing down a glove
what in the world he is
That names me traitor, villain-like he lies:
Call by thy trumpet: he that dares approach,
On him, on you, who not? I will maintain
My truth and honour firmly.

118

ALBANY

A herald, ho!

EDMUND

A herald, ho, a herald!

ALBANY

Trust to thy single virtue; for thy soldiers,
All levied in my name, have in my name
Took their discharge.

REGAN

My sickness grows upon me.

ALBANY

She is not well; convey her to my tent.

Exit Regan, led

Enter a Herald

Come hither, herald,--Let the trumpet sound,
And read out this.

Captain

Sound, trumpet!

A trumpet sounds

Herald

[Reads] 'If any man of quality or degree within
the lists of the army will maintain upon Edmund,

supposed Earl of Gloucester, that he is a manifold traitor, let him appear by the third sound of the trumpet: he is bold in his defence.'

EDMUND

Sound!

First trumpet

Herald

Again!

Second trumpet

Herald

Again!

Third trumpet

119

Trumpet answers within

Enter EDGAR, at the third sound, armed, with a trumpet before him

ALBANY

Ask him his purposes, why he appears

Upon this call o' the trumpet.

Herald

What are you?

Your name, your quality? and why you answer

This present summons?

EDGAR

Know, my name is lost;

By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit:

Yet am I noble as the adversary

I come to cope.

ALBANY

Which is that adversary?

EDGAR

What's he that speaks for Edmund Earl of Gloucester?

EDMUND

Himself: what say'st thou to him?

EDGAR

Draw thy sword,

That, if my speech offend a noble heart,

Thy arm may do thee justice: here is mine.

Behold, it is the privilege of mine honours,

My oath, and my profession: I protest,

Maugre thy strength, youth, place, and eminence,

Despite thy victor sword and fire-new fortune,

Thy valour and thy heart, thou art a traitor;

False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;

Conspirant 'gainst this high-illustrious prince;

And, from the extremest upward of thy head

To the descent and dust below thy foot,

A most toad-spotted traitor. Say thou 'No,'
This sword, this arm, and my best spirits, are bent
To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
Thou liest.

EDMUND

In wisdom I should ask thy name;
But, since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,
120

And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely I might well delay
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn:
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head;
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart;
Which, for they yet glance by and scarcely bruise,
This sword of mine shall give them instant way,
Where they shall rest for ever. Trumpets, speak!
Alarums. They fight. EDMUND falls

ALBANY

Save him, save him!

GONERIL

This is practise, Gloucester:
By the law of arms thou wast not bound to answer
An unknown opposite; thou art not vanquish'd,
But cozen'd and beguiled.

ALBANY

Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper shall I stop it: Hold, sir:
Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil:
No tearing, lady: I perceive you know it.
Gives the letter to EDMUND

GONERIL

Say, if I do, the laws are mine, not thine:
Who can arraign me for't.

ALBANY

Most monstrous! oh!
Know'st thou this paper?

GONERIL

Ask me not what I know.
Exit

ALBANY

Go after her: she's desperate; govern her.

EDMUND

What you have charged me with, that have I done;
And more, much more; the time will bring it out:
'Tis past, and so am I. But what art thou
121

That hast this fortune on me? If thou'rt noble,
I do forgive thee.

EDGAR

Let's exchange charity.
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more thou hast wrong'd me.
My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND

Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;
The wheel is come full circle: I am here.

ALBANY

Methought thy very gait did prophesy
A royal nobleness: I must embrace thee:
Let sorrow split my heart, if ever I
Did hate thee or thy father!

EDGAR

Worthy prince, I know't.

ALBANY

Where have you hid yourself?
How have you known the miseries of your father?

EDGAR

By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale;
And when 'tis told, O, that my heart would burst!
The bloody proclamation to escape,
That follow'd me so near,--O, our lives' sweetness!
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!--taught me to shift
Into a madman's rags; to assume a semblance
That very dogs disdain'd: and in this habit
Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
Their precious stones new lost: became his guide,
Led him, begg'd for him, saved him from despair;
Never,--O fault!--reveal'd myself unto him,
Until some half-hour past, when I was arm'd:
Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,
I ask'd his blessing, and from first to last
Told him my pilgrimage: but his flaw'd heart,
Alack, too weak the conflict to support!

122

'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.

EDMUND

This speech of yours hath moved me,
And shall perchance do good: but speak you on;
You look as you had something more to say.

ALBANY

If there be more, more woeful, hold it in;
For I am almost ready to dissolve,
Hearing of this.

EDGAR

This would have seem'd a period
To such as love not sorrow; but another,
To amplify too much, would make much more,
And top extremity.

Whilst I was big in clamour came there in a man,
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fastened on my neck, and bellow'd out
As he'd burst heaven; threw him on my father;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received: which in recounting
His grief grew puissant and the strings of life
Began to crack: twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him tranced.

ALBANY

But who was this?

EDGAR

Kent, sir, the banish'd Kent; who in disguise
Follow'd his enemy king, and did him service
Improper for a slave.

Enter a Gentleman, with a bloody knife

Gentleman

Help, help, O, help!

EDGAR

What kind of help?

ALBANY

Speak, man.

EDGAR

123

What means that bloody knife?

Gentleman

'Tis hot, it smokes;
It came even from the heart of--O, she's dead!

ALBANY

Who dead? speak, man.

Gentleman

Your lady, sir, your lady: and her sister

By her is poisoned; she hath confess'd it.

EDMUND

I was contracted to them both: all three
Now marry in an instant.

EDGAR

Here comes Kent.

ALBANY

Produce their bodies, be they alive or dead:
This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble,
Touches us not with pity.

Exit Gentleman

Enter KENT

O, is this he?

The time will not allow the compliment
Which very manners urges.

KENT

I am come
To bid my king and master aye good night:
Is he not here?

ALBANY

Great thing of us forgot!
Speak, Edmund, where's the king? and where's Cordelia?
See'st thou this object, Kent?

The bodies of GONERIL and REGAN are brought in

KENT

Alack, why thus?

EDMUND

124

Yet Edmund was beloved:
The one the other poison'd for my sake,
And after slew herself.

ALBANY

Even so. Cover their faces.

EDMUND

I pant for life: some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia:
Nay, send in time.

ALBANY

Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR

To who, my lord? Who hath the office? send
Thy token of reprieve.

EDMUND

Well thought on: take my sword,

Give it the captain.

ALBANY

Haste thee, for thy life.

Exit EDGAR

EDMUND

He hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison, and
To lay the blame upon her own despair,
That she fordid herself.

ALBANY

The gods defend her! Bear him hence awhile.

EDMUND is borne off

Re-enter KING LEAR, with CORDELIA dead in his arms; EDGAR, Captain, and others following

KING LEAR

Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
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If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why, then she lives.

KENT

Is this the promised end

EDGAR

Or image of that horror?

ALBANY

Fall, and cease!

KING LEAR

This feather stirs; she lives! if it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

KENT

[Kneeling] O my good master!

KING LEAR

Prithee, away.

EDGAR

'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

KING LEAR

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!
I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever!
Cordelia, Cordelia! stay a little. Ha!
What is't thou say'st? Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman.
I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee.

Captain

'Tis true, my lords, he did.

KING LEAR

Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made them skip: I am old now,
And these same crosses spoil me. Who are you?
Mine eyes are not o' the best: I'll tell you straight.

KENT

If fortune brag of two she loved and hated,
One of them we behold.

KING LEAR

This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?

KENT

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The same,
Your servant Kent: Where is your servant Caius?

KING LEAR

He's a good fellow, I can tell you that;
He'll strike, and quickly too: he's dead and rotten.

KENT

No, my good lord; I am the very man,--

KING LEAR

I'll see that straight.

KENT

That, from your first of difference and decay,
Have follow'd your sad steps.

KING LEAR

You are welcome hither.

KENT

Nor no man else: all's cheerless, dark, and deadly.
Your eldest daughters have fordone them selves,
And desperately are dead.

KING LEAR

Ay, so I think.

ALBANY

He knows not what he says: and vain it is
That we present us to him.

EDGAR

Very bootless.

Enter a Captain

Captain

Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY

That's but a trifle here.

You lords and noble friends, know our intent.

What comfort to this great decay may come
Shall be applied: for us we will resign,
During the life of this old majesty,
To him our absolute power:
To EDGAR and KENT
you, to your rights:
With boot, and such addition as your honours
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Have more than merited. All friends shall taste
The wages of their virtue, and all foes
The cup of their deservings. O, see, see!

KING LEAR

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there!

Dies

EDGAR

He faints! My lord, my lord!

KENT

Break, heart; I prithee, break!

EDGAR

Look up, my lord.

KENT

Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him much
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

EDGAR

He is gone, indeed.

KENT

The wonder is, he hath endured so long:
He but usurp'd his life.

ALBANY

Bear them from hence. Our present business
Is general woe.

To KENT and EDGAR

Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain.

KENT

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;
My master calls me, I must not say no.

ALBANY

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The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.
Exeunt, with a dead march

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born in Stratford-on-Avon in April 1564 into a family of some prominence. His father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and merchant of leather goods who earned enough to marry Mary Arden, the daughter of his father's landlord, in 1557. John Shakespeare was a prominent citizen in Stratford, and at one point, he served as an alderman and bailiff. Shakespeare presumably attended the Stratford grammar school, where he would have received an education in Latin, but he did not go on to either Oxford or Cambridge universities. We have no record of Shakespeare's activities for many years, but by 1592 he was in London working as an actor. He was also apparently well known as a playwright, for reference is made of him by his contemporary Robert Greene in *A Groatsworth of Wit*, as "an upstart crow." Several companies of actors were in London at this time. Shakespeare may have had connection with one or more of them before 1592, but we have no record that tells us definitely. However, we do know of his long association with the most famous and successful troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. (When James I came to the throne in 1603, after Elizabeth's death, the troupe's name changed to the King's Men.) In 1599 the Lord Chamberlain's Men provided the financial backing for the construction of their own theater, the Globe. The Globe was begun by a carpenter named James Burbage and finished by his two sons, Cuthbert and Robert. To escape the jurisdiction of the Corporation of London, which was composed of conservative Puritans who opposed the theater's "licentiousness," James Burbage built the Globe just outside London. This also meant that the Globe was safer from the threats that lurked in London's crowded streets, like plague and other diseases, as well as rioting mobs. Shakespeare played a vital role, financially and otherwise, in the construction of the theater, which was finally occupied sometime before May 16, 1599. Shakespeare not only acted with the Globe's company of actors; he was also a shareholder and eventually became the troupe's most important playwright.

The company included London's most famous actors, who inspired the creation of some of Shakespeare's best-known characters, such as Hamlet and Lear, as well as his clowns and fools. By 1598 Shakespeare had written some of his most famous works, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, as well as his historical plays *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, and *King John*. Somewhere around the turn of the century, Shakespeare wrote his romantic comedies *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as *Henry V*, the last of his history plays. During the next 10 years he wrote his great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

At this time, the theater was burgeoning in London; the public took an avid interest in drama, the audiences were large, the plays demonstrated an enormous range of subjects, and playwrights competed for approval. By 1613, however, the rising tide of Puritanism had changed the theater. With the desertion of the theaters by the middle classes, the acting companies were compelled to depend more on the aristocracy, which also meant that they now had to cater to a more sophisticated audience. Perhaps this change in London's artistic atmosphere contributed to Shakespeare's reasons for leaving London after 1612. His retirement from the theater is sometimes thought to be evidence that his artistic skills were waning.

During this time, however, he wrote *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII*. He also wrote the "tragicomedies," *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. These were thought to be inspired by Shakespeare's personal problems and have sometimes

been considered proof of his greatly diminished abilities.

However, so far as biographical facts indicate, the circumstances of his life at this time do not imply any personal problems. He was in good health and financially secure, and he enjoyed an excellent reputation. Indeed, although he

was settled in Stratford at this time, he made frequent visits to London, enjoying and participating in events at the royal court, directing rehearsals, and attending to other business matters. In addition to his brilliant and enormous contributions to the theater, Shakespeare remained a poetic genius throughout the years, publishing a renowned and critically acclaimed sonnet cycle in 1609 (most of the sonnets were written many years earlier).

Shakespeare's contribution to this popular poetic genre are all the more amazing in his break with contemporary notions of subject matter. Shakespeare idealized the beauty of man as an object of praise and devotion (rather than the Petrarchan tradition of the idealized, unattainable woman). In the same spirit of breaking with tradition, Shakespeare also treated themes previously considered off limits—the dark, sexual side of a woman as opposed to the Petrarchan ideal of a chaste and remote love object. He also expanded the sonnet's emotional range, including such emotions as delight, pride, shame, disgust, sadness, and fear.

When Shakespeare died in 1616, no collected edition of his works had ever been published, although some of his plays had been printed in separate unauthorized editions. Included in the First Folio is a poem by Shakespeare's contemporary Ben Jonson, an outstanding playwright and critic in his own right. Jonson paid tribute to Shakespeare's genius, proclaiming his superiority to what previously had been held as the models for literary excellence—the Greek and Latin writers. "Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show / To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe. / He was not of an age, but for all time!" Jonson was the first to state what has been said so many times since. Having captured what is permanent and universal to all human beings at all times, Shakespeare's genius continues to inspire us—and the critical debate about his works never ceases.

KEY PASSAGES IN *KING LEAR*

Act I, i, 1

I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall. Opening lines in Shakespeare serve as more than vehicles for exposition: They tend to offer a perspective on the entire play. The first lines of *King Lear* bring the problems of judgment and choice to the foreground. Here, Kent notes that in his planned division of the kingdom, Lear has been evenhanded in his

bequeathals to his two sons-in-law, Albany and Cornwall. When Kent speaks of the actual politics of the events to Gloucester, he refers not to Goneril and Regan but to their husbands. Thus it must be significant—for more than political reasons—that the love test Lear will demand, as the prelude to his bestowal of his realm, is devised as a contest between his daughters, not his sons-in-law. Noteworthy, too, is that Kent does not mention the third daughter, Cordelia, whose portion is destined to be larger than the other two. This opening conversation additionally shows the reader that the contest between his daughters is only a ceremony, a formality involving Lear's personal gratification, and that the division of the kingdom has already been determined.

Act I, i, 8 ff.

Kent: Is not this your son, my lord?

Gloucester: His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to it.

Kent: I cannot conceive you.

Gloucester: Sir, this young fellow's mother could: whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

Kent: I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

Gloucester: But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account: though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged. Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

Edmund: No, my lord.

Gloucester: My lord of Kent: remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

Edmund: My services to your lordship.

Kent: I must love you, and sue to know you better.

Edmund: Sir, I shall study deserving.

Gloucester: He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. The king is coming. As the conversation continues, Kent shifts from talk of Lear and the division of the kingdom, the primary plot of *King Lear*, to the secondary plot, the story

of Gloucester and his two sons. This passage shows Gloucester joking about Edmund's illegitimacy in front of Edmund. While Gloucester claims to love his sons equally, he also indicates that his bastard son has been away from home

for the last nine years and that he will send him away again after the state ceremonies are concluded, suggesting that he values Edmund and his legitimate son, Edgar, differently. As in the dialogue concerning the division of Lear's

kingdom, the conversation about Gloucester's sons reveals the themes of choosing between offspring and favoring one over others. In Gloucester's narrow self-absorption, Lear's is foreshadowed.

Act I, i, 37–53

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,

Key Passages in *King Lear* 25

Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,—
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,—
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge.

Lear's first speech, to the assembled court, shows him in what has been his traditional role as all-powerful king but in his last enactment of that role. It also introduces the terrible irony at the heart of the play. The divestiture, which is designed to allow Lear "To shake all cares and business from our age," instead introduces cares greater than any that have confounded him in his 80-plus years. Lear's stated desire, to "Unburthen'd crawl toward death," is not only ironic, considering what torment awaits him, but also disingenuous,

considering the tenacity of the grasp he maintains on life from his first cry of irritation in Act I, scene 4 ("Let me not stay a jot for dinner: go get it ready"), until his final scene. His desire to prevent "future strife" is likewise ironic since his action elicits rather than prevents strife. Perhaps the worst irony and the most grievous error on the king's part is that he believes that love is quantifiable.

Act I, i, 85–93

Lear: Now, our joy,

. . . What can you say to draw

A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

King Lear: Nothing!

Cordelia: Nothing.

King Lear: Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

After the formal and false declarations of her elder sisters, Cordelia's quiet refusal to participate in her father's ritual initiates a series of tempestuous exchanges that introduce the dominant verbal tone of the play, a language of raw passion and unmediated emotion that explodes from the dark and molten core of being. Lear asks Cordelia what she can say to earn a portion greater than her sisters. Instead of playing the role expected of her, she replies, "Nothing." Dumbstruck, the king repeats the word, and she repeats it after him, confirming

what she has said. His wrath beginning to overcome him, Lear warns her that "Nothing will come of nothing" and gives her another chance to take on the role he wishes her to play. But Cordelia is resolute and reveals herself to be as steadfast in her beliefs as he is insistent in his wishes.

Act I, i, 90 ff.

Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave

My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty

According to my bond; nor more nor less.

King Lear: How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,

Lest it may mar your fortunes.

Cordelia: Good my lord,

You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I

Return those duties back as are right fi t,

Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say

Th ey love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,

Th at lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care and duty:

Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters.

To love my father all.

Lear warns Cordelia to "mend" her "speech a little." The addition of "a little" shows Lear struggling to contain his wrath by seeming to moderate his demand. Cordelia, in what seems to be an attempt to mend, describes the quality of her love and the sturdiness of her devotion, but her explanation is

delivered in too rational a way for him and only inflames her father's ire. Nor does she limit herself to discussing only her own situation. Since she is being found wanting in regard to her sisters, she offers a penetrating critique of their declarations of

love. "Why have my sisters husbands," she asks rhetorically, "if they say / They love you all?" This makes sense and is not coldhearted, but Lear does not want to hear it—he wants everything. Cordelia, however, is destroying an illusion of

omnipotence that has sustained him. When he asks, "But goes thy heart with this?" she replies in the affirmative: "Ay, good my lord." Rather than being able to understand her words and her defense of proportion, degree, and obligation—the absence of which in Goneril and Regan will cause him much suffering—Lear condemns her. "So young, and so untender?" he demands. "So young, my lord, and true," she responds. It seems to Lear she is holding her ground rather than capitulating. "Thy truth, then, be thy dower," Lear responds. But her response is ambiguous: Lear understands Cordelia's word "true" to mean honest, but "true" also means loyal.

Still holding the power of his office, Lear speaks with the force of authority rather than with the violent anger of powerlessness that will characterize his later utterances. With priestly authority, he excommunicates her: For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Hecate, and the night;

By all the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist, and cease to be;

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,

Propinquity and property of blood,

And as a stranger to my heart and me

Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,

Or he that makes his generation messes

To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom

Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and relieved,

As thou my sometime daughter.

Not only does Lear not know what he is doing, but he also does not know that what he is saying is exactly what the case will be. He is banishing tender nurture and allying himself with those like "the barbarous Scythian," who feed on those

they ought to nourish.

Act I, i, 139–179

Kent: Royal Lear,

Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,

Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,

As my great patron thought on in my prayers,—

King Lear: The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

Kent: Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly,
When Lear is mad. What wilt thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound,
When majesty stoops to folly. Reverse thy doom;
And, in thy best consideration, cheque
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
Reverbs no hollowness.

King Lear: Kent, on thy life, no more.

Kent: My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thy enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

King Lear: Out of my sight!

Kent: See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.

King Lear: Now, by Apollo,—

Kent: Now, by Apollo, king,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

King Lear: O, vassal! miscreant!

Laying his hand on his sword

Albany, Cornwall: Dear sir, forbear.

Kent: Do: Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
Upon thy foul disease. Revoke thy doom;
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

King Lear: Hear me, recreant!

On thine allegiance, hear me!
Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
To come between our sentence and our power,
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good, take thy reward.
Five days we do allot thee, for provision
To shield thee from diseases of the world;
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom: if, on the tenth day following,

Th y banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
Th e moment is thy death. Away! by Jupiter,
Th is shall not be revoked.

Kent's attempt to intervene on Cordelia's behalf to make the king "see better" has the opposite effect. It increases his wrath, and Lear subsequently banishes Kent. It is noteworthy that the confrontation between Lear and Kent, terrible as it is due to the king's irrational fury and for what it portends for both sovereign and realm, nevertheless is magnificent dramatic poetry. The audience, whether seeing or reading it, must be torn between the awful events that are occurring and the linguistic brio and brilliance with which they are expressed. This tension between beauty and terror runs throughout the play. The passage is terrible, too, in its irony: Lear does know himself, contrary to what Goneril and Regan say of him later in this scene. Lear gives an exact

description of his mentality when he tells Kent that both his nature and his place make him unable to tolerate it when someone comes between "our sentence and our power." This grave fl aw he takes, however, as a perfect virtue.

Act I, ii, 1–22

Th ou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
Th e curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well, then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate: fine word,—legitimate!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:

Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

After the drama of Lear's confrontation with Cordelia and Kent, and after it has become clear that Goneril and Regan have spoken cunningly to their father and not with true filial love, scene 2 of *King Lear* switches focus from the primary

(Lear) plot to the secondary (Gloucester) plot. The audience will recognize Edmund, for he appeared with his father and Kent in the first lines of the play, but nothing of his character was revealed there except his courtliness. The audience saw him only as he played his role. Here, in his soliloquy, Edmund reveals himself and his intention of usurping his brother's place. As different as the subplot may be from the main plot of *King Lear*, there is a recognizable thematic affinity between the two story lines. Both reflect the conflict between trust and betrayal. Both play on the machinations of those who are able to use love and trust in order to frustrate love and trust. Both concern conflicts between parents and their children and the attempt of siblings to usurp the rights of their siblings.

Act I, ii, 106–121

Edmund: Th is is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit of our own behavior,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. Edgar—

Enter Edgar

And pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy: my cue is villanous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. O, these eclipses do portend these divisions! fa, sol, la, mi.

"These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us," Gloucester observes after Edmund tells him that Edgar is plotting against him. In this passage, which takes place after Gloucester has left him alone, Edmund reflects with sly delight on the beliefs that, along with his father's gullibility and the

events of Lear's court, make Gloucester ripe for Edmund's lies. The identity Edmund is defining for himself is that of a self-determined man, self-aware

and self-interested, a Machiavellian man who can control his destiny by manipulating others with psychological cunning.

Act I, iii, 1–10

Goneril: Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?

Oswald: Yes, madam.

Goneril: By day and night he wrongs me; every hour

He flashes into one gross crime or other,

That sets us all at odds: I'll not endure it:

His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us

Key Passages in *King Lear* 31

On every trifling. When he returns from hunting,

I will not speak with him; say I am sick:

If you come slack of former services,

You shall do well; the fault of it I'll answer.

The audience is prepared to detest Goneril based on the excess of her rhetoric in Act I, scene 1, as well as her waspish conversation with Regan and her coldness

to Cordelia after the division of the kingdom. Here, in her first appearance since then, she projects a ruthless disposition, though the audience cannot know whether her and Oswald's assertions against Lear are accurate. For the reader or viewer, a significant critical crux is deciding whether it matters if what she says about Lear is true or not. What actually seems to matter is the lack of love and charity she shows to her father, even if he is at fault in acting with the imperious authority of a monarch.

Act I, iv, 238–239

Lear: Who can tell me who I am?

Fool: Lear's shadow.

The bitter revelation that he has given himself into the power of unloving and cruel daughters tears at Lear and drives him to madness. In this question and answer between the king and his Fool, the Fool helps reveal to Lear the nature of his folly by speaking openly about the change that has occurred, a different change from the one Lear had expected. Lear is only the shadow of himself, an insubstantial man. But it may be that very real shadow of his—the Fool—who can tell him who he is: nothing.

Act II, iii, 1–21

I heard myself proclaim'd;

And by the happy hollow of a tree

Escaped the hunt. No port is free; no place,

That guard, and most unusual vigilance,

Does not attend my taking. Whiles I may 'scape,

I will preserve myself: and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
Th at ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast: my face I'll grime with filth;
Blanket my loins: elf all my hair in knots;

32 King Lear

And with presented nakedness out-face
Th e winds and persecutions of the sky.
Th e country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.

Like Kent, who disguised himself as Caius and continued to serve Lear even after the king banished him, so does Edgar—after Edmund has turned his father against him and made Gloucester believe that Edgar plans to kill him—flee and disguise himself to escape being killed. Ultimately, while still in disguise, Edgar serves his father after Gloucester has been blinded and banished. In this soliloquy Edgar transforms himself into a madman, Poor Tom. Lear's madness, though it overwhelms him, is rooted clearly in his rage. In contrast, Edgar controls the forces of dislocation by taking on himself the *guise* of madness. The cause of his disguise is obvious. Unlike Lear, it is less clear what aspect of himself his "madness" is revealing. There is a suggestion, however, that

Shakespeare is defining Edgar in opposition to Edmund, for while Edmund in his first soliloquy revolts against the idea of baseness, Edgar in this soliloquy embraces it: "I will preserve myself: and am bethought / To take the basest and most poorest shape."

Act II, iv

The force of drama, dialogue, and poetry in Act II, scene 4, is breathtaking. When Lear reaches Gloucester's castle and finds his servant Caius (the disguised Kent) in the stocks, the insult is overwhelming and his language reflects the oceanic force of rage welling up in him. The following staccato exchange between Lear and Kent recalls their argument in Act I, scene 1, when Lear shouts to Kent, "Out of my sight," and Kent responds, "See better, Lear": *King Lear*: What's he that hath so much thy place mistook To

set thee here?

Kent: It is both he and she;
Your son and daughter.

King Lear: No.

Kent: Yes.

King Lear: No, I say.

Kent: I say, yea.

King Lear: No, no, they would not.

Kent: Yes, they have.

King Lear: By Jupiter, I swear, no.

Kent: By Juno, I swear, ay.

When, at line 147, Lear complains to Regan of how Goneril has mistreated him and curses Goneril, Regan says,

O, sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine: you should be ruled and led
By some discretion, that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you,
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

In disbelief, Lear responds,

Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house:

'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;

Kneeling

Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.
But his outrage breeds no sympathy. Regan answers,
Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks:
Return you to my sister.

Lear experiences worse torment after Goneril arrives and he sees both his daughters are of one mind. They argue that he does not "need" a train of knights following him, that their household servants can attend him. At line 266, he erupts:

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's: thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,

Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,—
 You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
 You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
 As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
 If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
 Against their father, fool me not so much
 To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
 And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
 Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
 I will have such revenges on you both,
 Th at all the world shall—I will do such things,—
 What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be
 Th e terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep
 No, I'll not weep:
 I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
 Shall break into a hundred thousand fl aws,
 Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!

It is right after this speech that Gloucester reports, “Th e king is in high rage” and has gone out into the stormy night he does not know where. Regan orders Gloucester to “Shut up your doors” against her father. Lear's preceding tirade is a fitting prologue to his fury in Act III, in which the man and the weather rage in contrapuntal outbursts.

Act III, ii, 1–34

King Lear: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fi res,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Smite fl at the thick rotundity o' the world!
 Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once,
 Th at make ingrateful man!

Fool: O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rainwater out o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

King Lear: Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fi re! spout, rain!
 Nor rain, wind, thunder, fi re, are my daughters:
 I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
 I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
 You owe me no subscription: then let fall

Your horrible pleasure: here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul!

Fool: He that has a house to put's head in has a good head-piece.

The cod-piece that will house
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.

For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass.
The doors of Gloucester's castle shut upon him, Lear rages into the storm on the heath, accompanied at first only by the Fool. Their combined response to the storm reflects Lear's divided mind. Lear rants against his daughters, immersing himself in the fury of the weather, which seems, despite its terror, to be an ally, for the storm reflects the same fury that he experiences. It tells him who he is, a castoff, and reflects the anger he feels upon realizing that none of his daughters has satisfactorily reflected his need to be loved. The Fool plays the saner role; rather than surrendering to the upsurge of chaos, he cries for protection from the elements.

Act III, ii, 49–73

Let the great gods,
Th at keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
Th at hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;
Th ou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue
Th at art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,
Th at under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practised on man's life: close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
Th ese dreadful summoners grace. I am a man

More sinn'd against than sinning.

•••

My wits begin to turn.

Come on, my boy: how dost, my boy? art cold?

I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?

The art of our necessities is strange,

That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart

That's sorry yet for thee.

After Kent finds Lear and the Fool in the storm, he tries to lead them to the shelter of a hovel. In this passage, Lear, consumed by his outrage and feeding on it, is initially beyond such consideration for himself. But after raging about injustice, crime, and the terrors of punishment, he grows calmer and, as if something in him had eased after his exertion and its tempestuous accompaniment, he thinks not of his own frustrated need but of the Fool's present need.

Act III, iv, 6–36

King Lear: Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm

Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;

But where the greater malady is fix'd,

The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'ldst shun a bear;

But if thy flight lay toward the raging sea,

Thou'ldst meet the bear i' the mouth. When the mind's free,

The body's delicate: the tempest in my mind

Doth from my senses take all feeling else

Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand

For lifting food to't? But I will punish home:

No, I will weep no more. In such a night

To shut me out! Pour on; I will endure.

In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!

Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all,—

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;

No more of that.

Kent: Good my lord, enter here.

King Lear: Prithee, go in thyself: seek thine own ease:

This tempest will not give me leave to ponder

On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.

To the Fool

In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,—

Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

Fool goes in

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
Th at bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superfl ux to them,
And show the heavens more just.

Outside the hovel, Lear speaks to Kent of his mental turmoil. He explains that the storm outside is nothing compared to the storm within himself. As he describes his condition, he is again overcome by it. His thoughts less enraged now and his language more analytic, he seeks analogies to explain the cause of his discomposure. But approaching the subject rouses him to self-pity. He thinks of himself as an "old kind father, whose frank heart gave all," which is not entirely honest, since his heart was less than frank—it was grasping. Lear temporarily retreats from his terrible introspection in order to send the Fool into the hovel, but he says he will pray first. This is not his first prayer, but

his former ones were more like imprecations, curses pronounced in rage.

"Poor naked wretches," however, is the prayer of a man whose heart is becoming aware

of torment—a man who is growing aware of himself as not the only tormented person in the world but as a member of the tormented race of mankind. "Take physic, pomp," he says to himself, "Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

/ That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, / And show the heavens more just." As much as *King Lear* contains cries of the heart against the cruelty of the gods, there is also the sense, expressed in these lines, that the cruelty or benignity, the injustice or the justice of the gods, is determined by the actions of men and women.

Act III, vii, 29–107

Cornwall: Bind fast his corky arms.

Gloucester: What mean your graces? Good my friends, consider
You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends.

Cornwall: Bind him, I say.

Servants bind him

Regan: Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

Gloucester: Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

Cornwall: To this chair bind him. Villain, thou shalt find—

Regan plucks Gloucester's beard

Gloucester: By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

Regan: So white, and such a traitor!

Gloucester: Naughty lady,

These hairs, which thou dost ravish from my chin,

Will quicken, and accuse thee: I am your host:

With robbers' hands my hospitable favours

You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?

Cornwall: Come, sir, what letters had you late from France?

Regan: Be simple answerer, for we know the truth.

Cornwall: And what confederacy have you with the traitors
Late footed in the kingdom?

Regan: To whose hands have you sent the lunatic king? Speak.

Gloucester: I have a letter guessingly set down,

Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,

And not from one opposed.

Cornwall: Cunning.

Regan: And false.

Cornwall: Where hast thou sent the king?

Gloucester: To Dover.

Regan: Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril—

Cornwall: Wherefore to Dover? Let him first answer that.

Gloucester: I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course.

Regan: Wherefore to Dover, sir?

Gloucester: Because I would not see thy cruel nails

Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.

The sea, with such a storm as his bare head

In hell-black night endured, would have buoy'd up,

And quench'd the stelled fires:

Yet, poor old heart, he help the heavens to rain.

If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that stern time,

Thou shouldst have said 'Good porter, turn the key,'

All cruels else subscribed: but I shall see

The winged vengeance overtake such children.

Cornwall: See't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair.

Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

Gloucester: He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help! O cruel! O you gods!

Regan: One side will mock another; the other too.

Cornwall: If you see vengeance,—

First Servant: Hold your hand, my lord:
I have served you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.

Regan: How now, you dog!

First Servant: If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?

Cornwall: My villain!

They draw and fight

First Servant: Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.

Regan: Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!

Takes a sword, and runs at him behind

First Servant: O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. O!

Dies

Cornwall: Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!
Where is thy lustre now?

Gloucester: All dark and comfortless. Where's my son Edmund?
Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature,
To quit this horrid act.

Regan: Out, treacherous villain!
Thou call'st on him that hates thee: it was he
That made the overture of thy treasons to us;
Who is too good to pity thee.

Gloucester: O my follies! then Edgar was abused.
Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

Regan: Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell
His way to Dover.

Exit one with Gloucester

How is't, my lord? how look you?

Cornwall: I have received a hurt: follow me, lady.
Turn out that eyeless villain; throw this slave
Upon the dunghill. Regan, I bleed apace:
Untimely comes this hurt: give me your arm.

Exit Cornwall, led by Regan

Second Servant: I'll never care what wickedness I do,

If this man come to good.

Third Servant: If she live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,
Women will all turn monsters.

Second Servant: Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam
To lead him where he would: his roguish madness
Allows itself to any thing.

Third Servant: Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face. Now, heaven help him!

Charged with a brutal power, the scene of Gloucester's blinding also illustrates Lear's contention that our actions determine what we take to be the dispensation of heaven. Cornwall, as he pokes out Gloucester's eyes, shows the heavens less just, but the serving man who rushes at him with drawn sword to prevent his crime—although he fails to save Gloucester's eyes—nevertheless shows that the impulse to fellowship is as powerful as a contempt for others and that it, too, fashions the heavens' justice. In his repudiation of his master's brutality, the servant echoes Kent's rebellion against Lear's injustice to Cordelia in Act I, scene 1. The second and third servant at the end of the scene reinforce the

first servant's actions and thereby establish goodness as a shared human quality rather than one lone man's particular quirk. Brutal as this scene may be, it is also a pure example of the classical dramatic pattern of reversal and revelation. While Gloucester suffers a reversal of fortune by being blinded, he is also woefully enlightened when Regan corrects his misapprehensions about his sons.

Act IV, i, 29–37

Gloucester: Is it a beggar-man?

Old Man: Madman and beggar too.

Key Passages in *King Lear* 41

Gloucester: He has some reason, else he could not beg.

I' the last night's storm I such a fellow saw;

Which made me think a man a worm: my son

Came then into my mind; and yet my mind

Was then scarce friends with him: I have heard more since.

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods.

They kill us for their sport.

Gloucester's bitter observation—"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods. /

They kill us for their sport"—expresses the depressed state in which he will

live

out the remainder of his life. His words have often been used by explicators of

King Lear as representing a central crux of the play.

Act IV, ii, 2–11

Goneril: Now, where's your master?

Oswald: Madam, within; but never man so changed.

I told him of the army that was landed;

He smiled at it: I told him you were coming:

His answer was 'The worse:' of Gloucester's treachery,

And of the loyal service of his son,

When I inform'd him, then he call'd me sot,

And told me I had turn'd the wrong side out:

What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;

What like, offensive.

This conversation between Goneril and Oswald, who is as devoted to ill-doing as his mistress, is the first mention of the change wrought in Albany by the brutality of the allied sisters. Critics see in Albany's transition from milksop to rebel against his wife and a force for good an indication of hopefulness amid the play's bleak view of human action. When Goneril and Albany meet several lines later, the change in him is visible: "O Goneril!" he says, "You are not worth the dust which the rude wind

/ Blows in your face."

Act IV, vi, 84–189

King Lear: No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the king himself.

Edgar: O thou side-piercing sight!

King Lear: Nature's above art in that respect. Th ere's your press-money.

Th at fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper: draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do 't. Th ere's my gauntlet; I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up the brown bills. O, well fl own, bird! i' the clout, i' the clout: hewgh! Give the word.

Edgar: Sweet marjoram.

King Lear: Pass.

Gloucester: I know that voice.

King Lear: Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! Th ey fl attered me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said!—'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me

chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding;
there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their
words: they told me I was every
thing; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

Gloucester: Th e trick of that voice I do well remember:
Is 't not the king?

King Lear: Ay, every inch a king:

When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.

I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause? Adultery?

Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:

The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fl y

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son

Was kinder to his father than my daughters

Got 'tween the lawful sheets.

To 't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers.

Behold yond simpering dame,

Whose face between her forks presages snow;

Th at minces virtue, and does shake the head

To hear of pleasure's name;

The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to 't

With a more riotous appetite.

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,

Though women all above:

But to the girdle do the gods inherit,

Beneath is all the fi ends';

There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,

Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fi e, fi e, fi e! pah, pah! Give me

an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination: there's

money for thee.

Gloucester: O, let me kiss that hand!

King Lear: Let me wipe it fi rst; it smells of mortality.

Gloucester: O ruin'd piece of nature! Th is great world

Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me?

King Lear: I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me?

No, do thy worst, blind Cupid! I'll not love. Read thou this challenge;

mark but the penning of it.

Gloucester: Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

Edgar: I would not take this from report; it is,

And my heart breaks at it.

King Lear: Read.

Gloucester: What, with the case of eyes?

King Lear: O, ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light; yet you see how this world goes.

Gloucester: I see it feelingly.

King Lear: What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places; and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

Gloucester: Ay, sir.

King Lear: And the creature run from the cur? There thou mightst behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office. Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;

Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind

For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;

Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:

Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em:

Take that of me, my friend, who have the power

To seal the accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes;

And like a scurvy politician, seem

To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now:

Pull off my boots: harder, harder: so.

Edgar: O, matter and impertinency mix'd! Reason in madness!

King Lear: If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.

I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester:

Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:

Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,

We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

Gloucester: Alack, alack the day!

King Lear: When we are born, we cry that we are come

To this great stage of fools: this a good block;

It were a delicate stratagem, to shoe

A troop of horse with felt: I'll put 't in proof;

And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,

Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

In this passage of some 100 lines showing the meeting between the broken Lear and the blinded Gloucester, after both have been duped and then at considerable pain and loss been enlightened, Shakespeare brings dramatic force to the exploration of psychic pain and flashes of human insight. When Lear first sees Gloucester, in his madness, he cries, “Ha! Goneril with a white beard,” but immediately shifts from the obsession that had maddened him during his night in the storm and says, with some insight, “They flattered me like a dog; and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to every thing that I said!—‘Ay’ and ‘no’ too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding;

there I found ’em, there I smelt ’em out. Go to, they are not men o’ their words: they told me I was everything; ’tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.”

This is not very different in meaning from what the Fool said to Lear in Act I: “If thou wert my Fool, Nuncle, I’d have thee beaten for being old before thy time. . . . Thou should’st not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (I, v, 41–43).

When Gloucester recognizes that it is Lear who is with him, he asks, “Is’t not the King?” and Lear responds, in his new wisdom, “Ay, every inch a king: / When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.” These words from his lips loosen the further flow of speech as he mocks his own authority—“A dog’s obeyed in office,” he says at line 160—and also anatomizes human evil, especially sexual viciousness, which he finds inherent in the rapacious appetite of women. “But to the girdle do the Gods inherit,” he cries. “Beneath is all the fiends; / there’s hell, there’s darkness, There is the sulphurous pit / Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!”

Nor does Lear put himself above the things he vilifies: When Gloucester tries to show his devotion and says, “O! let me kiss that hand,” Lear responds,

“Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.”

Act IV, vii, 44–77

Cordelia: How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

King Lear: You do me wrong to take me out o’ the grave:

Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound

Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears

Do scald like moulten lead.

Cordelia: Sir, do you know me?

King Lear: You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

Cordelia: Still, still, far wide!

Doctor: He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.

King Lear: Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?

I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity,

To see another thus. I know not what to say.

I will not swear these are my hands: let's see;

I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured

Of my condition!

Cordelia: O, look upon me, sir,

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:

No, sir, you must not kneel.

King Lear: Pray, do not mock me:

I am a very foolish fond old man,

Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;

And, to deal plainly,

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

Methinks I should know you, and know this man;

Yet I am doubtful for I am mainly ignorant

What place this is; and all the skill I have

Remembers not these garments; nor I know not

Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;

For, as I am a man, I think this lady

To be my child Cordelia.

Cordelia: And so I am, I am.

King Lear: Be your tears wet? yes, 'faith. I pray, weep not:

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

I know you do not love me; for your sisters

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:

You have some cause, they have not.

Cordelia: No cause, no cause.

King Lear: Am I in France?

Kent: In your own kingdom, sir.

King Lear: Do not abuse me.

Doctor: Be comforted, good madam: the great rage,

You see, is kill'd in him: and yet it is danger

To make him even o'er the time he has lost.

Desire him to go in; trouble him no more

Till further settling.

Cordelia: Will't please your highness walk?

King Lear: You must bear with me:

Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish.

Whereas the scene with Gloucester revealed King Lear in his prophetic frenzy,

the scene with Cordelia shows him calm and introspective. The two reunited and undivided by the pull of ego, ceremony, or principle represent the triumph

of the heart over adversity and might serve for the final scene of a drama like *King Lear*. But it is, although emotionally climactic, not the end of the story.

The tragedy that follows does not need to be interpreted as lessening this scene's importance but rather as shifting emphasis in the evaluation of triumphs from linear reckoning, where the ending is what matters, to a nonlinear model of experiences, which privileges moments of supreme intensity despite the final dissolution of both joy and pain.

Act V, iii, 3–25

Cordelia: We are not the first

Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.

For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;

Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown.

Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

King Lear: No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:

We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,

And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,

And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,

Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;

And take upon's the mystery of things,

As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,

In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,

That ebb and flow by the moon.

Edmund: Take them away.

King Lear: Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,

The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?

He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,

And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;

The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell,

Ere they shall make us weep: we'll see 'em starve first. Come.

As in the reconciliation scene, the power of this scene lies in the fact that the

language transcends the facts of the matter. Lear's joy is perhaps perverse. In misery he finds joy, for all he really wanted—Cordelia to himself—is now what he has. The conflict between the ethical and the rhapsodic provides the scene with added poignancy and complexity. Has Lear learned anything? What does Cordelia feel? It matters very much, and yet not at all, for in this scene Shakespeare limns the bliss of a soul separated from and impervious, for the moment, to the actual force (Edmund) that would separate it from its source of bliss.

Act V, iii, 305–311

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there!

Meaning, language, and music join in Lear's last utterance. The less important matter is whether he dies deceived or not, believing Cordelia to be alive or accepting that she is dead, or whether he has transcended his suffering or been crushed by it. What is crucial is whether the audience or reader can hear this speech, in its lamentation, as a celebration of the possibilities of love—a vision of love, open for us, even as it closes for Lear.

LIST OF CHARACTERS IN
KING LEAR

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King Lear is the octogenarian king of Britain. His decision to divest himself of power and to divide his kingdom among his three daughters before his death

sets in motion the events of the tragedy.

Goneril is Lear's eldest daughter. She flatters him to obtain her portion of the

inheritance. Once she has power, she breaks her filial promise to honor him and

his wishes, scorning and humiliating him. Although she is married to Albany,

she plans to form a romantic and strategic alliance with Edmund.

Regan is Lear's second daughter. Like her elder sister, she flatters and betrays her father. Like Goneril, too, she betrays her vow of filial devotion. Once they are both in power, the two daughters contend against each other. Regan also loves (or lusts after) Edmund and, since her husband, Cornwall, has been killed by one of his serving men, she hopes to make Edmund her husband.

Cordelia is Lear's youngest and favorite daughter. She angers him when, unlike her sisters, she refuses to flatter Lear and publicly proclaim the measurelessness of her love for him in order to secure her portion of the inheritance. She marries the King of France, who takes her without a dowry. Cordelia later returns to England to save her father from her rapacious sisters and dies a victim of their wars.

Kent opposes Lear when the king disinherits Cordelia for refusing to flatter him. In consequence, Lear banishes Kent from his realm. Ever loyal, though, Kent disguises himself as Caius and returns to serve Lear in his last and troubled days.

The **Fool**, Lear's court jester, becomes the wise and ironic voice of his misery.

He reproaches the king for the folly of surrendering his power to his two elder daughters when those daughters, Goneril and Regan, show their contempt for Lear.

50 King Lear

Gloucester is the father of Edgar and Edmund. After the division of the kingdom,

Gloucester remains loyal to the king despite Goneril and Regan's injunction against supporting their father. As punishment for Gloucester's loyalty, Regan's husband, Cornwall, gouges out Gloucester's eyes.

Edmund is Gloucester's illegitimate son. He incites division between his father and his brother, Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, by getting Gloucester to believe that Edgar is plotting to murder him. Through this stratagem he succeeds in usurping Edgar's place and becoming their father's heir. He then informs Regan and Cornwall of Gloucester's support of King Lear and is, thereby, the cause of his blinding.

Edgar is Gloucester's legitimate son. He disguises himself as a madman, Tom o'

Bedlam, or Poor Tom, after Gloucester is tricked by Edmund and seeks to have

Edgar killed. As Poor Tom, Edgar spends the night of the storm on the heath with Lear. After Gloucester has been blinded for his loyalty to Lear, Edgar, hiding his identity, cares for his father. After his father's death, he vanquishes

Edmund in single combat and becomes ruler of Britain.

Albany is Goneril's husband and a seeming milksop, but in the final act he breaks with his wife, takes command over Edmund, and sides with Lear.

Cornwall is Regan's husband and an equal in viciousness to his wife and sister-

in-law. He crushes out Gloucester's eyes for supporting Lear. A servant, revolted at Cornwall's brutality, kills Cornwall.

Oswald is in Goneril's service. He insults Lear and carries messages between

Goneril and Regan and between Goneril and Edmund. Edgar kills him when Oswald encounters him and Gloucester and tries to kill Gloucester.

The **King of France** is one of Cordelia's suitors at the beginning of the play. He

marries her even after Lear disinherits her.

The **Duke of Burgundy**, another suitor, rejects Cordelia when Lear refuses to

provide a dowry for her.

The **doctor** attends to Lear after Cordelia finds her father wandering mad in Dover.

The Sources of King Lear

There are a number of sources for the story of King Lear. The primary source is an earlier play, probably dating from around 1594, with which Shakespeare was undoubtedly acquainted, called *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*. The story of Lear and his daughters, however, can also be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin work, *History of the Kings of England* (c.1136), in the collection *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574), in *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577), in William Warner's *Albions England* (1586), and in Edmund Spenser's epic *The Fairie Queene* (1596). The source

for the Gloucester plot is found in Book II, Chapter 10 of Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia* (1590). Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egre-gious Popishe Impostures* (1603) is the source for much of Edgar's mad talk and references to demons.

King Lear has a strange performance history. In 1642, the English Parliament, politically at odds with King Charles I, and Puritanical in its religious inclination, ordered the theaters closed in London. And closed they remained during the English Commonwealth which the Puritan government established in 1649 under Oliver Cromwell. It was not until 1661, a year after the restoration of the monarchy, when Charles II ordered them to be re-opened. When the theaters reopened, the theater, as well as English culture itself, was quite different from the way it had been in Shakespeare's day. Boys no longer acted the parts of women—women did. The stage was no longer a bare stage—something like a plat-form at an inn yard—but a proscenium stage adapted to using, even depending upon, scenery.

The Tragic Hero

Aristotle recommended but did not insist on the use of the traditional stories in tragedy: the practice entailed that the central place was normally given to heroes and kings. Moreover, he laid it down as inherent in tragedy that the personages must be 'better than we are', and was taking part in a religious and civic rite at a special festival. He stood for the people—but he was representing a king or hero, he spoke with a poet's majestic words, he was manifestly doomed. He necessarily induced awe, a sense of being 'above' even as he fell. This basic concept remained through the ancient world. When there was a protagonist—and we shall see in a moment that that was not always the case, at least throughout a play or trilogy—he was of exalted rank and held, for this and other reasons, a

position of recognizable eminence. Certainly this was how it was in Seneca. His central figures are men in high place: as a stoic philosopher he knows that this is an evil thing, that what matters is that one shall be king over oneself, that this is rendered more difficult when one has the relation with men that power entails: that, for him, is the mainspring of tragedy. And when in the Middle Ages the idea of tragedy came for a time to be divorced from play-writing, there continues to be a stress on 'heroic characters', 'commonwealths and kings', 'heigh degree'.

In the Renaissance, the concept did not in this respect change: tragedy is a warning to tyrants, but it is also something that stirs us, the spectators, to 'admiration' as well as 'commiseration'. The practice of the Renaissance was not basically different from its theory. Shakespeare is bold in making a mere general his hero in *Othello*, The hero is normally a king or prince, either by right of birth or through conquest or usurpation, as in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, or he is a man who in other ways wins peculiar power, as in *Doctor Faustus*. Always he has a fall to endure. Elizabethan-Jacobean drama does include a few plays that strain after the tragic effect in a purely domestic setting. We can safely say that dramatic tragedy from antiquity to the nineteenth century normally implied a concern with people in high place. Hamlet is regretted because 'he was likely, had he been put on, /To have prov'd most royal', but Fortinbras is securely in charge of Denmark and we may feel is more likely to be the efficient monarch. The end of *King Lear* is a lament for Lear's death and suffering, but no hint is there that Britain's future is in danger: it will probably be safer under the mediocre and fumbling Albany than under the irascible and wayward old king. *Macbeth* and *Tamburlaine*, however much we are involved (and indeed

we are greatly involved) in their fortunes, cannot be regretted as rulers. Yet there must be some sense of eminence if the tragic writer depends on a central figure. It may be, through the sharpness of the revelation, the *anagnorisis*; it may be through the particularity of the distress, or through the possession of a special virtue and dignity. A fall there always is, and the tragic writer is inevitably concerned with how it operates. Aristotle, in one of the passages from *The Poetics* given in Chapter 1, insisted that it came through *'hamartia'*, an error of judgement which allowed disaster in. This has been usually interpreted as involving a kind of 'poetical justice' Aristotle rejected the notion of an evil or a totally good hero: the one would not move us to pity, he said; the fall of the other would merely shock us. What is necessary is that we should feel the interrelation of character and circumstance. 'Poetical justice' is simply not found in tragedy, where Cordelia is hanged, Ophelia drowned, Othello driven to Desdemona's murder, Lear to madness. But all these characters act in such a way as to contribute to a developing process of event which will ultimately include their personal disasters. The whole process that tragedy shows is one in which man plays his part: we cannot know how large that part is; we may suspect it to be small (as probably Aristotle did when he urged on the dramatist who used an event of apparent chance, like the falling of a statue to kill a man, the need to make it at least appear appropriate).