

character breakdown

King Lear	Cordelia		
Edgar	Goneril		
Edmund	Reagan	Oswald	cut
Kent	Gloucester	Burgundy	cut
Albany	the Fool		
France / Cornwall / Captain			

ACT I

SCENE I. King Lear's palace

Enter KING LEAR, KENT, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA

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
Unburden'd crawl toward death.
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The honorable prince of France,
Suitor to our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court has made his amorous sojourn,
And here is 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

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

What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

LEAR

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
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

Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
More ponderous 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.
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.

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 you 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
Hold thee, from this, for ever.

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?

Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.

I do invest you jointly with my power,

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

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 wouldst 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. Reserve thy state,

And, in thy best consideration, check

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—

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

KENT

Do.

Kill thy physician. Revoke thy gift,
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 vows,
Which we never durst yet, take thy reward:
Five days we do allot thee, for provision
To shield thee from disasters of the world,
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom. If, on the seventh 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, enter KING OF FRANCE

KING LEAR

My lord of France, what, in the least,
Will you require in present dower with her,
Or cease your quest of love?

FRANCE

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

KING LEAR

Right noble King of France,
When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
But now her price is fallen. 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.

FRANCE

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

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,
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
That 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.

FRANCE

Is it but this — a tardiness in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stand
Aloof from the entire point. She is herself a dowry.
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.
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:
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.

Exit LEAR

CORDELIA

Ye 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. Love 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 duty.

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

Well may you prosper!

FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

Exit KING OF FRANCE and CORDELIA

GONERIL

Sister, it is not 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. 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 leave-taking between France and him.

REGAN

We shall further think on't.

GONERIL

We must do something, and i' the heat.

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
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
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 tonight, prescribed his power,
Confined to exhibition — all this done
Upon the gad? Edmund, how now? What news?

EDMUND

So please your lordship, none.

Putting away 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

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

GLOUCESTER

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 you to this? 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

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

GLOUCESTER

Has he never before 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 declined, 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! Where is he?

GLOUCESTER

He cannot be such a monster. Edmund, seek him out, wind me into him, I pray you. Frame the business after your own wisdom.

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. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished, his offense, 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 on 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

Pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villanous melancholy, with a sigh... 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... 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

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.

EDGAR

Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND

That's my fear. I pray you, retire 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. 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 they suspect 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.

SCENE III-IV. The Duke of Albany's palace.

Enter GONERIL

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 he distaste it, let him to my 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 checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused.

Exit GONERIL, 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.

Enter KING LEAR

KING LEAR

Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready.
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'rt poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT

Service.

KING LEAR

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

Follow me. Thou shalt serve me, if I like thee no worse after dinner. Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my fool? I think the world's asleep. 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 these two days.

enter FOOL

FOOL

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

KING LEAR

How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?

FOOL

(offering his cap to KENT) Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

KENT

Why, fool?

FOOL

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

Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

KING LEAR

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

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

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. 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'llt have me whipped for lying; and sometimes I am whipped for holding my piece. 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.
Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing.
Mum, mum.

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
By your allowance.

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.

KING LEAR

Doth any here know me? This is not Lear.

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL

Lear's shadow.

KING LEAR

Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL

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

enter ALBANY

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!
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,
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 disnatured 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!

LEAR exits

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.

ALBANY

I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
To the great love I bear you,--

GONERIL

Pray you, content.

(to the FOOL)

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

FOOL

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

FOOL exits

GONERIL

'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.

ALBANY

Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL

Safer than trust too far.

What he hath uttered I will write my sister.
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 cannot tell.
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

They exit

SCENE V. Court before the same.

Enter KING LEAR, KENT, and Fool

KING LEAR

Go you before to Gloucester with these letters. 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.

KENT exits

FOOL

Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i' the middle on's face?

KING LEAR

No.

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!

FOOL

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!

ACT II

SCENE I. GLOUCESTER's castle

EDMUND (*reading a letter*)

The duke of Cornwall 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.
Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither, now, i' the night, i' the haste,
And Regan with him.

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

Exit EDGAR

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion.
Of my more fierce endeavour. I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport. (*Wounds his arm*) Father, father! Stop, stop! No help?
Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out—
Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

By no means what?

EDMUND

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship.

GLOUCESTER

Let him fly far,
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught.

The noble duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron, comes tonight.
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 pitched 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 faithed? No: what I should deny—
My very character — I'd turn it all

To thy suggestion—“

GLOUCESTER

O strange and and fastened villain.

Would he deny his letter, said he?

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; and of my land,

Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means

To make thee capable.

Enter CORNWALL and REGAN

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, that he were ill affected.
I have this present evening from my sister
Been well inform'd of them; and with such cautions,
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 betray 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.

GLOUCESTER

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

Exeunt

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;
The 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,
Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.

SCENE IV.

Before GLOUCESTER's castle.

KENT in the stocks. Enter KING LEAR and Fool

KING LEAR

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

KENT Hail to thee, noble master!

KING LEAR

Ha! Makest thou this shame thy pastime?

KENT

No, my lord.

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

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,

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.

KING LEAR

Where is this daughter?

KENT

With the earl, sir, here within.

KING LEAR

Follow me not; Stay here.

Exit

FOOL

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. 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.

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-

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:

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!'

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER

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

(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:
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;
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

Never, Regan:

She hath abated me of half my train;
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; 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?

CORNWALL

What means your grace?

KING LEAR

Enter 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

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

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?

GONERIL

At your choice, sir.

KING LEAR

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell:
I can be patient; I can stay with Regan,

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

KING LEAR

Is this well spoken?

GONERIL

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

REGAN

Why not, my lord? If your knights 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.

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

'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.

ACT III [Scene 1 CUT]

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,
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.

KING LEAR

No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.

Enter KENT

KENT

Who's there?

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.

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 scantred 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.

Exit KING LEAR and KENT

FOOL

This is a brave night to cool a courtezan.
I'll speak a prophecy ere I go...
This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time.

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!

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. The king my old master must be relieved. 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.

SCENE IV. The heath, before a hovel

Enter KING LEAR, KENT, and Fool

KENT

Here is the place, my lord; good my lord, enter.

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.

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.
In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty,--
Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That 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.

EDGAR

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

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.

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 halts in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made film 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. Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes: there could I have him now,--and there,--and there again, and there.

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.

EDGAR

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: wine loved I deeply, dice dearly: and in woman out-paramoured the Turk: keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend. Dolphin my boy, my boy, sessa! let him trot by.

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? 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.

Enter GLOUCESTER

EDGAR

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT

How fares your grace?

GLOUCESTER

What, hath your grace no better company?

EDGAR

The prince of darkness is a gentleman. Mudo 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.

GLOUCESTER

No words, no words: hush.

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

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.

CORNWALL

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

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

Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.

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.
Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer;
Thou, sapient sir, sit here. Now, you she foxes!

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.
Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;
And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
Bench by his side. 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;
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,
Thy sheep shall take no harm.
Purr! 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!
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

Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?

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' the 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:

KENT

Oppressed nature sleeps:

This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken senses.

Exeunt all but EDGAR, helping LEAR

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!

What will hap more to-night, safe 'scape the king!

SCENE VII. Gloucester's Castle

Enter CORNWALL, EDMUND, REGAN, GONERIL

CORNWALL

The army of France is landed. Seek out the villain Gloucester.

REGAN

Hang him instantly.

GONERIL

Pluck out his eyes. [REGAN exits]

CORNWALL

Leave him to my displeasure. Where's the king?

EDMUND

My lord of Gloucester hath convey'd him hence:

He is gone 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, re-enter REGAN

REGAN

Ingrateful fox! 'tis he.

GLOUCESTER

What mean your graces? Good my friends, consider

You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends.

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, 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.
All cruels else subscribed: but I shall see
The winged vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL

See't shalt thou never. 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!

Cornwall plucks out an eye

REGAN

One side will mock another; the other too

CORNWALL

If you see vengeance,--

enter FOOL

FOOL

Hold your hand, my lord:

REGAN

How now, you dog!

FOOL

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

CORNWALL

My villain!

FOOL

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

REGAN

Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!

They fight

FOOL

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?

Plucks Gloucester's other eye

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.

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.

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, blind

My father, poorly led? World, world, O world!
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age.
Alack, sir, you cannot see your way.

GLOUCESTER

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;
I stumbled when I saw: 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!

EDGAR

O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?
I am worse than e'er I was.
And worse I may be yet: the worst is not
So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'

GLOUCESTER

Are you a beggar-man?

EDGAR

Bless thee, master!

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

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes: that I am wretched
Makes thee the happier.
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR

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.

SCENE II. Before Albany's place.

Enter GONERIL and EDMUND

GONERIL

Welcome, my lord: I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way. Our wishes on the way
May prove effects. *[Albany calls]* Back, Edmund, to my brother;
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers:
I must change arms at home. Wear this; spare speech;
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

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.

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?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come.

GONERIL

Milk-liver'd man!

That bear'st a cheek for blows, 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

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.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood now.

ALBANY

Gloucester's eyes! Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the king,
And to revenge thine eyes.

Exeunt

SCENE VI. [Scene 3 - 5 CUT] Fields near Dover

Enter GLOUCESTER and EDGAR

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 fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; 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

[aside] Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER

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.

EDGAR

Gone, sir: farewell.

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.
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?

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

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

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.

Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do 't.

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

KING LEAR

Ha! Goneril, with a white beard! They flattered
me like a dog; 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.

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

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.

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.

And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

enter KENT

KENT

O, here he is: 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.

KENT

You shall have any thing.

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.

KENT

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; KENT follows

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.

Far off, methinks, I hear the beaten drum:

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

SCENE VII. A tent in the French camp

LEAR asleep, CORDELIA, KENT, and FRANCE

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.

KENT

To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid.

All my reports go with the modest truth;

Nor more nor clipp'd, but so.

CORDELIA

How does the king?

KENT

My lady, 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!

FRANCE

We may wake the king: he hath slept long.
Be by, good lady, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.

CORDELIA

Very well.

FRANCE

Please you, draw near.

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

Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
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.

FRANCE

My lady, 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!

FRANCE

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.

FRANCE

Be comforted, good lady: 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.

Exeunt all but KENT and FRANCE

FRANCE

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

KENT

Most certain, sir.

FRANCE

Who is conductor of his people?

KENT

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

FRANCE

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

KENT

My point and period will be thoroughly wrought,

Or well or ill, as this day's battle's fought.

ACT V

SCENE I. The British camp near Dover

Enter EDMUND and REGAN

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:

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 ALBANY, GONERIL

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, manet ALBANY

EDGAR

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

ALBANY

I'll overtake you. Speak.

EDGAR

Before you fight the battle, ope this letter.

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
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 III. [Scene 2 CUT] The British camp near Dover

Enter, in conquest, EDMUND, KING LEAR and CORDELIA, prisoners

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; 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.

Enter ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN

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;
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;
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

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. 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; 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

If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

EDMUND

There's my exchange: 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.

ALBANY

A herald, ho!

EDMUND

A herald, ho, a herald!

REGAN

My sickness grows upon me.

Regan stumbles off, Enter EDGAR

ALBANY

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,
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.

They fight. EDMUND falls

GONERIL

Ask me not what I know.

Exit

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
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.

EDMUND

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!
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!
'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.

CAPTAIN

Help, help, O, help!

EDGAR

What kind of help?

ALBANY

Speak, man.

EDGAR

What means that bloody knife?

CAPTAIN

'Tis hot, it smokes;

It came even from the heart of--O, she's dead!

ALBANY

Who dead? speak, man.

CAPTAIN

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.

enter KENT

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?

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!

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!

Re-enter KING LEAR, with CORDELIA dead in his arms; EDGAR 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;
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

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.

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

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

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.

KENT

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: you, to your rights:
With boot, and such addition as your honours
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

Our present business
Is general woe. 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.

EDGAR

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.

END OF PLAY