



The Tragedy of
KING LEAR

ACT 1



1.1 King Lear, intending to divide his power and kingdom among his three daughters, demands public professions of their love. His youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses. Lear strips her of her dowry, divides the kingdom between his two other daughters, and then banishes the earl of Kent, who has protested against Lear's rash actions. The king of France, one of Cordelia's suitors, chooses to marry her despite her father's casting her away. Lear tells his daughters Goneril and Regan that they and their husbands should divide his powers and revenues; he himself will keep a hundred knights and will live with Goneril and Regan by turns.

1. more affected: been more partial to

5-7. equalities . . . moiety: i.e., the equal portions (of the divided kingdom awarded by Lear to the dukes) are so balanced that the most minute examination of either can find no difference between their shares **moiety:** share, portion

9-10. breeding . . . charge: (1) upbringing has been at my expense; (2) parentage has been imputed to me

11. brazed: hardened (like brass)

12. conceive: understand (with sexual wordplay in line 13)

15. ere: before

16. fault: misdeed

17. issue: (1) result; (2) offspring, child

18. proper: (1) appropriate, fitting; (2) handsome

19. a son . . . law: i.e., a legitimate son

(continued)

ACT 1

Scene 1

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. 5

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 't. 10

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? 15

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

GLOUCESTER But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily to the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, 20

20. **some year:** i.e., a **year** or so

20–21. **dearer . . . account:** (1) more loved by me; (2) more valuable in my assessment

21. **this knave:** i.e., Edmund, the illegitimate son (The word **knave** meant “boy” or “fellow,” but was also a term for a servant, a sense playfully continued by Gloucester in “came something saucily . . . before he was sent for,” as if he were an impudent servant who intrudes before he is summoned.) **something:** somewhat

22. **saucily:** (1) impudently; (2) bawdily

23. **fair:** beautiful

24. **whoreson:** bastard (here used affectionately)

24–25. **Do . . . Edmund:** It is possible that Edmund does not hear the conversation until this point.

29. **services:** respects (a courtly term)

30. **sue:** beg, entreat

31. **study deserving:** strive to deserve (your acquaintance)

32. **He:** i.e., Edmund; **out:** i.e., away

33 SD. **Sennet:** trumpets announcing an approach

34. **Attend:** escort (to the king's presence)

37. **we:** i.e., I (the royal “we,” which continues in the lines that follow)

40. **fast:** firm

43. **son:** i.e., son-in-law

46. **constant will:** firm intention; **publish:** make public

47. **several:** separate, particular; **dowers:** i.e., inheritances, legacies (Only Cordelia's portion would have been an actual dowry.)

and the whoreson must be acknowledged.—Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

25

EDMUND No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER My lord of Kent. Remember him hereafter as my honorable friend.

EDMUND My services to your Lordship.

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

30

EDMUND Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. (*Sennet.*) The King is coming.

Enter King Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and Attendants.

LEAR

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,
Gloucester.

35

GLOUCESTER I shall, my lord.

He exits.

LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.—
Give me the map there.

[He is handed a map.]

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
Unburdened crawl toward death. Our son of
Cornwall

40

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.]

45

The <two great> 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 answered. Tell me, my
daughters—

50

[Since now we will divest us both of rule,

55. **Interest of:** claim or title to

58. **Where nature . . . challenge:** i.e., **where merit** and natural affection lay claim to it (i.e., to Lear's **largest bounty**)

60-61. **wield the matter:** express the substance (of her love)

63. **valued:** estimated, appraised

65. **found:** i.e., **found** himself to be loved

66. **breath:** voice; **unable:** unequal to the task

69. **these bounds:** i.e., the lands within these boundaries

70. **shadowy:** shady; **champaigns riched:** i.e., rich plains

71. **wide-skirted meads:** broad meadows

72. **issue:** descendants

76. **self:** same; **mettle:** (1) temperament; (2) metal

77. **prize:** esteem, value (with a secondary sense of "price")

78. **my . . . love:** i.e., **my love** exactly

79. **that:** i.e., in that

81. **square of sense:** No satisfactory explanation of these words has been found. Among the possible meanings of **square** are (1) area; (2) measure (i.e., carpenter's square); (3) perfection.

83. **felicitate:** made happy

87. **More ponderous:** weightier (and therefore more significant)

Interest of territory, cares of state—] 55
 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 word can wield the 60
 matter,
 Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;
 As much as child e'er loved, or father found; 65
 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable.
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA, *aside*

What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

LEAR, *pointing to the map*

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
 With shadowy forests [and with champains riched, 70
 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 of Cornwall? (Speak.) 75

REGAN

I am made of that self mettle as my sister
 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 80
 Which the most precious square of sense
 (possesses,)

And find I am alone felicitate
 In your dear Highness' love.

CORDELIA, *aside*

Then poor Cordelia! 85

And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
 More ponderous than my tongue.

90. **validity:** value
 93. **vines:** i.e., vineyards; **milk:** i.e., pastures
 94. **to be interested:** (1) to have a right or share;
 (2) to be closely connected; **draw:** gain
 99. **Nothing . . . nothing:** proverbial
 102. **bond:** duty or obligation (of child to father)
 106. **bred me:** educated me, brought me up
 107. **right fit:** fitting, appropriate
 110. **Haply:** perchance, perhaps
 111. **must take my plight:** will receive my vow
 or pledge



"He that makes his generation messes." (1.1.130)

From *Bauern-praktik, Bawren Practica, odder
 Wetterbüchlin . . .* (1555).

LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,
 No less in space, validity, and pleasure 90
 Than that conferred on Goneril.—Now, our joy,
 Although our last and least, to whose young love
 [The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
 Strive to be interested,] what can you say to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak. 95

CORDELIA Nothing, my lord.

[LEAR Nothing?

CORDELIA Nothing.]

LEAR

Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave 100
 My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
 According to my bond, no more nor less.

LEAR

How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little,
 Lest you may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord, 105

You have begot me, bred me, loved me.
 I return those duties back as are right fit:
 Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
 Why have my sisters husbands if they say
 They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed, 110
 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.> 115

LEAR But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA Ay, my good lord.

LEAR So young and so untender?

CORDELIA So young, my lord, and true.

122. **mysteries**: secret rites; **Hecate**: goddess of witchcraft and of the moon. (Her name, in Shakespeare, is pronounced as a two-syllable word.)

123-24. **operation . . . be**: i.e., influence of the planets that govern human life and death

126. **Propinquity . . . blood**: kinship

127-28. **as . . . this**: i.e., consider you **a stranger from this moment**

129. **Scythian**: member of a tribe noted in classical literature for savagery (See picture, page 22.)

130. **makes . . . messes**: eats his own offspring (See picture, page 12.)

132. **well neighbored**: closely placed; **relieved**: helped in distress

133. **sometime**: former

137-38. **thought . . . nursery**: i.e., expected to commit myself entirely to her loving care **set my rest**: venture everything (The term is from the card game of primero.) **nursery**: i.e., caretaking

140. **So . . . as**: i.e., as I hope to rest in **peace** in my grave

141. **France**: i.e., the king of **France**; **Who stirs?**: an impatient outburst: "Does no one move?"

144. **digest the third**: i.e., absorb what was to be Cordelia's dowry

145. **plainness**: plain-speaking, frankness; **marry her**: i.e., get her a husband

146. **invest**: endow; clothe

147-48. **large effects . . . majesty**: i.e., considerable signs (of power), or splendid shows, that are associated with rulership

148. **Ourself**: the royal "we"; **by monthly course**: i.e., a month at a time

(continued)

LEAR

Let it be so. Thy truth, then, be thy dower, 120
 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, 125
 Propinquity, and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this forever. The barbarous
 Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes 130
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved
 As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT

Good my liege—

LEAR Peace, Kent. 135

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
 I loved her most and thought to set my rest
 On her kind nursery. 'To Cordelia.' Hence and avoid
 my sight!—
 So be my grave my peace as here I give 140
 Her father's heart from her.—Call France. Who stirs?
 Call Burgundy. 'An Attendant exits.' Cornwall and
 Albany,
 With my two daughters' dowers digest the third.
 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her. 145
 I do invest you jointly with my power,
 Preeminence, and all the large effects
 That troop with majesty. Ourself by monthly course,
 With reservation of an hundred knights
 By you to be sustained, shall our abode 150
 Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain
 The name and all th' addition to a king.
 The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,

149. **With reservation of:** i.e., reserving for myself
150. **sustained:** provided for
152. **addition to:** titles of
153. **revenue:** accent on second syllable; **execution:** carrying out, performance; **rest:** i.e., everything else associated with kingship
160. **Make . . . shaft:** get out of the way of the arrow
161. **fork:** forked arrowhead
- 165-66. **To plainness . . . bound:** i.e., honor obliges one to speak bluntly
167. **Reserve thy state:** keep your power
168. **in . . . consideration:** i.e., by pausing for reflection; **check:** stop
- 169-70. **Answer . . . judgment:** i.e., I will bet **my life** on the truth of my opinion that
- 172-73. **those . . . hollowness:** Proverbial: "Empty vessels have the loudest sounds."
175. **pawn:** (1) something to be set at risk; (2) chess piece of least value
176. **wage:** (1) wager, bet; (2) risk in warfare
178. **motive:** i.e., my reason for acting
181. **blank:** white bull's eye in the center of a target (See picture, page 26.)
182. **Apollo:** god of the sun
185. **vassal:** slave; **Miscreant:** misbeliever; villain

Belovèd sons, be yours, which to confirm,
This coronet part between you. 155

KENT Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honored as my king,
Loved as my father, as my master followed,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers—

LEAR
The bow is bent and drawn. Make from the shaft. 160

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 honor's 165
bound

When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state,
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness. Answer my life my
judgment, 170

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
Reverb no hollowness.

LEAR Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT
My life I never held but as ⟨a⟩ pawn 175
To wage against thine enemies, ⟨nor⟩ fear to lose
it,
Thy safety being motive.

LEAR Out of my sight!

KENT
See better, Lear, and let me still remain 180
The true blank of thine eye.

LEAR Now, by Apollo—

KENT Now, by Apollo, king,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

LEAR O vassal! Miscreant! 185

191. **recreant:** traitor
 192. **That:** i.e., in that
 193. **strained:** excessive
 194. **our sentence:** my statement of condemnation, my judgment
 195. **nor . . . nor:** neither . . . nor; **place:** position as king
 196. **Our . . . good:** i.e., with my power put into effect
 201. **trunk:** i.e., body
 202. **Jupiter:** king of the Roman gods
 204. **Sith:** since
 205. **hence:** elsewhere, away from here
 209-10. **your large . . . approve:** i.e., may your actions fulfill your grand expressions (of love)
 211. **effects:** results, i.e., **deeds** (line 210)

[ALBANY/CORNWALL Dear sir, forbear.]

KENT

Kill thy physician, and thy fee bestow
Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift,
Or whilst I can vent clamor from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

190

LEAR

Hear me, recreant; on thine allegiance, hear me!
That thou hast sought to make us break our vows—
Which we durst never yet—and with strained pride
To come betwixt 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 disasters of the world,
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom. If on the tenth day following
Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

195

200

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 Goneril and Regan.] 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.

205

210

He exits.

*Flourish. Enter Gloucester with France, and Burgundy,
[and] Attendants.*

(GLOUCESTER)

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

216. **We . . . address:** i.e., I . . . **address** myself

217. **rivaled:** competed

218. **in present . . . her:** i.e., as her immediate (or available) dowry

222. **tender:** offer

224. **so:** i.e., **dear,** precious

226. **ought:** anything; **little seeming substance:**

This dismissive reference to Cordelia may allude to her stature, her manners, or her monetary worth.

227. **pieced:** added, joined to it

228. **fitly:** suitably; **like:** please

231. **infirmities:** imperfections; **owes:** owns

233. **strangered with:** made a stranger to me by

237. **Election . . . conditions:** i.e., choice is not possible on such terms

239. **tell:** (1) describe for you; (2) count up for you; **For:** i.e., as for

240. **make . . . stray:** stray so much

241. **To:** as to; **match:** marry; **beseech:** i.e., I beseech

242. **avert:** turn

246-47. **best object:** dearest **object** of your love

248. **argument:** subject

LEAR My lord of Burgundy, 215
We first address toward you, who with this king
Hath rivaled 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, 220
I crave no more than hath your Highness offered,
Nor will you tender less.

LEAR Right noble Burgundy,
When she was dear to us, we did hold her so,
But now her price is fallen. Sir, there she stands. 225
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. 230

LEAR
Will you, with those infirmities she owes,
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dowered with our curse and strangered with our
oath,
Take her or leave her? 235

BURGUNDY Pardon me, royal sir,
Election makes not up in such conditions.

LEAR
Then leave her, sir, for by the power that made me
I tell you all her wealth.—For you, great king,
I would not from your love make such a stray 240
To match you where I hate. Therefore beseech you
T' avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed
Almost t' acknowledge hers.

FRANCE This is most strange, 245
That she whom even but now was your (best)
object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,

250-51. **to dismantle . . . favor:** i.e., as to strip away the mantle of your goodwill

253. **That monsters it:** i.e., that makes it monstrous or hideous

253-54. **or . . . taint:** or else your hitherto professed love must now appear tainted (blemished, stained)

254. **which:** referring back to Cordelia's **offense** (line 251)

256. **Should:** i.e., could

258. **for I want:** because I do not have

259. **speak and purpose not:** i.e., say things that I do not intend to do

265. **for which:** i.e., for lacking **which**

266. **still-soliciting:** always begging or enticing

272. **tardiness in nature:** natural reserve

273. **leaves . . . unspoke:** does not tell the story

276. **regards:** considerations

276-77. **stands . . . from:** i.e., are irrelevant to



"The barbarous Scythian." (1.1.128-29)
From Conrad Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum* . . . (1557).

The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle 250
So many folds of favor. Sure her offense
Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it, or your forevouched affection
Fall into taint; which to believe of her
Must be a faith that reason without miracle 255
Should never plant in me.

CORDELIA, *['to Lear']* I yet beseech your Majesty—
If for I want that glib and oily art
To speak and purpose not, since what I *(well)*
intend 260
I'll do 't before I speak—that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action or dishonored step
That hath deprived me of your grace and favor,
But even for want of that for which I am richer: 265
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.

LEAR Better thou
Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me 270
better.

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 275
When it is mingled with regards that stands
Aloof from th' entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY, *['to Lear']* Royal king,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed, 280
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

LEAR
Nothing. I have sworn. I am firm.

286. **Peace be with:** a phrase usually used as a greeting, but used here as a farewell

288. **respect and fortunes:** i.e., mercenary considerations (Many editors print the First Quarto's reading "respects of fortune," which also means considerations of wealth.)

293. **Be it lawful:** i.e., if it be lawful that

298. **chance:** lot, fortune, fate

300. **wat'rish Burgundy:** (1) the river-filled duchy of **Burgundy**; (2) the weak and vapid duke of **Burgundy** (transferred epithet)

301. **unprized:** unvalued

302. **though unkind:** i.e., though they are (1) unnatural, (2) lacking kindness

303. **here:** i.e., this place; **where:** i.e., place

308. **benison:** blessing

311. **The:** i.e., you, who are the; **washed:** i.e., tear-filled

312. **what:** i.e., for what

313. **like a sister:** i.e., because I am your sister

BURGUNDY, *['to Cordelia']*

I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
That you must lose a husband. 285

CORDELIA Peace be with

Burgundy.

Since that respect and fortunes are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor; 290
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 295

My love should kindle to enflamed respect.—
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my
chance,

Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes of wat'rish Burgundy 300
Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.—
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.
Thou lovest here a better where to find.

LEAR

Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see 305
That face of hers again. *['To Cordelia.']* Therefore
begone

Without our grace, our love, our benison.—
Come, noble Burgundy.

*Flourish. 'All but France, Cordelia, Goneril,
and Regan' exit.*

FRANCE Bid farewell to your sisters. 310

CORDELIA

The jewels of our father, with washed eyes
Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are,
And like a sister am most loath to call

314. **as they are named:** by their proper names
316. **professèd bosoms:** i.e., publicly proclaimed love
318. **prefer him:** recommend him
323. **At Fortune's alms:** i.e., as a charity donation from Fortune; **scanted:** withheld, begrudged
324. **are . . . wanted:** i.e., deserve to be deprived as you deprived (your father)
325. **unfold:** reveal; unpleat; **plighted:** pleated, folded
326. **Who . . . derides:** perhaps, **Time,** which **covers faults,** eventually **derides** them (The line is often emended.)
330. **appertains to:** pertains to, concerns
334. **changes:** changefulness, fickleness
338. **grossly:** obviously
341. **best . . . time:** i.e., prime of his life
342. **but rash:** i.e., completely hotheaded, overhasty
- 343-44. **of . . . condition:** i.e., firmly embedded in his character
344. **therewithal:** together with them; i.e., also



Aiming at "the . . . blank." (1.1.181)
From Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatographie* . . . (1543).

Your faults as they are named. Love well our
father.

315

To your professèd 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.

320

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 plighted cunning hides,
Who covers faults at last with shame derides.
Well may you prosper.

325

FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

France and Cordelia exit.

GONERIL

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

330

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.

335

REGAN

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

340

GONERIL

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

345

347. **unconstant starts:** i.e., abrupt fits or outbursts; **like:** i.e., likely

349. **compliment:** ceremony

350. **sit:** take counsel

352. **last surrender of his:** i.e., recent **surrender** of the kingdom

355. **i' th' heat:** Compare the proverb, "Strike while the iron is hot."

1.2 Edmund, the earl of Gloucester's illegitimate son, plots to displace his legitimate brother, Edgar, as Gloucester's heir by turning Gloucester against Edgar. He tricks Gloucester into thinking Edgar seeks Gloucester's life.

1. **Nature:** i.e., that which is natural, as opposed to spiritual or social

2. **Wherefore:** why

3. **Stand in . . . custom:** i.e., be exposed to the evil of a social convention (by which the elder—and legitimate—son will inherit everything)

4. **curiosity of nations:** i.e., elaborate legal or social distinctions

5. **For that:** because; **moonshines:** months

6. **Lag of:** lagging behind (in birth); younger than; **base:** (1) base-born; illegitimate; (2) inferior

7. **compact:** compacted, put together

8. **generous:** noble, courageous; **true:** proper

9. **honest . . . issue:** the child of a legally married woman **honest:** chaste

(continued)

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. Pray you, let us sit together. If our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us. 350

REGAN We shall further think of it.

GONERIL We must do something, and i' th' heat. 355
They exit.

Scene 2

Enter ¹Edmund, the ¹Bastard.

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," 5
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," 10
"base,"

Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops 15
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 th' legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate."
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed 20

13. **More . . . quality:** i.e., a stronger constitution and more energy

15. **fops:** fools

16. **Got:** begotten, conceived

17. **your land:** i.e., the **land** you are to inherit

20. **speed:** prove successful

21. **invention:** inventiveness; or, plot, scheme

24. **choler:** anger; **parted:** departed

25. **tonight:** i.e., last night; **prescribed his power:** i.e., told how much power he retains

26. **Confined to exhibition:** restricted to an allowance

27. **Upon the gad:** i.e., on a sudden impulse **gad:** goad, spur; **how now:** an interjection, here used as a greeting meaning, roughly, "**how** are you **now**?"

29. **put up:** i.e., put away

34. **terrible:** frightened

34-35. **dispatch:** putting away

35. **quality:** nature

40-41. **for . . . o'erlooking:** i.e., for you to read

44-45. **to blame:** blameworthy, deserving rebuke

48. **essay or taste:** test

49. **This policy . . . age:** i.e., **this policy** of reverencing the aged

50. **the best . . . times:** the prime of our lives

And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
 Shall 'top' th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Enter Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

Kent banished thus? And France in choler parted?
 And the King gone tonight, prescribed his power, 25
 Confined to exhibition? All this done
 Upon the gad?—Edmund, how now? What news?

EDMUND So please your Lordship, none. *He puts a
 paper in his pocket.*

GLOUCESTER Why so earnestly seek you to put up that
 letter? 30

EDMUND I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER What paper were you reading?

EDMUND Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER No? What needed then that terrible dis-
 patch of it into your pocket? The quality of nothing 35
 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'erread; and
 for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for 40
 your o'erlooking.

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. 45

GLOUCESTER Let's see, let's see.

Edmund gives him the paper.

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 50
 our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish*

52. **idle and fond:** silly and foolish
53. **who sways:** which rules
54. **suffered:** allowed, tolerated
64. **closet:** private room
65. **character:** handwriting
67. **matter:** i.e., subject **matter**
68. **in respect of that:** i.e., considering the contents
69. **fain:** gladly
73. **sounded:** i.e., questioned
76. **fit:** fitting, appropriate; **at perfect age:** i.e., fully grown
77. **declined:** i.e., in decline, or failing in vigor; **ward:** one legally placed under the protection of a guardian
80. **Abhorred:** abhorrent; **detested:** detestable
81. **sirrah:** term of address that shows the speaker's position of authority
87. **run . . . course:** i.e., act with certainty; **where:** i.e., whereas

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 enjoy half his revenue forever and live the beloved of your brother. 55
Edgar.

Hum? Conspiracy? "Sleep till I wake 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? 60

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? 65

EDMUND 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. 70

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. 75

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? 80

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 should run a certain course; where, if 85

91. **pawn down:** stake, bet
92. **feel:** test
93. **pretense of danger:** dangerous purpose
95. **meet:** fitting, proper
97. **auricular:** perceived by the ear; **have your satisfaction:** i.e., convince yourself
103. **wind me into him:** i.e., for my sake, insinuate yourself into his confidence; **Frame:** manage
104. **after . . . wisdom:** as you judge wise
- 104-5. **unstate . . . resolution:** i.e., give up my rank and fortune if only I could resolve my doubts
106. **presently:** immediately; **convey:** conduct
108. **withal:** i.e., with what happens
109. **late:** recent
- 110-11. **the wisdom of nature:** i.e., the study of nature, "natural philosophy" (what we would now call "science")
111. **nature:** i.e., human nature
112. **scourged:** afflicted; **sequent effects:** disasters that follow (the **eclipses** [line 109])
- 113-14. **mutinies:** riots
116. **prediction:** portent, omen
117. **bias of nature:** natural inclination (In the game of bowls, the **bias** is the curve that brings the ball to the desired point. See picture, page 44.)
120. **disquietly:** in a disturbing manner

you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honor and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down my life for him that he hath writ this to feel my affection to your Honor, and to no other pretense of danger. 90

GLOUCESTER Think you so?

EDMUND If your Honor 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. 95

GLOUCESTER He cannot be such a monster.

EDMUND Nor is not, sure. 100

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. 105

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 offense, honesty! 'Tis strange. 110 115 120
He exits.

125. **foppery**: foolishness

126. **surfeits**: sicknesses caused by intemperance

127–28. **guilty . . . stars**: Edmund here places his father's talk about omens within the larger context of belief in astrology, where the position of the stars, moon, and planets at the moment of one's birth are thought to control one's life. (See picture, page 74.)

129. **on**: by

130. **treachers**: deceivers, traitors; **by spherical predominance**: i.e., through the influence of the celestial spheres (According to Ptolemaic astronomy heavenly bodies were carried around the Earth in crystalline spheres. See picture, page xxxiv.)

133. **divine thrusting on**: supernatural incitement

134–35. **lay . . . star**: blame his lecherousness on a star

136. **compounded with**: i.e., had sex with (literally, contracted with, made terms with)

136–37. **under the Dragon's tail**: perhaps, when the constellation Draco was in the ascendant; or, perhaps, while the moon was at the southward node of its orbit

137. **Ursa Major**: the constellation called the Great Bear

138. **rough**: violent, harsh, rude; **Fut**: i.e., 'sfoot, or Christ's foot (a strong oath)

139. **that**: that which; **maidenliest**: i.e., chastest

140. **twinkled . . . bastardizing**: in astrological terms, "been in the ascendant at the moment I was conceived (as a bastard)"

141. **pat**: at exactly the right moment; **catastrophe**: conclusion, winding up

(continued)

EDMUND This is the excellent foppery of the world, that 125
 when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeits of
 our own behavior) we make guilty of our disasters
 the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains
 on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves,
 thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; 130
 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 on the charge of a star! My father 135
 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. (Fut,) I should
 have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the
 firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. (Edgar)— 140

Enter Edgar.

⟨and⟩ pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old
 comedy. My cue is villainous 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 con- 145
 templation 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 with that?

EDMUND I promise you, the effects he writes of suc- 150
 ceed 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 diffi-
 dences, banishment of friends, dissipation of co- 155
 horts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR How long have you been a sectary astronomi-
 cal?

143. **Tom o' Bedlam:** a beggar who has escaped or been discharged from Bedlam (London's Bethlehem Hospital for the insane) or who pretends to be so in order to make people give him money

144. **Fa, sol, la, mi:** The notes of the musical scale were sung to the syllables *do, re, mi, fa, sol, la*, and *ti*. Presumably Edmund sings these four syllables.

148. **this:** i.e., the

150-51. **succeed:** follow, turn out

154-55. **diffidences:** distrust

155-56. **dissipation of cohorts:** (perhaps mutinous) disbanding of troops of soldiers

157-58. **sectary astronomical:** believer in astrology

163. **in:** on

164. **countenance:** manner

166. **Bethink yourself:** recollect

167-68. **forbear his presence:** i.e., avoid him

168. **qualified:** reduced

170. **with . . . person:** i.e., even physical harm to you

171. **allay:** calm, assuage

173-74. **have . . . forbearance:** i.e., restrain yourself patiently (Both **continent** and **forbearance** connote self-restraint.)

176. **fitly:** at a convenient time

181. **meaning:** intention

183. **image and horror:** i.e., horrible **image**

185. **anon:** soon

190. **practices ride easy:** i.e., plots easily succeed; **the business:** i.e., how to proceed

191. **wit:** cleverness

192. **meet:** i.e., welcome (literally, appropriate); **fashion fit:** i.e., shape to my own ends

EDMUND Come, come,) when saw you my father last?

EDGAR The night gone by.

160

EDMUND Spake you with him?

EDGAR Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him by word nor countenance?

EDGAR None at all.

165

EDMUND Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him, and at my entreaty forbear his presence until 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.

170

EDGAR Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND That's my fear. [I pray you have a continent forbearance till the speed 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 you go. There's my key. If you do stir abroad, go armed.]

175

EDGAR Armed, brother?]

EDMUND Brother, I advise you to the best. I am no honest man if there be any good meaning toward you. I have told you what I have seen and heard, but faintly, nothing like the image and horror of it. Pray you, away.

180

EDGAR Shall I hear from you anon?

185

EDMUND I do serve you in this business. *Edgar exits.*

A credulous father and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices 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.

190

He exits.

1.3 Goneril, with whom Lear has gone to live, expresses her anger at Lear and his knights. She orders her steward, Oswald, to inform Lear that she will not see him and to treat Lear coldly.

5. **crime:** offense

10. **come slack:** fall short

11. **answer:** i.e., **answer** for

14. **to question:** into dispute

15. **distaste:** dislike; **let him:** i.e., **let him** go

17. **Idle:** silly, useless

18. **authorities:** powers

21-22. **checks . . . abused:** reprimands in place of (or, perhaps, as well as) flattering words, **when they** (old men) **are seen** to be misguided

27. **would . . . occasions:** i.e., wish to create opportunities

28. **straight:** straightway, immediately

29. **hold . . . course:** i.e., follow exactly **my course** of action



“Old fools are babes again.” (1.3.20)

From August Casimir Redel, *Apophtegmata symbolica* . . . (n.d.).

Scene 3

Enter Goneril and Oswald, her Steward.

GONERIL Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his Fool?

OSWALD Ay, madam.

GONERIL

By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other 5
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, 10
You shall do well. The fault of it I'll answer.

OSWALD He's coming, madam. I hear him.

GONERIL

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows. I'd have it come to question.
If he distaste it, let him to my sister, 15
Whose mind and mine I know in that are one,
(Not to be overruled. 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 20
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen
abused.)

Remember what I have said.

OSWALD

Well, madam.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you. 25
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.

They exit in different directions.

1.4 The earl of Kent returns in disguise, offers his services to Lear, and is accepted as one of Lear's followers. Goneril rebukes Lear for his knights' rowdiness and demands he dismiss half of them. After attacking her verbally for her ingratitude, he prepares to leave for Regan's.

1-4. **If . . . likeness:** i.e., **if I can** disguise my way of speaking as well as I have my appearance, then I may be able fully to carry out my plan **diffuse:** disorder, and thereby disguise **razed:** erased; shaved off **likeness:** outward appearance

5-6. **where . . . condemned:** i.e., in Lear's presence

7. **come:** i.e., happen that

8 SD. **Horns:** i.e., the sound of hunting **horns;** **within:** offstage

9. **stay:** wait

12. **What . . . profess?:** What is your trade or calling?

14. **profess to be:** assert that I am

15. **put . . . trust:** i.e., trust me, have confidence in me

16. **honest:** honorable; **converse:** associate

17. **fear judgment:** i.e., fear coming before a judge, either divine or human

17-18. **cannot choose:** i.e., have no choice

18. **eat no fish:** This seems to be a joke, though its meaning is unclear. It may mean "I am a Protestant" or "I eat meat and am therefore manly."

23. **What wouldst thou?:** i.e., what do you want?

29. **fain:** gladly

Scene 4

Enter Kent ¹*in disguise.*

KENT

If but as ^{<well>} I other accents borrow
That can my speech diffuse, my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I razed my likeness. Now, banished Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand
condemned,
So may it come thy master, whom thou lov'st,
Shall find thee full of labors.

5

Horns within. Enter Lear, ¹Knights, and Attendants.

LEAR Let me not stay a jot for dinner. Go get it ready.

¹*An Attendant exits.*

10

How now, what art thou?

KENT A man, sir.

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.

15

LEAR What art thou?

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

20

LEAR If thou be'st as poor for a subject as he's for a king, thou art poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT Service.

LEAR Who wouldst thou serve?

25

KENT You.

LEAR Dost thou know me, fellow?

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

33. **keep . . . counsel:** **keep** honorable secrets; or, perhaps, honestly **keep** secrets

34. **curious:** elaborate

38. **to love:** i.e., as **to love**

43. **knave:** boy; servant

44. **Fool:** A professional **Fool** made his living by entertaining his aristocratic patron. He was both allowed and encouraged to speak the truth, thus countering the flattery of the other attendants surrounding the monarch or nobleman.

47. **clotpole:** blockhead

52. **slave:** rascal, menial servant

54. **roudest:** rudest

58. **entertained:** treated

59. **were wont:** i.e., used to be



A game of bowls. (1.2.117)
From *Le centre de l'amour* . . . (1650?).

LEAR What's that? 30

KENT Authority.

LEAR What services canst 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. 35

LEAR How old art thou?

KENT Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for anything. I have years on my back forty-eight. 40

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.

「An Attendant exits.」

Enter 「Oswald, the」 Steward.

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter? 45

OSWALD So please you— *He exits.*

LEAR What says the fellow there? Call the clotpole back. *「A Knight exits.」* Where's my Fool? Ho! I think the world's asleep.

「Enter Knight again.」

How now? Where's that mongrel? 50

KNIGHT He says, my lord, your ⟨daughter⟩ is not well.

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. 55

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 60

61. **the ... dependents:** i.e., all the servants
 67. **but remembrest:** only remind
 67-68. **conception:** idea, thought
 68. **faint neglect:** i.e., unenthusiastic service
 69-70. **blamed ... curiosity:** charged to my own oversensitivity
 70. **very pretense:** actual intention
 72. **this:** i.e., these
 84. **bandy:** exchange (literally, hit back and forth like a tennis ball)
 85. **strucken:** struck
 86. **base:** low, inferior
 91. **differences:** perhaps, **differences** in rank
 91-92. **measure ... length:** i.e., be tripped **lubber's:** clumsy oaf's



Football players. (1.4.87)
 From Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britannia* ... (1612).

well in the general dependents as in the Duke himself also, and your daughter.

LEAR Ha? Sayst 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. 65

LEAR Thou but remembrest 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 pretense and purpose of unkindness. I will look further into 't. But where's my Fool? I have not seen him this two days. 70

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

LEAR No more of that. I have noted it well.—Go you and tell my daughter I would speak with her. *「An Attendant exits.」* Go you call hither my Fool. 75
「Another exits.」

Enter 「Oswald, the」 Steward.

O you, sir, you, come you hither, sir. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD My lady's father.

LEAR "My lady's father"? My lord's knave! You whore-son dog, you slave, you cur! 80

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

LEAR Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?
「Lear strikes him.」

OSWALD I'll not be stricken, my lord. 85

KENT, *「tripping him」* Nor tripped neither, you base football player?

LEAR I thank thee, fellow. Thou serv'st me, and I'll love thee.

KENT, *「to Oswald」* 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. 90
「Oswald exits.」

94. **knave:** servant
95. **earnest:** a small payment that promises a greater reward to come
97. **coxcomb:** fool's cap (See picture, page 52.)
99. **were best:** had better
- 103-4. **an . . . sits:** i.e., if you cannot adjust to shifts in power **an:** i.e., if **as the wind sits:** in the direction **the wind** blows
105. **on 's:** i.e., of his
108. **nuncle:** i.e., mine uncle, the Fool's familiar way of addressing Lear
111. **living:** property
- 115-17. **Truth's . . . stink:** perhaps, truth-telling is **whipped out** of the house while flattery is rewarded (This meaning depends on the traditional symbolic link between flattery and dogs.) **Brach:** bitch-hound
118. **gall:** painful sore; or, vexation
121. **Mark:** pay attention to, listen to
124. **owest:** own
125. **goest:** walk
126. **trowest:** believe
127. **Set . . . throwest:** bet less than you win throwing dice

LEAR Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee. There's
earnest of thy service. *「He gives Kent a purse.」* 95

Enter Fool.

FOOL Let me hire him too. *「To Kent.」* Here's my
coxcomb. *「He offers Kent his cap.」*

LEAR How now, my pretty knave, how dost thou?

FOOL, *「to Kent」* Sirrah, you were best take my cox-
comb. 100

LEAR Why, my boy?

FOOL Why? For taking one's part that's out of favor.
「To Kent.」 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 105
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.

LEAR Why, my boy? 110

FOOL If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my cox-
combs myself. There's mine. Beg another of thy
daughters.

LEAR Take heed, sirrah—the whip.

FOOL Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be 115
whipped out, when the Lady Brach may stand by th'
fire and stink.

LEAR A pestilent gall to me!

FOOL Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

LEAR Do. 120

FOOL Mark it, nuncle:

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest, 125
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest;

131. **a score:** twenty
133. **unfee'd:** unpaid (Proverbial: "A lawyer will not plead without a fee.")
140. **bitter:** harsh, cutting
147. **Do . . . stand:** i.e., you **stand** in his place
149. **presently:** immediately
150. **motley:** the multicolored costume of the professional fool
155. **altogether fool:** i.e., just fooling (The Fool's reply assumes that "altogether fool" means "all the folly that there is.")
156. **let me:** i.e., allow me to monopolize foolishness
157. **on 't:** i.e., of it
- 162-63. **eat . . . meat:** i.e., eaten up the edible part



"And ladies too . . . they'll be snatching." (1.4.158-59)
 From Theodor de Bry, *Emblemata* . . . (1593).

Leave thy drink and thy whore
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more 130
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? 135

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.

LEAR A bitter Fool! 140

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

LEAR No, lad, teach me.

FOOL <That lord that counseled thee
To give away thy land, 145
Come place him here by me;
Do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear.
The one in motley here, 150
The other found out there.

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. 155

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 the fool
to myself; they'll be snatching.)—Nuncle, give me
an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns. 160

LEAR What two crowns shall they be?

FOOL Why, after I have cut the egg i' th' middle and eat
up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou

164. **clovest:** split
165. **bor'st . . . ass:** i.e., carried your donkey
168. **like myself:** i.e., like a fool
170. **grace:** favor
171. **foppish:** foolish
172. **wear:** possess and enjoy as their own
173. **apish:** foolishly imitative
176. **used it:** made it my practice
178. **put'st down . . . breeches:** i.e., volunteered to be whipped
181. **bo-peep:** a child's game
194. **frontlet:** i.e., frown



"Here's my coxcomb." (1.4.96-97)
From Sebastian Brant, *Stultifera navis* (1570).

clovest thy <crowne> i' th' middle and gav'st away
both parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er 165
the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown
when thou gav'st thy golden one away. If I speak
like myself in this, let him be whipped that first
finds it so. *['Sings.']*

Fools had ne'er less grace in a year, 170
For wise men are grown foppish
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.

LEAR When were you wont to be so full of songs,
sirrah? 175

FOOL I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou mad'st thy
daughters thy mothers. For when thou gav'st them
the rod and put'st down thine own breeches,
['Sings.']

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung, 180
That such a king should play bo-peep
And go the <fools> among.

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

LEAR An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped. 185

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 190
thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides
and left nothing i' th' middle. Here comes one o' the
parings.

Enter Goneril.

LEAR

How now, daughter? What makes that frontlet on?
<Methinks> you are too much of late i' th' frown. 195

197-98. **an O without a figure:** a zero with no number before it (to give it a numerical value)

204. **want:** need

205. **shelled peascod:** an empty pea pod

206. **all-licensed Fool:** i.e., servant who, as **Fool**, may do whatever he pleases

208. **carp:** (1) find fault; (2) talk noisily

209. **rank:** gross, excessive

211. **a . . . redress:** a sure remedy

212. **yourself too late:** you all too recently

213. **put it on:** encourage it

214. **allowance:** approval

214-19. **which . . . proceeding:** Goneril's speech becomes much less intelligible as she begins to threaten Lear, but her general sense is clear: **if you** continue to encourage your knights' riotous behavior, I will move against them for the general good even if I offend and embarrass you; and I will be thought right to do so.

215. **censure:** blame; **redresses:** remedies

216. **tender . . . weal:** regard for the general good

217. **working:** implementation

218. **else were:** otherwise would be seen as; **shame:** shameful; **necessity:** the obvious need

221-22. **The hedge . . . young:** This couplet offers a nature story: **the cuckoo** lays its egg in the sparrow's nest, and the sparrow feeds the young cuckoo until it gets so big it kills the sparrow. **it's:** i.e., it has; **it:** i.e., its

223. **darkling:** (1) in the dark; (2) confused

225. **I would:** I wish

226. **fraught:** filled

227. **dispositions:** (1) inclinations; (2) temperaments

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 200
 me, though you say nothing.

Mum, mum,

He that keeps nor crust <nor> crumb,

Weary of all, shall want some.

['He points at Lear.']

That's a shelled peascod.

205

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-endurèd riots. Sir,
 I had thought by making this well known unto you 210
 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; which if you should, the fault
 Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep 215
 Which in the tender of a wholesome weal
 Might in their working do you that offense,
 Which else were shame, that then necessity
 Will call discreet proceeding.

FOOL For you know, nuncle,

220

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,

That it's had it head bit off by it young.

So out went the candle, and we were left darkling.

LEAR Are you our daughter?

GONERIL

I would you would make use of your good wisdom, 225
 Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away
 These dispositions which of late transport you
 From what you rightly are.

230. **Jug:** a nickname for "Joan"

234. **notion:** mind; **discernings:** mental faculties

235. **lethargied:** asleep; **Waking?:** i.e., am I awake?

238-40. **marks . . . reason:** i.e., by the tokens that designate kingship (titles, dress, entourage), and **by knowledge and reason**

240. **false:** falsely

242. **Which:** i.e., whom

244. **admiration:** pretended amazement

244-45. **much o' th' savor / Of:** i.e., of a kind with

245. **other your:** i.e., others of your

247. **should:** i.e., you **should**

249. **disordered:** disorderly, unruly

251. **Shows:** looks; **Epicurism:** sensuality; or, gluttony

253. **graced:** honorable, dignified; **speak:** i.e., ask

254. **desired:** requested

255. **else:** otherwise

256. **disquantity:** lessen the number of; **train:** attendants

257. **remainders . . . depend:** i.e., those that remain as your dependents

258. **besort:** suit

FOOL May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? Whoop, Jug, I love thee! 230

LEAR
Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied—Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so. 235
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL Lear's shadow.

LEAR I would learn that, for, by the marks of
sovereignty,
Knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded 240
I had daughters.

FOOL Which they will make an obedient father.)

LEAR Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL

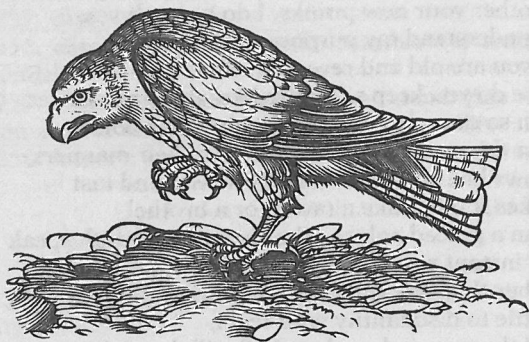
This admiration, sir, is much o' th' savor
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you 245
To understand my purposes aright.
As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners, 250
Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
Makes 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, 255
A little to disquantity your train,
And the remainders that shall still depend
To be such men as may besort your age,
Which know themselves and you.

LEAR Darkness and 260
devils!—

Saddle my horses. Call my train together.

「Some exit.」

267. **Woe that:** i.e., **woe** to the one who
 271. **thou show'st thee:** you reveal yourself
 273. **patient:** calm
 274. **kite:** vulture, vicious bird of prey (See picture, below.)
 275. **train:** attendants; **parts:** qualities
 277. **in . . . support:** i.e., maintain with precise observance (of their duty)
 278. **worships:** honor
 280–82. **Which . . . place:** i.e., which distorted, twisted, me away from what I should be (The image of these lines may be of a building [**frame**] dislodged from its foundation [**fixed place**].) **engine:** machine
 285. **dear:** precious
 287. **moved you:** aroused your feelings



A kite. (1.4.274)

From Konrad Gesner, *Historiae animalium* . . . (1585–1604).

Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee.
Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL

You strike my people, and your disordered rabble 265
Make servants of their betters.

Enter Albany.

LEAR

Woe that too late repents!—(O, sir, are you
come?)

Is it your will? Speak, sir.—Prepare my horses.

Some exit.

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend, 270
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea monster!

[ALBANY

Pray, sir, be patient.]

LEAR, *to Goneril*] Detested kite, thou liest.

My train are men of choice and rarest parts, 275

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,

Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of 280
nature

From the fixed place, drew from my heart all love

And added to the gall! O Lear, Lear, Lear!

He strikes his head.

Beat at this gate that let thy folly in

And thy dear judgment out. Go, go, my people. 285

Some exit.

ALBANY

My lord, I am guiltless as I am ignorant

[Of what hath moved you.]

LEAR

It may be so, my lord.—

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!

Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend 290

291. **this creature:** i.e., Goneril
293. **increase:** procreation
294. **derogate:** dishonored
295. **If . . . teem:** i.e., if it is her destiny to bear a child
296. **spleen:** spite, malice
297. **thwart:** perverse; **disnatured:** unnatural
299. **cadent:** falling; **fret:** wear
300. **her . . . benefits:** i.e., Goneril's motherly efforts and kindnesses
306. **disposition:** temperament
307. **As dotage:** i.e., that senility
308. **at a clap:** i.e., at one stroke
314. **perforce:** i.e., against my will
315. **Blasts and fogs:** sudden infections and foul (infectious) air
317. **untented woundings:** perhaps, wounds too deep to be probed (A **tent** was a probe used to cleanse a wound.)
318. **fond:** foolish
319. **Beweep . . . again:** i.e., (if you) weep **again** over **this** matter

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 honor her. If she must teem, 295
 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 300
 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 and the rest of his train」 exit.

ALBANY

Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONERIL

Never afflict yourself to know more of it, 305
 But let his disposition have that scope
 As dotage gives it.

Enter Lear 「and the Fool」.

LEAR

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

ALBANY

What's the matter, sir? 310

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 315
 thee!
 Th' untented woundings of a father's curse
 Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
 Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out

320. **waters . . . loose:** i.e., tears **that you shed**
 321. **temper:** moisten, soften
 323. **comfortable:** comforting
 325. **visage:** face
 328. **mark:** hear
 337. **Should . . . slaughter:** i.e., would certainly
 be sent to execution
 338. **halter:** hangman's rope
 342. **politic:** prudent (said sarcastically)
 343. **At point:** armed
 344-45. **dream, buzz, fancy:** All mean "whim,"
 but **buzz** may also mean "whisper," "rumor."
 346. **enguard:** i.e., guard, protect
 347. **in mercy:** i.e., at his **mercy**
 348. **too far:** i.e., unreasonably
 350. **still take away:** always remove
 351. **Not . . . taken:** i.e., rather than always **fear**
 being overtaken (by those **harms**)
 354. **unfitness:** unsuitableness



"A tavern or a brothel." (1.4.252)
 From *Le centre de l'amour* . . . (1650?).

And cast you, with the waters that you loose, 320
 To temper clay. (Yea, is 't come to this?)
 Ha! Let it be so. I have another daughter
 Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable.
 When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
 She'll flay thy wolvisish visage. Thou shalt find 325
 That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
 I have cast off forever. *He exits.*

GONERIL Do you mark that?

ALBANY

I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
 To the great love I bear you— 330

GONERIL Pray you, content.—What, Oswald, ho!—

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

FOOL Nuncle Lear, Nuncle Lear, tarry. Take the Fool
 with thee.

A fox, when one has caught her, 335
 And such a daughter,
 Should sure to the slaughter;
 If my cap would buy a halter.
 So the Fool follows after. *He exits.*

[GONERIL

This man hath had good counsel. A hundred
 knights! 340

'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, 345
 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, 350
 Not fear still to be taken. I know his heart.
 What he hath uttered I have writ my sister.
 If she sustain him and his hundred knights
 When I have showed th' unfitness—

356. **What:** an interjection introducing a question
 359. **full:** i.e., fully
 361. **compact:** confirm
 364. **milky . . . course:** i.e., mild and gentle
course
 365. **under pardon:** i.e., if you will excuse me
 366. **at task:** blamed; **want:** lack
 371. **Well . . . event:** perhaps a version of a proverb
 such as "time will tell" or "the end crowns all"

1.5 Lear, setting out for Regan's with his Fool, sends the disguised Kent ahead with a letter to Regan.

1. **Gloucester:** presumably, the town (or county) of that name
- 1-2. **these letters:** i.e., this letter
3. **demand out of:** questions arising from
8. **in 's:** in his
9. **kibes:** chilblains (i.e., sores resulting from exposure to the cold)

Enter 'Oswald, the' Steward.

How now, Oswald?] 355

What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

OSWALD Ay, 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

360

As may compact it more. Get you gone,

And hasten your return. 'Oswald exits.' No, no, my lord,

This milky gentleness and course of yours,

Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,

365

'You' are much more at task 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.

GONERIL Nay, then—

370

ALBANY Well, well, th' event.

They exit.

Scene 5

Enter Lear, Kent 'in disguise,' Gentleman, and Fool.

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

5

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

He exits.

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

LEAR Ay, boy.

10

11-12. **go slipshod**: i.e., have to wear slippers
(The Fool may be suggesting that Lear has no brains,
or that his brains do not lie in his heels, since his
heels are taking him on a senseless journey.)

14. **Shalt**: i.e., thou **shalt**

15. **this**: i.e., Goneril; **crab's**: i.e., crabapple is

20. **on 's**: of his

22. **of either side 's**: i.e., on **either side** of his

24. **her**: i.e., Cordelia

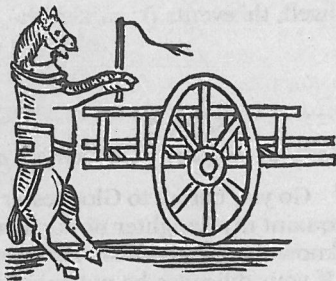
34. **gone about 'em**: i.e., getting them ready

35. **seven stars**: i.e., the star cluster known as the
Pleiades

39. **perforce**: forcibly

45. **mad**: insane

46. **in temper**: i.e., steady, calm; **would not**: do
not want to be



"The cart draws the horse." (1.4.229-30)

From Edmund W. Ashbee's 1871 reprint from John Taylor, *Mad
fashions, od fashions* . . . (1642).

FOOL Then, I prithee, be merry; thy wit shall not go slipshod.

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. 15

LEAR What canst tell, boy?

FOOL She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab. Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i' th' middle on 's face? 20

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.

LEAR I did her wrong.

FOOL Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell? 25

LEAR No.

FOOL Nor I neither. But I can tell why a snail has a house.

LEAR Why?

FOOL Why, to put 's head in, not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case. 30

LEAR I will forget my nature. So kind a father!—Be my horses ready? *「Gentleman exits.」*

FOOL Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason. 35

LEAR Because they are not eight.

FOOL Yes, indeed. Thou wouldst make a good Fool.

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. 40

LEAR How's that?

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

LEAR

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper. I would not be mad! 45

「Enter Gentleman.」

How now, are the horses ready?

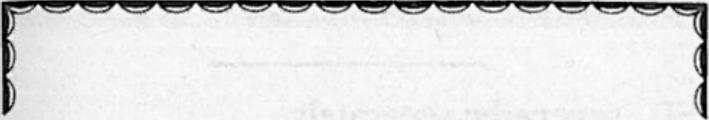
GENTLEMAN Ready, my lord.

LEAR Come, boy.

FOOL

She that's a maid now and laughs at my departure, 50
Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut
shorter.

They exit.



The Tragedy of
KING LEAR

ACT 2



2.1 Edmund tricks Edgar into fleeing from Gloucester's castle. After more of Edmund's lies, Gloucester condemns Edgar to death and makes Edmund his heir. Cornwall and Regan arrive at Gloucester's castle, hear the false stories about Edgar, and welcome Edmund into their service.

0 SD. **severally**: separately

1. **Save**: i.e., God **save** (an ordinary greeting)

5. **How comes that?**: i.e., how did this happen?

7. **abroad**: i.e., going around; **ones, they**: i.e., news (regarded as plural)

8. **ear-kissing**: i.e., barely heard because not yet widely known; **arguments**: topics of conversation

10. **toward**: about to happen

13. **do**: i.e., hear

14. **The better, best**: i.e., so much **the better**—in fact, the **best** that could happen

15. **perforce**: necessarily

17. **queasy question**: hazardous, uncertain nature

18. **Briefness**: i.e., quick action; **work**: succeed

20. **watches**: perhaps, has ordered that a watch be kept for you; or, perhaps, is on the lookout

ACT 2

Scene 1

Enter 'Edmund, the' Bastard and Curan, severally.

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.

He exits.

EDMUND

The Duke be here tonight? 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!

21. **Intelligence is given:** i.e., information has been **given** out

24. **i' th' haste:** i.e., in **haste**

26. **Upon . . . Albany:** perhaps, against Cornwall's side in his dispute with Albany; or, perhaps, on Cornwall's behalf against the duke of Albany

27. **Advise yourself:** i.e., think about it

31. **Draw:** i.e., **draw** your sword; **quit you:** i.e., acquit yourself

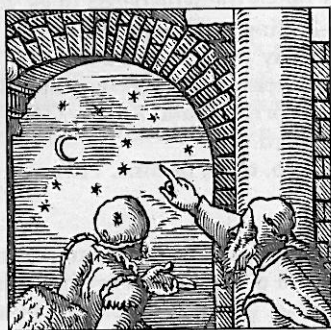
33-35. **Yield . . . farewell:** Edmund alternates between hostile shouts and instructions uttered in a low voice.

36. **drawn on:** i.e., **drawn** from

36-37. **beget . . . endeavor:** i.e., create a belief that I fought fiercely

38. **in sport:** i.e., as a joke, for amusement

45. **stand:** i.e., **stand** in support of him as



Astrologers casting a baby's horoscope. (1.2.127-28)

From Jakob Rüff, *De conceptu et generatione hominis* . . . (1580).

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' th' night, i' th' haste,
And Regan with him. Have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?
Advise yourself.

25

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. *They draw.*
Yield! Come before my father! Light, ho, here!
Aside to Edgar. Fly, brother.—Torches, torches!
—So, farewell. *Edgar exits.*

30

35

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion
Of my more fierce endeavor. I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport. *He wounds his arm.*
Father, father!

Stop, stop! No help?

40

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.

45

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—

50

54. **that:** i.e., when

55. **thunder:** It was believed that **thunder** (also *thunderbolt*, *thunderstone*) was a tangible object that caused the damage associated with lightning strikes. **bend:** direct

56. **Spoke with:** i.e., and when I **spoke** of

57. **in fine:** in conclusion

58. **how . . . stood:** i.e., with what loathing I opposed

59. **fell motion:** fierce attack

60. **prepared:** i.e., already drawn; **charges home:** impetuously and effectively attacks

61. **unprovided:** defenseless

62. **best alarumed spirits:** i.e., **best** courage aroused by the alarum (call to arms)

63. **quarrel's right:** i.e., in the rightness of my cause

64. **ghasted:** aghast, frightened

65. **Full:** very

66. **Let . . . far:** perhaps, "he'd better flee a long way if he hopes to escape me"

68. **dispatch:** i.e., let him be killed

69. **arch and patron:** i.e., archpatron, chief **patron**

71. **he which finds him:** i.e., whoever finds Edgar

72. **stake:** place of execution

75. **pight:** determined (obsolete form of "pitched"); **curst:** angry

76. **discover:** expose

77. **unpossessing:** i.e., without property (Illegitimate children could not inherit.)

77-80. **dost . . . faithed:** i.e., if I contradicted you, do you **think** anyone would believe you, or repose in you the **trust, virtue, or worth** necessary to credit your words? **faithed:** credited, believed

GLOUCESTER

Pursue him, ho! Go after. *['Servants exit.']* 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 the thunder bend, 55
Spoke with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to th' father—sir, in fine,
Seeing how loathly opposite I stood
To his unnatural purpose, in fell motion
With his preparèd sword he charges home 60
My unprovided body, (lanced) mine arm;
And when he saw my best alarumed spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to th' encounter,
Or whether ghastrd by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled. 65

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 tonight.
By his authority I will proclaim it 70
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 75
I threatened 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 faithd? No. What (I should) 80
deny—

As this I would, though thou didst produce

83. **My very character:** i.e., evidence against me written in my own handwriting

83-84. **turn . . . To:** i.e., make it all appear to be

84. **suggestion:** tempting; **practice:** treachery

85-88. **thou must . . . seek it:** i.e., you must think **the world** is stupid **if** you think people would not be aware that the benefits for you, should I die, are powerful incitements to you to seek **my death pregnant and potential:** obvious and powerful

89. **strange and fastened:** unnatural and confirmed

91. **got:** begot, fathered

91 SD. **Tucket:** trumpet signal

94. **ports:** sea harbors

98. **natural:** i.e., showing **natural** affection (but the word also had the meaning of "illegitimate," as well as of "legitimate")

99. **capable:** i.e., legally **capable** of inheriting (in spite of illegitimacy)

101. **Which . . . now:** i.e., **which** was only just now

111. **tended upon:** i.e., attended

My very character—I'd turn it all
 To thy suggestion, plot, and damnèd practice.
 And thou must make a dullard of the world 85
 If they not thought the profits of my death
 Were very pregnant and potential <spurs>
 To make thee seek it."

GLOUCESTER O strange and fastened villain!
 Would he deny his letter, said he? 90
 <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 95
 I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
 May have 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, 100
 Which I can call but now, I have heard strange
 <news.>

REGAN
 If it be true, all vengeance comes too short
 Which can pursue th' offender. How dost, my
 lord? 105

GLOUCESTER
 O madam, my old heart is cracked; it's cracked.

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 110
 That tended upon my father?

113. **consort:** company
114. **though:** i.e., if; **ill affected:** evilly inclined
115. **put him on:** i.e., incited him to attempt
116. **expense:** spending; **revenues:** accent on second syllable
123. **childlike office:** service appropriate to a son
125. **He . . . practice:** i.e., Edmund exposed Edgar's plot
130-31. **Make . . . please:** i.e., use my power (against Edgar) however you like
131. **For:** i.e., as for
137. **however else:** i.e., at least
140. **Thus out of season:** i.e., at such an inopportune time



A snail. (1.5.27)

From Thomas Trevelyan's pictorial commonplace book (1608).

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, 115

To have th' expense and waste of his revenues.

I have this present evening from my sister

Been well informed of them, and with such cautions

That if they come to sojourn at my house

I'll not be there. 120

CORNWALL

Nor I, assure thee, Regan.—

Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father

A childlike office.

EDMUND

It was my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER

He did bewray his practice, and received 125

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 feared of doing harm. Make your own purpose, 130

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. 135

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. 140

- 141. **poise:** weight
- 144. **which:** i.e., the letters
- 145. **from:** while away from; **several:** various
- 146. **attend dispatch:** are waiting to be dismissed
- 148. **needful:** necessary
- 149. **the instant use:** i.e., immediate action

2.2 Kent meets Oswald at Gloucester's castle (where both await answers to the letters they have brought Regan) and challenges Oswald to fight. The disturbance and Kent's explanations provoke Cornwall into putting Kent into the stocks for punishment.

6. **if thou lov'st me:** i.e., please

9. **in Lipsbury pinfold:** A **pinfold** is a pound for animals. Since no such place as **Lipsbury** is known, editors have guessed that Kent means "between my teeth."

14. **broken meats:** i.e., leftover food

15. **base:** low; **three-suited:** For the earl of Kent, a man who owned three suits would be a pitiful creature.

15-16. **hundred-pound:** perhaps, in total worth; or, perhaps, in annual salary

16. **worsted:** woolen, rather than the preferred silk

16-17. **lily-livered:** cowardly (i.e., with a liver, supposedly the seat of courage, pale from lack of blood)

(continued)

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 best <thought> it fit
 To answer from our home. The several messengers 145
 From hence attend dispatch. Our good old friend,
 Lay comforts to your bosom and bestow
 Your needful counsel to our businesses,
 Which craves the instant use.

GLOUCESTER I serve you, madam. 150
 Your Graces are right welcome.

Flourish. They exit.

Scene 2

*Enter Kent 'in disguise' and 'Oswald, the' Steward,
 severally.*

OSWALD Good dawning to thee, friend. Art of this
 house?

KENT Ay.

OSWALD Where may we set our horses?

KENT I' th' mire. 5

OSWALD Prithee, if thou lov'st me, tell me.

KENT I love thee not.

OSWALD Why then, I care not for thee.

KENT If I had thee in Lipsbury pinfold, I would make
 thee care for me. 10

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, hun- 15
 dred-pound, filthy worsted-stocking knave; a lily-
 livered, action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing, su-
 perserviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting

17. **action-taking:** i.e., settling disputes in court, rather than fighting; **glass-gazing:** i.e., fond of admiring himself in a mirror

17-18. **superserviceable:** perhaps, overeager to be of service

18. **finical:** over-particular; **one-trunk-inheriting:** i.e., possessing no more than will fit in a single trunk

19-20. **wouldst . . . service:** would, in order to give **good service**, play pimp or pander

20. **composition:** combination

24. **addition:** title (i.e., the one that I just gave you)

26. **of:** i.e., to

28. **varlet:** rascal

32-33. **make . . . you:** perhaps, fill you so full of holes that you soak up moonlight (**A sop** is a piece of bread soaked in liquid.)

33-34. **cullionly barbermonger:** despicable fop

37. **Vanity the puppet:** probably his name for Goneril (The phrase may mean a figure who personifies the sin of vanity or an actor who plays the allegorical figure Vanity.)

39. **carbonado:** slice up (like meat before it is broiled)

39-40. **Come your ways:** i.e., come on

42. **Stand:** Kent's repetition of this command suggests that Oswald keeps trying to run away.

42-43. **neat slave:** perhaps, elegant rascal

46. **With you:** an offer to fight; **goodman:** a form of address to a man below the rank of gentleman, insulting to Edmund

47. **flesh you:** initiate you into fighting

slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch; one whom I will beat into (clamorous) whining if thou deny'st the least syllable of thy addition. 20

OSWALD Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee! 25

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? *He draws his sword.* Draw, you rogue, for though it be night, yet the moon shines. I'll make a sop o' th' moon-shine of you, you whoreson, cullionly barbermonger. Draw! 30

OSWALD Away! I have nothing to do with thee. 35

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. 40

OSWALD Help, ho! Murder! Help!

KENT Strike, you slave! Stand, rogue! Stand, you neat slave! Strike! *He beats Oswald.*

OSWALD Help, ho! Murder, murder!

Enter Bastard (Edmund, with his rapier drawn,) Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester, Servants.

EDMUND How now, what's the matter? Part! 45

KENT With you, goodman boy, if you please. Come, I'll flesh you. Come on, young master.

GLOUCESTER

Weapons? Arms? What's the matter here?

CORNWALL Keep peace, upon your lives! He dies that strikes again. What is the matter? 50

52. **your difference:** i.e., the cause of your quarrel
 55. **disclaims in:** refuses to acknowledge
 59. **stonecutter:** sculptor
 60. **ill:** badly
 61. **o':** i.e., in
 64. **at suit of:** i.e., moved to mercy by
 65. **zed:** the letter z; **unnecessary:** i.e., not included in the Latin alphabet
 67. **unbolted:** unsifted or lumpy; **daub:** plaster
 68. **jakes:** outhouse
 69. **wagtail:** a bird so-called because of its constantly wagging tail

74-75. **should . . . honesty:** i.e., **should wear** the symbol of manhood without being honorable

77-78. **oft . . . unloose:** This seems to allude to the Gordian knot, which could not be untied because it was so intricately knotted. (It was cut apart by Alexander the Great.) The **holy cords** may, therefore, refer to marriage bonds, since the Gordian knot often symbolized marriage. **atwain:** in two **intrinse:** intricately tied

78-83. **smooth . . . masters:** i.e., encourage every rebelliously overpowering emotion of their lords by catering to it either through denial or affirmation, changing with every change in their master
smooth: encourage **Reneg:** deny **halcyon:** kingfisher, whose dead body, if hung up, was believed to turn in the direction of the wind **vary:** variation, change

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 valor.

You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee; a
tailor made thee. 55

CORNWALL Thou art a strange fellow. A tailor make a man?

KENT A tailor, sir. A stonecutter or a painter could not
have made him so ill, though they had been but two 60
years o' th' 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! 65
—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! 70

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 75
these,

Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain
Which are (too) intrinse t' unloose; smooth every
passion

That in the natures of their lords rebel— 80
Being oil to fire, snow to the colder moods—
(Reneg,) affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every (gale) and vary of their masters,

85. **epileptic:** i.e., distorted

86. **Smile . . . as:** i.e., do you smile . . . as if

87. **Sarum plain:** Salisbury plain (a very large open expanse just north of Salisbury, and, in prehistoric England, the location of the city of Old **Sarum**)

88. **Camelot:** in the Arthurian legends, the place where King Arthur's court was located (It has been variously placed in Winchester, in Somersetshire, and in Wales.)

94. **likes:** pleases

96. **occupation:** custom, habit; **plain:** i.e., plain-spoken, blunt

101-3. **doth . . . nature:** i.e., pretends to be plain-spoken, and thus twists plain speech away from its own nature (that is, truth) **saucy:** insolent **garb:** appearance, manner **his:** its

105. **An they:** i.e., if they; **so:** i.e., fine

109. **silly-ducking observants:** ridiculously bowing sycophants

110. **stretch . . . nicely:** strain to carry out **their duties** punctiliously

111-14. **Sir . . . front:** Kent here abandons plain speaking and mocks elaborate courtly language. **allowance:** approval **aspect:** (1) look; (2) astrological position (Kent flatteringly associates Cornwall with a heavenly body.) **Phoebus' front:** the sun's forehead

Knowing naught, like dogs, but following.—

A plague upon your epileptic visage!

85

「Smile」 you my speeches, as I were a fool?

Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain,

I'd drive you cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL What, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER How fell you out? Say that.

90

KENT

No contraries hold more antipathy

Than I and such a knave.

CORNWALL

Why dost thou call him "knave"? What is his fault?

KENT His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

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

95

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

100

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.

105

These kind of knaves I know, which in this

plainness

Harbor more craft and more corrupter ends

Than twenty silly-ducking observants

That stretch their duties nicely.

110

KENT

Sir, in good faith, in sincere verity,

Under th' allowance of your great aspect,

Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire

On 「flick'ring」 Phoebus' front—

116. **dialect:** i.e., plainspokenness; **discommend:** disapprove

117-18. **He . . . knave:** i.e., whoever it was who used plain speaking to deceive you was an out-and-out villain

119-20. **though . . . to 't:** perhaps, even **though** I may displease you (by refusing to be plain) when you ask me to be

124. **late:** recently

125. **upon his misconception:** i.e., because of the king's misunderstanding me

126. **he, compact:** i.e., Kent, joined in a compact (with the king); **his:** i.e., the king's

127. **being down, insulted:** i.e., I **being down**, he **insulted**

128-30. **put . . . self-subdued:** acted like such a courageous man that he made himself appear worthy and won praise from the king by attacking one (namely Oswald) who had already chosen to give up **man:** courage **worthied:** got a reputation for **For him attempting:** for attacking someone

131. **fleshment:** excitement arising from a first success

134. **Ajax:** in Greek mythology and in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, a dull-witted, blustering Greek warrior in the Trojan War

135. **stocks:** an instrument of punishment that imprisoned the ankles in a wooden frame (See picture, page 92.)

136. **reverent:** i.e., reverend (worthy of respect because old)

142. **malice:** ill will

143. **grace:** i.e., royal honor

CORNWALL What mean'st by this? 115

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, 'to Oswald' What was th' offense 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, compact, and flattering his displeasure,
Tripped me behind; being down, insulted, railed,
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.

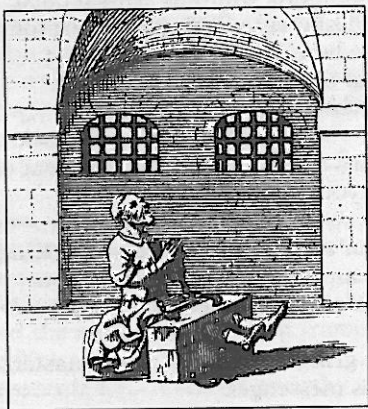
CORNWALL Fetch forth the stocks.— 135
You stubborn ancient knave, you reverent braggart,
We'll teach you.

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. 140
You shall do small <respect,> show too bold
malice
Against the grace and person of my master,
Stocking his messenger.

CORNWALL
Fetch forth the stocks.—As I have life and honor, 145
There shall he sit till noon.

REGAN
Till noon? Till night, my lord, and all night, too.

149. **should:** i.e., would
 150. **knave:** (1) servant; (2) villain
 151. **color:** nature
 152. **sister:** sister-in-law; **away:** i.e., in
 155. **check:** rebuke; **Your purposed low correction:**
 the ignoble punishment you intend
 156. **condemned'st:** most despised
 161. **answer:** i.e., be accountable for
 169. **rubbed:** hindered
 170. **watched:** gone without sleep
 172. **A . . . heels:** i.e., even good men can have bad
 luck **grow . . . heels:** decay, like stockings worn
 through at the heel
 173. **Give:** i.e., God give



A man in the stocks. (2.2.135)
 From August Casimir Redel, *Apophtegmata symbolica* . . . (n.d.).

KENT

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

REGAN Sir, being his knave, I will.

150

CORNWALL

This is a fellow of the selfsame color
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 check him for 't. Your purposed low correction 155
Is such as basest and 'contemned'st' wretches
For pilf'rings and most common trespasses
Are punished with.) The King must take it ill
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrained. 160

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.'

CORNWALL Come, my (good) lord, away.

165

'All but Gloucester and Kent' exit.

GLOUCESTER

I am sorry for thee, friend. 'Tis the (Duke's)
pleasure,
Whose disposition all the world well knows
Will not be rubbed nor stopped. I'll entreat for thee.

KENT

Pray, do not, sir. I have watched and traveled hard. 170
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.

175. **king:** i.e., Lear; **approve:** confirm; **saw:** proverb

176–77. **out . . . sun:** This proverb (“Out of God’s blessing into the warm [i.e., hot] sun”) meant “to go from good to bad.”

179. **comfortable:** cheering, helpful

183. **obscured course:** i.e., actions in disguise

183–85. **shall . . . remedies:** These lines are difficult to interpret, and many editors suspect textual corruption. In stage productions, they are often read as if fragments from Cordelia’s letter.

185. **o’erwatched:** tired out from lack of sleep

186. **vantage:** advantage (of your fatigue)

188–89. **turn thy wheel:** i.e., change my luck (**Fortune** is often depicted turning a wheel on which mortals rise and fall. See pictures, pages 172 and 252.)

2.3 Edgar disguises himself as a madman-beggar to escape his death sentence. (Although Kent remains onstage, a new scene begins because the locale shifts away from Gloucester’s castle, from which Edgar has fled.)

1. **proclaimed:** i.e., as an outlaw

2. **happy . . . tree:** i.e., fortunate presence of a hollow tree

5. **attend . . . taking:** i.e., look out for my capture

6. **bethought:** resolved

8. **in contempt of:** i.e., in its contempt for

9. **grime:** begrime, blacken

10. **elf:** twist into elflocks (i.e., mat)

11. **presented:** displayed, offered; **outface:** defy

GLOUCESTER

The Duke's to blame in this. 'Twill be ill taken.

He exits.

KENT

Good king, that must approve the common saw, 175

Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st

To the warm sun. *「He takes out a paper.」*

Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,

That by thy comfortable beams I may

Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles 180

But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,

Who hath most fortunately been informed

Of my obscurèd course, and shall find time

From this enormous state, seeking to give 185

Losses their remedies. All weary and o'erwatched,

Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold

This shameful lodging.

Fortune, good night. Smile once more; turn thy
wheel.*⟨Sleeps.⟩*

Scene 3

Enter Edgar.

EDGAR I heard myself proclaimed,

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, 5

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 hairs in knots, 10

And with presented nakedness outface

13. **proof:** example
14. **Bedlam beggars:** See note to 1.2.143 and picture, page 166.
15. **mortifièd:** deadened
16. **pricks:** skewers
17. **object:** spectacle
- 17-20. **from low farms . . . charity:** i.e., force country people to give them food **low:** lowly **pelting:** paltry **bans:** curses
20. **Turlygod:** The meaning of this word (unrecorded elsewhere) is unknown. **Poor Tom:** for the name *Tom o' Bedlam*, see note to 1.2.143.
21. **"Edgar" . . . am:** i.e., as **"Edgar," I am nothing**

2.4 At Gloucester's castle, Lear is angered that his messenger has been stocked and further angered that Regan and Cornwall refuse to see him. When Goneril arrives, Lear quarrels bitterly with her and with Regan, who claim that he needs no attendants of his own. When each daughter says that he may stay with her only if he dismisses all his knights, he rushes, enraged, out into a storm. Cornwall, Regan, and Goneril shut Gloucester's castle against Lear.

-
1. **they:** i.e., Regan and Cornwall
 5. **remove:** change of residence
 10. **cruel:** painful (with a pun on "crewel," thin woolen yarn)
 12. **by th' loins:** i.e., around the waist

(continued)

The winds and persecutions of the sky.
 The country gives me proof and precedent
 Of Bedlam beggars who with roaring voices
 Strike in their numbed and mortifièd arms 15
 Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary,
 And, with this horrible object, from low farms,
 Poor pelting villages, sheepcotes, and mills,
 Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
 Enforce their charity. "Poor Turlygod! Poor Tom!" 20
 That's something yet. "Edgar" I nothing am.

He exits.

Scene 4

Enter Lear, Fool, and Gentleman.

LEAR

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

GENTLEMAN

As I learned,

The night before there was no purpose in them
 Of this remove. 5

KENT, *['waking']* Hail to thee, noble master.

LEAR Ha?

Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

[KENT

No, my lord.]

FOOL Ha, ha, he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied 10
 by the heads, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys
 by th' loins, and men by th' legs. When a (man's)
 overlusty at legs, then he wears wooden nether-
 stocks.

LEAR

What's he that hath so much thy place mistook 15
 To set thee here?

KENT

It is both he and she,

Your son and daughter.

12-14. **When . . . netherstocks:** Vagabonds were punished by being put in the stocks. **overlusty at legs:** i.e., too eager to wander **netherstocks:** stockings

15-16. **What's . . . To:** i.e., who **so mistook** your position as **to**

18. **son:** i.e., son-in-law

23. **Jupiter:** king of the Roman gods, also called Jove (See picture, page 112.)

24. **Juno:** queen of the Roman gods, often at odds with Jupiter

28. **upon respect:** i.e., against the king, whose messenger should be respected

29. **Resolve:** inform; **modest:** moderate

30. **usage:** treatment

31. **us:** i.e., me

33. **commend:** deliver

34-35. **Ere . . . kneeling:** i.e., before I could get up from where I knelt to show **my duty**

35-36. **reeking . . . haste:** i.e., a messenger hot and soaked (with the sweat from his hurried journey)

38. **spite of intermission:** i.e., although he interrupted me

39. **presently:** immediately; **on:** i.e., as a result of

40. **meiny:** train, retinue; **straight:** straightway, immediately

44. **meeting:** i.e., I, **meeting**

47. **Displayed so saucily:** i.e., put on such an impudent display

48. **more . . . wit:** more courage than intelligence

52-53. **that way:** i.e., south, the direction geese fly as winter approaches (The sense is that things are going to become still worse.)

- LEAR No.
- KENT Yes. 20
- LEAR No, I say.
- KENT I say yea.
- LEAR By Jupiter, I swear no.
- [KENT By Juno, I swear ay.
- LEAR] They durst not do 't. 25
- 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 might'st deserve or they impose this usage, 30
- 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 showed
- My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post, 35
- Stewed in his haste, half breathless, <panting> forth
- From Goneril his mistress salutations;
- Delivered letters, spite of intermission,
- Which presently they read; on <whose> contents
- They summoned up their meiny, straight took 40
- 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 poisoned mine, 45
- Being the very fellow which of late
- Displayed 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 50
- The shame which here it suffers.
- [FOOL Winter's not gone yet if the wild geese fly that way.

55. **blind**: i.e., neglectful of their fathers

56. **bags**: i.e., **bags** of gold

58. **Fortune . . . whore**: The goddess Fortuna is called a **whore** because her favors are so fickle.

59. **turns the key to**: i.e., opens the door for

60. **dolors for**: sorrows on account of (with a possible pun on "dollars in exchange for")

61. **tell**: (1) count; (2) relate

62-64. **O, how . . . below**: "The **mother**" was the name given to hysteria, one symptom of which is the suffocation that Lear is represented as feeling in his rage and grief. (Its medical name is **hysterica passio**.) The disease was thought to be caused by a wandering womb (*hystera*), which belonged **below**, not up near the **heart**.

68. **but**: i.e., other than

70. **chance**: i.e., chances it that

74-81. **We'll . . . after**: The Fool explains the desertion of Lear's knights three ways, all of them emphasizing Lear's decline into adversity: Lear is in his **winter** (an unprofitable time for ants, just as following Lear is now unprofitable); Lear stinks with misfortune (so that even a blind man can smell his decay); Lear is like a **great wheel** going downhill, destroying everything attached to it.

84. **sir**: gentleman

85. **follows . . . form**: serves a master only in outward behavior

86. **pack**: hurry off

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 th' poor.

But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours for
thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.] 60

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. 65

LEAR, [*to Fool and Gentleman*] Follow me not. Stay
here. *He exits.*

GENTLEMAN

Made you no more offense but what you speak of?

KENT None.

How chance the King comes with so small a number? 70

FOOL An thou hadst been set i' th' stocks for that
question, thou'dst well deserved it.

KENT Why, Fool?

FOOL We'll set thee to school to an ant to teach thee
there's no laboring i' th' 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 follow-
ing; but the great one that goes upward, 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. 80

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form, 85
Will pack when it begins to rain

90. **knave:** servant

91. **knave:** rascal; **perdie:** *par Dieu*, French for "by God"

96. **fetches:** dodges, tricks

97. **images:** signs

100. **quality:** disposition

101. **unremovable:** immovable

103. **confusion:** ruin

113. **tends:** awaits, expects

114. **service:** homage, fealty, obedience

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, perdie.

KENT Where learned you this, Fool?

FOOL Not i' th' stocks, fool.

90

Enter Lear and Gloucester.

LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick? They are weary?

95

They have traveled 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,

100

How unremovable and fixed he is

In his own course.

LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!

"Fiery"? What "quality"? Why Gloucester,

Gloucester,

105

I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

[GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I have informed them so.

LEAR

"Informed them"? Dost thou understand me, man?]

GLOUCESTER Ay, my good lord.

110

LEAR

The King would speak with Cornwall. The dear father

Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends service.

[Are they "informed" of this? My breath and blood!]

115

119-20. **still . . . bound:** i.e., always fail in those duties required of us when in good **health office:** duties

123. **am . . . will:** i.e., **am** angry with **my more** impetuous temper

124. **To take:** i.e., in mistaking

125-26. **Death . . . state:** a curse **my state:** i.e., my royal power

126. **Wherefore:** why

127. **This act:** the stocking of Kent

128. **remotion:** i.e., keeping remote from me

129. **practice:** contrivance, deception; **Give . . . forth:** release **my servant**

130. **and 's:** i.e., and his

131. **presently:** immediately

133. **cry . . . death:** i.e., put an end to sleep

136. **cockney:** city dweller; squeamish or affected woman

137. **paste:** pastry; **knapped:** knocked

138. **coxcombs:** i.e., heads

139. **wantons:** playful animals (with a secondary sense of "lewd persons")

140. **his hay:** its hay

146. **divorce . . . tomb:** perhaps, **divorce** your dead mother; or, perhaps, refuse to be buried beside her

"Fiery"? The "fiery" duke? Tell the hot duke that—
 No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.
 Infirmary doth still neglect all office
 Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves 120
 When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind
 To suffer with the body. I'll forbear,
 And am fallen out with my more headier will,
 To take the indisposed and sickly fit
 For the sound man. *Noticing Kent again.* Death on 125
 my state! Wherefore
 Should he sit here? This act persuades me
 That this remotion of the Duke and her
 Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.
 Go tell the Duke and 's wife I'd speak with them. 130
 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.

He exits.

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down! 135

FOOL Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels
 when she put 'em i' th' paste alive. She knapped
 'em o' th' coxcombs with a stick and cried "Down,
 wantons, down!" 'Twas her brother that in pure
 kindness to his horse buttered his hay. 140

Enter Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester, Servants.

LEAR Good morrow to you both.

CORNWALL Hail to your Grace.

Kent here set at liberty.

REGAN I am glad to see your Highness.

LEAR

Regan, I think <you> are. I know what reason
 I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad, 145
 I would divorce me from thy <mother's> tomb,

147. **Sepulch'ring:** i.e., since it would be the tomb of (Lear says that if Regan is not glad to see him, she could not be his daughter. Her mother would therefore be an **adult'ress**.)

150. **naught:** (1) worthless; (2) wicked

153. **quality:** manner

154-56. **I have . . . duty:** i.e., I hope you under-value her merit rather than that she failed in **her duty**

165. **Nature in you:** i.e., your life

165-66. **very verge . . . confine:** i.e., its limit

167. **some discretion that:** i.e., the **discretion** of someone who; **state:** condition

172. **mark:** see; **house:** i.e., dignity of the royal family

174. **Age is unnecessary:** i.e., no one needs old people

Sepulch'ring an adult'ress. *['To Kent.']* O, are you free?

Some other time for that.—Belovèd Regan,
Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied 150
Sharp-toothed 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 155
Than she to scant her duty.

[LEAR

Say? How is that?

REGAN

I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation. If, sir, perchance
She have restrained the riots of your followers, 160
'Tis on such ground and to such wholesome end
As clears her from all blame.]

LEAR My curses on her.

REGAN O sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge 165
Of his 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 wronged her. 170

LEAR Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house:

['He kneels.']

"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." 175

REGAN

Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks.
Return you to my sister.

- 179. **abated:** deprived
- 180. **black:** angrily
- 183. **top:** i.e., head
- 184. **taking:** infectious
- 188-89. **fen-sucked . . . blister:** vapors **drawn** up from marshes **by the sun to fall** on and **blister** her
- 193. **tender-hefted:** perhaps, moved (i.e., heaved, swayed) by tender emotions
- 198. **scant my sizes:** diminish my allowance (as if he were a poor university student)
- 199. **oppose the bolt:** i.e., lock the door
- 201. **offices of nature:** i.e., natural duties
- 202. **Effects:** actions
- 205. **to th' purpose:** i.e., come to the point

LEAR, *rising* Never, Regan.
She hath abated me of half my train,
Looked black upon me, struck me with her tongue 180
Most serpentlike 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! 185

LEARN
You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the powerful sun
To fall and blister!

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

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' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endowed.

REGAN Good sir, to th' purpose. 205
 Tucket within.

LEAR
Who put my man i' th' stocks?

CORNWALL What trumpet's that?

208. **approves:** confirms
 212. **grace:** favor
 213. **varlet:** rascal
 216. **on 't:** i.e., of it
 218-19. **sway / Allow:** government approves
 225-26. **that . . . so:** i.e., that is thought so by those who lack judgment and that is named so by the senile
 227. **sides:** i.e., **sides** of his body
 231. **advancement:** preferment, promotion

REGAN

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

Enter 'Oswald, the' Steward.

Is your lady come? 210

LEAR

This is a slave whose easy-borrowed pride
Dwells in the (fickle) grace of her he follows.—
Out, varlet, from my sight!

CORNWALL

What means your Grace?

LEAR

Who stocked my servant? Regan, I have good hope 215
Thou didst not know on 't.

Enter Goneril.

Who comes here? O heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause. Send down and take my part. 220
'To Goneril.' Art not ashamed to look upon this
beard? 'Regan takes Goneril's hand.'
O Regan, will you take her by the hand?

GONERIL

Why not by th' hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offense that indiscretion finds 225
And dotage terms so.

LEAR

O sides, you are too tough!
Will you yet hold?—How came my man i' th'
stocks?

CORNWALL

I set him there, sir, but his own disorders 230
Deserved much less advancement.

LEAR

You? Did you?

REGAN

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If till the expiration of your month

237. **from home:** i.e., away from my **home**
 238. **entertainment:** proper care
 241. **wage:** contend, struggle
 243. **Necessity's . . . pinch:** i.e., I choose the pains of poverty and distress
 246. **knee:** i.e., kneel before
 248. **sumpter:** packhorse
 249. **groom:** servant; or, stable hand
 251. **mad:** insane
 257. **embossèd carbuncle:** swollen, inflamed tumor
 259. **call:** invoke
 260. **thunder-bearer:** i.e., the king of Roman gods (called both **Jove** [line 261] and **Jupiter** [line 23])
 267. **fit:** appropriate
 268. **mingle . . . passion:** i.e., rationally assess your intemperate behavior



Jove, "the thunder-bearer." (2.4.260-61)
 From Vincenzo Cartari, *Le vere e noue imagini . . .* (1615).

You will return and sojourn with my sister, 235
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.

LEAR

Return to her? And fifty men dismissed?
No! Rather I abjure all roofs, and choose 240
To wage against the enmity o' th' 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 245
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. *「He indicates Oswald.」*

GONERIL

At your choice, sir. 250

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, 255
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore or embossèd 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, 260
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. 265

I looked 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

274. **sith that:** since; **charge:** expense
277. **Hold amity:** i.e., remain peaceful
280. **slack:** neglect (their duty to)
285. **notice:** acknowledgment
288. **depositories:** trustees (of my power)
289. **kept a reservation:** i.e., reserved for myself
the right
293. **well-favored:** attractive
295. **Stands . . . praise:** i.e., deserves a measure
of praise

Must be content to think you old, and so—
But she knows what she does. 270

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 275
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, 280

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. 285

LEAR I gave you all—

REGAN And in good time you gave it.

LEAR

Made you my guardians, my depositaries,
But kept a reservation to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you 290
With five-and-twenty? Regan, said you so?

REGAN

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

LEAR

Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favored
When others are more wicked. Not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. 'To Goneril.' I'll go 295
with thee.

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

GONERIL

Hear me, my lord.

301. **follow:** attend on you

304. **reason not:** i.e., do not argue in terms of

305. **Are . . . superfluous:** i.e., own something that exceeds what they actually need

306. **nature . . . nature:** i.e., humans . . . animals

308-10. **If . . . keeps thee warm:** i.e., if dressing warmly were the only gorgeousness a lady needed, then you would not need your **gorgeous** clothes, **which** hardly keep you **warm** anyway

316-17. **fool . . . To:** do not make me such a fool as to

326. **flaws:** fragments

327. **Or ere:** before

330. **bestowed:** accommodated

What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five, 300
 To follow in a house where twice so many
 Have a command to tend you?

REGAN What need one?

LEAR
 O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars 305
 Are in the poorest thing superfluous.

Allow not nature more than nature needs,
 Man's life is 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 310
 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 stirs these daughters' hearts 315
 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 320

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 325

Storm and tempest.

Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
 Or ere I'll weep.—O Fool, I shall go mad!

(Lear, Kent, and Fool) exit

(with Gloucester and the Gentleman.)

CORNWALL Let us withdraw. 'Twill be a storm.

REGAN

This house is little. The old man and 's people 330
 Cannot be well bestowed.

331. **his . . . himself:** i.e., **his** fault that has **put** him

332. **taste:** experience

333. **For his particular:** i.e., as for him in particular

340. **will:** i.e., **will** go

341. **give him way:** i.e., let **him** have his own **way**;
He leads himself: i.e., he will take no one's advice

344. **sorely ruffle:** fiercely blow

349. **a desperate train:** i.e., a troop of violent supporters

350-51. **being . . . abused:** i.e., being easily misled or deceived

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? 335

CORNWALL

Followed the old man forth.

Enter Gloucester.

He is returned.

GLOUCESTER The King is in high rage.

[CORNWALL Whither is he going?

GLOUCESTER

He calls to horse,] but will I know not whither. 340

CORNWALL

'Tis best to give him way. He leads himself.

GONERIL, [to Gloucester]

My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, the night comes on, and the high winds
Do sorely ruffle. For many miles about
There's scarce a bush. 345

REGAN

O sir, to willful men

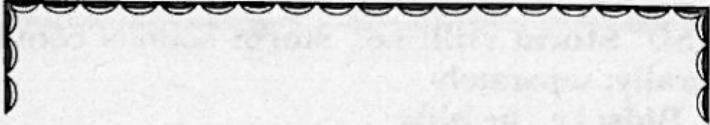
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.

He is attended with a desperate train,
And what they may incense him to, being apt 350
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' th' storm.

They exit.



The Tragedy of
KING LEAR

ACT 3



3.1 Kent, searching for Lear, meets a Gentleman and learns that Lear and the Fool are alone in the storm. Kent tells the Gentleman that French forces are on their way to England.

0 SD. **Storm still:** i.e., **storm** sounds continue; **severally:** separately

5. **Bids:** i.e., he **bids**

6. **main:** mainland

10. **make nothing of:** i.e., treat irreverently; or, scatter and reduce to **nothing** as he **tears** it out

13. **cub-drawn:** i.e., ravenous, with her dugs sucked dry by her cubs

14. **couch:** i.e., stay in her den

17. **bids . . . take all:** The desperate gambler betting the last of his money cries "**Take all!**"

19-20. **outjest . . . injuries:** i.e., use jokes to relieve the **injuries** that have struck the king to the heart

ACT 3

Scene 1

Storm still. Enter Kent 'in disguise,' and a Gentleman, severally.

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 elements;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea
Or swell the curlèd waters 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease; <tears his white
hair,

5

Which the impetuous blasts with eyeless rage
Catch in their fury and make nothing of;
Strives in his little world of man to outscorn
The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.
This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear would
couch,

10

The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs
And bids what will take all.)

15

KENT

But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN

None but the Fool, who labors to outjest
His heart-struck injuries.

20

21–46. **Sir, I do know...this office to you:** We combine the Folio and quarto versions of this speech in a new way designed to make Kent's words more intelligible. See "Appendix: 3.1.21–46" (pp. 289–93, below) and Richard Knowles, "Revision Awry" in Further Reading (p. 313, below).

22. **upon...note:** i.e., justified by what I have observed in you

23. **Commend:** entrust, commit; **a dear:** an important, precious

26. **that...stars:** i.e., whom the fates or destinies

27. **seem no less:** i.e., appear to be real servants

28. **spies, speculations:** Both words mean **spies**.

29. **Intelligent of:** giving information about

30. **a power:** an armed force

31. **scattered:** divided

32. **Wise in:** knowledgeable about; **feet:** i.e., footholds

33. **at point:** in readiness

34. **their open banner:** i.e., **their banner** openly

35. **credit:** credibility

37. **making just:** i.e., for **making** a true

38. **bemadding:** maddening

39. **plain:** complain about

40. **snuffs:** rages (against each other); **packings:** plots

43. **furnishings:** outer trappings

44. **blood:** noble birth

46. **office:** duty (i.e., to go to Dover)

50. **outwall:** outward appearance

54. **that fellow is:** i.e., who I am

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 is covered
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.] (From France there comes
a power

25

30

Into this scattered 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:) [what hath been seen,
Either in snuffs and packings of the dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them hath borne
Against the old kind king, or something deeper,
Whereof perchance these are but furnishings.]
(I am a gentleman of blood and breeding,
And from some knowledge and assurance offer
This office to you.)

35

40

45

GENTLEMAN

I will talk further with you.

KENT

No, do not.

For confirmation that I am much more
Than my outwall, open this purse and take
What it contains.

50

「Kent hands him a purse and a ring.」

If you shall see Cordelia

(As fear not but you shall), show her this ring,
And she will tell you who that fellow is

58. **to effect:** i.e., in their significance

59-61. **in . . . this:** i.e., **in which** effort, you seek him **that way** while I go **this way**

3.2 Lear rages against the elements while the Fool begs him to return to his daughters for shelter; when Kent finds them, he leads them toward a hovel.

1. **crack your cheeks:** On maps and illustrations of the time, the winds are pictured as puffing out their cheeks as they blow. (See picture, page 128.)

2. **cataracts and hurricanoes:** waterspouts, tornadoes occurring over water

4. **cocks:** i.e., weathercocks, weathervanes (on the top of **steeple**s)

5. **thought-executing:** acting as quickly as thought; or, destroying thought; **fires:** i.e., lightning

6. **Vaunt-couriers:** forerunners; **thunderbolts:** See note to 2.1.55.

10. **Crack . . . molds:** destroy the **molds** in which nature fashions life; **germens:** seeds; **spill:** destroy

12. **court holy water:** flattering speeches

18. **tax:** accuse

That yet you do not know. Fie on this storm!
I will go seek the King.

55

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.

60

They exit [↑]*separately.* [↑]

Scene 2

Storm still. Enter Lear and Fool.

LEAR

Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, (drowned) the
cocks.

You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head. And thou, all-shaking
thunder,

5

Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world.
Crack nature's molds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man.

10

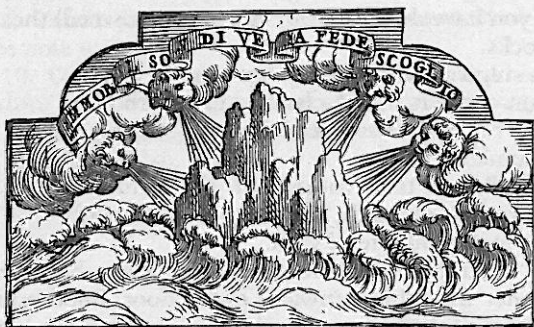
FOOL O nuncle, court holy water in a dry house is
better than this rainwater out o' door. Good nun-
cle, in. Ask thy daughters' blessing. Here's a night
pities neither wise men nor fools.

15

LEAR

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness.

20. **subscription:** submission, allegiance
 23. **ministers:** underlings, agents
 25. **high-engendered battles:** heavenly battalions
 28. **headpiece:** helmet; brain
 29. **codpiece:** a showy appendage to the front of a man's breeches; here meaning the genitals themselves; **house:** lodge, take shelter (in sexual activity)
 30. **any:** i.e., a house in which to live
 31. **louse:** become infested with lice
 37-38. **made mouths . . . glass:** i.e., **made** faces in a mirror
 42. **Marry:** a mild oath (originally on the name of the Virgin Mary)
 46. **Gallow:** frighten, terrify
 47. **keep:** stay within
 50. **carry:** endure



Wind swelling "the curlèd waters." (3.1.6; 3.2.1)
 From Lodovico Dolce, *Imprese nobili* . . . (1583).

I never gave you kingdom, called you children;
You owe me no subscription. Then let fall 20
Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head 25
So old and white as this. O, ho, 'tis foul!

FOOL He that has a house to put 's head in has a good
headpiece.

The codpiece that will house
Before the head has any, 30
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, 35
And turn his sleep to wake.

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

LEAR

No, I will be the pattern of all patience.
I will say nothing. 40

Enter Kent 'in disguise.'

KENT Who's there?

FOOL Marry, here's grace and a codpiece; 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 45
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 50
Th' affliction nor the fear.

53. **pudder**: pother, confusion
 54. **Find out**: discover, expose
 56. **of**: i.e., by
 57. **perjured**: i.e., perjurer; **simular**: simulator, imitator
 58. **Caitiff**: wretch, villain
 59. **seeming**: deception
 60. **practiced on**: plotted against; **Close pent-up**: hidden, confined
 61. **Rive your concealing continents**: tear open that which contains and conceals you
 61-62. **cry . . . grace**: i.e., **cry** for mercy from the elements—i.e., **these dreadful summoners** (**Summoners** were officers of church courts.)
 66. **hard**: near
 70-71. **Which . . . come in**: i.e., the residents of which forbade my entrance **demanding**: i.e., I asking
 72. **scanted**: withheld; deficient
 81-84. **He that . . . every day**: This song echoes the song that concludes Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (5.1.412-31).

LEAR

Let the great gods

That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads
 Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
 That hast within thee undivulged crimes 55
 Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
 Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue
 That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
 That under covert and convenient seeming
 Has practiced on man's life. Close pent-up guilts, 60
 Rive your concealing continents and cry
 These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
 More sinned against than sinning.

KENT

Alack,

bareheaded? 65

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, 70
 Denied me to come in—return and force
 Their scantied courtesy.

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? 75
 The art of our necessities is strange
 And 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. 80

FOOL *['sings']*

*He that has and a little tiny wit,
 With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
 Must make content with his fortunes fit,
 Though the rain it raineth every day.*

LEAR

True, (my good) boy.—Come, bring us to this hovel. 85

['Lear and Kent'] exit.

86. **brave:** fine

88-101. **When . . . used with feet:** This speech is a parody of a well-known prophecy known as "Merlin's Prophecy." The first few lines seem to present, as a vision of the future, the actual state of affairs in an imperfect world.

88. **more . . . matter:** i.e., preach virtue better than they practice it

89. **mar:** i.e., dilute

90. **nobles . . . tutors:** i.e., noblemen teach their tailors (perhaps, about what is fashionable)

91. **heretics burned:** The traditional punishment for religious **heretics** was being **burned** at the stake.

92-97. **When . . . build:** These lines represent a utopia or perfect world. **right:** just **cutpurses . . . throngs:** purse-stealers do not haunt crowds **usurers . . . field:** moneylenders count their money in public **bawds:** procurers of women as prostitutes

98. **Albion:** England

99. **confusion:** ruin

101. **going . . . feet:** i.e., walking will be done on foot

3.3 Gloucester tells Edmund that he has decided to go to Lear's aid; he also tells him about an incriminating letter he has received about the French invasion. After Gloucester leaves to find Lear, Edmund announces his plan to betray his father to Cornwall.

2. **leave:** permission

3. **pity:** have pity on

(continued)

[FOOL This is a brave night to cool a courtesan. I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:

When priests are more in word than matter,
When brewers mar their malt with water, 90
When nobles are their tailors' tutors,

No heretics burned 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, 95
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs,

When usurers tell their gold i' th' 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, 100
That going shall be used with feet.

This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before
his time.

He exits.]

Scene 3

Enter Gloucester and Edmund.

GLOUCESTER Alack, alack, Edmund, I like not this
unnatural dealing. When I desired their leave that I
might pity him, they took from me the use of mine
own house, charged me on pain of perpetual
displeasure neither to speak of him, entreat for 5
him, or any way sustain him.

EDMUND Most savage and unnatural.

GLOUCESTER Go to; say you nothing. There is division
between the dukes, and a worse matter than that. I
have received a letter this night; 'tis dangerous to 10
be spoken; I have locked the letter in my closet.
These injuries the King now bears will be revenged

- 8. **Go to:** an expression of impatience
- 11. **closet:** private chamber
- 13. **home:** i.e., completely; **power:** armed force; **footed:** i.e., landed
- 14. **incline to:** i.e., take the side of; **look:** i.e., look for; **privily:** secretly
- 16. **of:** i.e., by
- 19. **toward:** about to happen
- 21. **This . . . thee:** i.e., the forbidden kindness to the king that you are about to show
- 23. **This . . . deserving:** i.e., this (treachery to my father) will seem (to Cornwall) to deserve a reward

3.4 Lear, Kent, and the Fool reach the hovel, where they find Edgar disguised as Poor Tom, a madman-beggar. When Gloucester finds them, he leads them to the shelter of a house.

-
- 2. **open night:** i.e., **night** in the **open** air
 - 3. **nature:** i.e., human **nature**
 - 10. **fixed:** lodged, rooted

home; there is part of a power already footed. We must incline to the King. I will look 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. If I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the King my old master must be relieved. There is strange things toward, Edmund. Pray you, be careful. *He exits.* 15 20

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. *He exits.* 25

Scene 4

Enter Lear, Kent 'in disguise,' 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.*

LEAR

Let me alone.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here. 5

LEAR

Wilt break my heart?

KENT

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

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 fixed, The lesser is scarce felt. Thou 'dst shun a bear, But if <thy> flight lay toward the roaring sea, 10

- 13. **i' th' mouth:** i.e., head-on
- 14. **free:** i.e., at peace
- 18. **as:** i.e., as if
- 19. **home:** thoroughly
- 23. **frank:** generous
- 29. **would:** i.e., that **would**
- 33. **bide:** suffer, endure
- 35. **looped and windowed:** i.e., holey (as if filled with loopholes and windows)
- 38. **Take physic:** i.e., cure yourself; **pomp:** i.e., you who are powerful
- 40. **superflux:** excess, surplus (that you have)
- 42. **Fathom and half:** cry of a sailor taking soundings

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

The body's delicate. <This> 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.

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

[Fool exits.]

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed 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 may'st shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.

[EDGAR *within* Fathom and half, fathom and half!
Poor Tom!

Enter Fool.]

FOOL Come not in here, nuncle; here's a spirit. Help
me, help me!

48. **grumble:** i.e., mumble, mutter

50. **Away:** go away; **foul fiend:** devil (Edgar, in disguise as Poor Tom, pretends to be possessed.)

50-51. **Through . . . wind:** a line from a ballad

58. **that:** who (i.e., **the fiend** [line 56]); **his:** i.e., Poor Tom's

59. **halters:** hangman's ropes (Like **knives** and **ratsbane**, the ropes were temptations to suicide.)

porridge: thick soup

61. **four-inched bridges:** i.e., very narrow bridges; **course:** hunt

62. **for:** as; **five wits:** five senses (According to Stephen Hawes in *The Pastime of Pleasure* [1509], the **five wits** are common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory.)

64. **star-blasting:** i.e., the evil influence of stars; **taking:** being put under a magic spell; being attacked by disease

68. **pass:** predicament

71. **reserved:** kept, retained; **else:** otherwise

73. **pendulous:** pendent, overhanging

74. **fated:** fatefully, ominously

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' th' straw? Come forth.

Enter Edgar ¹*in disguise.*

EDGAR Away. The foul fiend follows me. Through the sharp hawthorn (blows the cold wind.) Hum! Go to thy (cold) bed and warm thee. 50

LEAR Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?

EDGAR Who gives anything to Poor Tom, whom the foul fiend hath led (through) fire and through flame, 55
through (ford) and whirlpool, o'er bog and quag-
mire; 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 60
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 65
could I have him now, and there—and there again
—and there. *Storm still.*

LEAR
Has his daughters brought him to this pass?—
Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em
all? 70

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

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. 75

LEAR
Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.

79. **flesh:** i.e., bodies (See Edgar's description at 2.3.6-12 of how he will turn his body into a "horrible object.")

81. **pelican:** Young pelicans were thought to feed on their parents' blood. (See picture, page 144.)

82. **Pillicock:** a term of endearment and a name for the phallus

87. **keep . . . justice:** i.e., keep your word

87-88. **commit . . . spouse:** i.e., do not commit adultery

89. **array:** dress, clothing

91. **servingman:** literally, servant; figuratively, a lover (in service to his beloved)

92. **gloves:** A lover honored his mistress by wearing her glove in his hat.

98. **out-paramoured the Turk:** i.e., had sex with more women than the Turkish sultan with his harem

99. **light of ear:** i.e., ready to listen to malicious talk

101. **prey:** i.e., preying

103. **plackets:** openings in petticoats or in skirts

104. **lenders':** moneylenders'

106. **Dolphin . . . sessa:** perhaps a fragment of a song

108. **answer:** stand up to

111. **worm:** i.e., silkworm

112. **cat:** civet cat, from whose secretions perfume is made (See picture, page 160.) **on 's:** i.e., of us

113. **sophisticated:** not pure or genuine

113-14. **unaccommodated:** unfurnished (with items taken from other animals)

Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'Twas this flesh begot 80
Those pelican daughters.

EDGAR Pillicock sat on Pillicock Hill. Alow, alow, loo,
loo.

FOOL This cold night will turn us all to fools and
madmen. 85

EDGAR Take heed o' th' foul fiend. Obey thy parents,
keep thy word's justice, swear not, commit not with
man's sworn spouse, set not thy sweet heart on
proud array. Tom's a-cold.

LEAR What hast thou been? 90

EDGAR A servingman, 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; 95
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 100
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; 105
says suum, mun, nonny. Dolphin my boy, boy, sessa!
Let him trot by. *Storm still.*

LEAR Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with
thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.—Is
man no more than this? Consider him well.—Thou 110
ow'st 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; unac-
commodated man is no more but such a poor, bare,

115. **lendings**: i.e., clothes
117. **naughty**: wicked
118. **wild**: uncultivated
120. **on 's**: i.e., of his
122. **Flibbertigibbet**: a name for the devil in Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), a pamphlet Shakespeare draws on throughout for his depiction of Edgar as Poor Tom
123. **curfew**: i.e., 9 p.m., when the curfew bell was rung; **first cock**: first cock-crow of the day (i.e., dawn) See *Hamlet* 1.1.162-70.
124. **web . . . pin**: cataract of the eye; **squints**: i.e., makes squint
125. **white**: ripening
127. **Swithold**: Saint Withold, who appears in this charm against the devil in the role of an exorcist; **footed**: crossed on foot; **'old**: wold, open country
128. **nightmare**: incubus; **ninefold**: nine offspring
130. **plight**: i.e., pledge (to do no more harm)
131. **aroint**: begone, get away
137. **water**: i.e., **water newt**
139. **sallets**: tasty things
140. **ditch-dog**: dead dog thrown in a ditch; **green mantle**: scum
- 141-42. **tithing to tithing**: i.e., place to place (Beggars were ordered whipped from one place to the next until they returned to their own district.) **tithing**: originally the name of a community of ten families
143. **three suits**: See note to 2.2.15.
146. **deer**: animals

forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! 115
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. 120

Enter Gloucester, with a torch.

Look, here comes a walking fire.

EDGAR This is the foul (fiend) Flibbertigibbet. He be-
gins at curfew and walks (till the) first cock. He
gives the web and the pin, squints the eye, and
makes the harelip, mildews the white wheat, and 125
hurts the poor creature of earth.

Swithold footed thrice the 'old,

He met the nightmare and her ninefold,

Bid her alight,

And her troth plight, 130

And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee.

KENT How fares your Grace?

LEAR What's he?

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

GLOUCESTER What are you there? Your names? 135

EDGAR 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 sallots, swallows the old
rat and the ditch-dog, drinks the green mantle of 140
the standing pool; who is whipped from tithing to
tithing, and stocked, punished, and imprisoned;
who hath (had) three suits to his back, six shirts to
his body,

Horse to ride, and weapon to wear; 145

But mice and rats and such small deer

Have been Tom's food for seven long year.

148. **my follower:** i.e., the fiend that attends me
 148, 151, 152. **Smulkin, Modo, Mahu:** names of devils in Harsnett's *Declaration*
 153. **flesh and blood:** i.e., children
 154. **what gets it:** i.e., parents **gets:** i.e., begets
 156-57. **suffer / T' obey:** i.e., tolerate obeying
 165. **Theban:** citizen of Thebes, capital of ancient Boeotia in Greece
 166. **your study:** the specialty that you study
 167. **prevent:** forestall
 169. **Importune:** implore, beg (accent on second syllable)



A pelican and its young. (3.4.81)
 From Conrad Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum* . . . (1557).

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

GLOUCESTER, *['to Lear']*

What, hath your Grace no better company? 150

EDGAR The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman. Modo he's called, and Mahu.

GLOUCESTER, *['to Lear']*

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

EDGAR Poor Tom's a-cold. 155

GLOUCESTER, *['to Lear']*

Go in with me. My duty cannot suffer
T' 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 160
And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher.
['To Edgar.'] What is the cause of thunder?

KENT

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

LEAR

I'll talk a word with this same learnèd Theban.— 165
What is your study?

EDGAR How to prevent the fiend and to kill vermin.

LEAR Let me ask you one word in private.

['They talk aside.']

KENT, *['to Gloucester']*

Importune him once more to go, my lord.
His wits begin t' unsettle. 170

GLOUCESTER Canst thou blame him?

Storm still.

His daughters seek his death. Ah, that good Kent!
He said it would be thus, poor banished man.
Thou sayest the King grows mad; I'll tell thee,
friend,

177. **outlawed from my blood:** i.e., (1) disinherited; (2) condemned as an outlaw

182. **cry you mercy:** i.e., excuse me

189. **keep still:** i.e., continue to stay

190. **soothe:** indulge

191. **Take . . . on:** i.e., bring him along

193. **Athenian:** i.e., philosopher

195-97. **Child . . . man:** Edgar gives to the hero of Charlemagne legends, Rowland or Roland (whose title **Child** shows that he was a candidate for knighthood), the words of the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk." **word:** motto **still:** always

3.5 Edmund tells Cornwall about Gloucester's decision to help Lear and about the incriminating letter from France; in return, Cornwall makes Edmund earl of Gloucester.

3. **censured:** judged; **that:** i.e., because; **nature:** i.e., natural affection for my father

4. **something fears:** somewhat frightens

I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
 Now outlawed from my blood. He sought my life
 But lately, very late. I loved him, friend,
 No father his son dearer. True to tell thee,
 The grief hath crazed my wits. What a night's this! 180
 —I do beseech your Grace—

LEAR O, cry you mercy, sir.

「To Edgar.」 Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER, 「to Edgar」

In fellow, there, into th' hovel. Keep thee warm. 185

LEAR Come, let's in all.

KENT This way, my lord.

LEAR, 「indicating Edgar」 With him.

I will keep still with my philosopher.

KENT, 「to Gloucester」

Good my lord, soothe him. Let him take the fellow. 190

GLOUCESTER, 「to Kent」 Take him you on.

KENT, 「to Edgar」

Sirrah, come on: go along with us.

LEAR Come, good Athenian.

GLOUCESTER No words, no words. Hush.

EDGAR

Child Rowland to the dark tower came. 195

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

I smell the blood of a British man."

They exit.

Scene 5

Enter Cornwall, and Edmund 「with a paper.」

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.

7. **his**: i.e., Gloucester's

8. **provoking merit**: perhaps, Edgar's virtue incited or provoked; or, perhaps, Gloucester's deserving (of death) provoked

8-9. **reprovable ... himself**: blameworthy evil in Gloucester

12. **approves him**: i.e., proves him to be

12-13. **intelligent ... France**: one giving information that aids the king of France

20. **apprehension**: arrest

21. **comforting**: i.e., relieving the misery of

22. **his suspicion**: i.e., Cornwall's suspicion of Gloucester

24. **my blood**: i.e., attachment to my blood relations

3.6 Lear, in his madness, imagines that Goneril and Regan are on trial before a tribunal made up of Edgar, the Fool, Kent, and himself. Gloucester returns to announce that Lear's death is being plotted and to urge Kent to rush Lear to Cordelia at Dover.

2. **piece out**: i.e., increase

5. **impatience**: incapacity to endure more suffering

6. **Frateretto**: another devil found in Harsnett's *Declaration*; **Nero**: brutal and self-indulgent emperor of Rome in the first century C.E. (here doomed to fish in hell)

CORNWALL I now perceive it was not altogether your brother's evil disposition made him seek his death, but a provoking merit set awork by a reprovable 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. 10

CORNWALL Go with me to the Duchess. 15

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. 20

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 I will lay trust upon thee, and thou shalt find a *(dearer)* father in my love. 25

They exit.

Scene 6

Enter Kent in disguise, and Gloucester.

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! 5

Gloucester exits.

Enter Lear, Edgar in disguise, and Fool.

EDGAR Frateretto calls me and tells me Nero is an

10. **yeoman**: rank below **gentleman**

12-13. **to his son**: i.e., as a **son**

14. **before him**: i.e., **before** he has achieved the rank himself

20-59. **I will arraign . . . 'scape**: In this passage Lear stages an arraignment and trial of the absent Goneril and Regan.

20. **straight**: straightway, immediately

25. **he**: perhaps one of Poor Tom's fiends, or perhaps Lear

25-26. **Want'st . . . trial**: perhaps, "Do you lack onlookers **at your trial**?" or, perhaps, "Can't you see who is judging you?"

27. **Come . . . me**: the first line of a ballad first printed in 1558 (The Fool's continuation of it does not follow the original.) **burn**: stream, brook

32. **Hoppedance**: One of Harsnett's devils is called "Hobberdidance."

33. **white**: unsmoked; **Croak not**: Edgar may be alluding to the rumbling of an empty stomach.

35. **amazed**: confused (as if lost in a maze)

37. **their evidence**: the witnesses against them

angler in the lake of darkness. Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.

FOOL Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman. 10

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. 15

LEAR]

To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em! 15

(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.

LEAR

It shall be done. I will arraign them straight. 20

['To Edgar.] Come, sit thou here, most learned justice.

['To Fool.] Thou sapient sir, sit here. 'Now,' you she-foxes—

EDGAR Look where he stands and glares!—Want'st thou eyes at trial, madam? 25

['Sings.] Come o'er the burn, Bessy, to me—

FOOL ['sings']

Her boat hath a leak,

And she must not speak

Why she dares not come over to thee. 30

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

KENT, ['to Lear']

How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed. 35

Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?

LEAR

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

40. **yokefellow of equity**: fellow justice in a court of equity

41. **Bench**: i.e., sit on the bench

41-42. **o' th' commission**: authorized to be a judge

45-48. **Sleepest . . . harm**: These lines echo songs, ballads, and catches from the period, including the nursery song "Little Boy Blue."

46. **corn**: i.e., wheat

47. **minikin**: pretty, dainty

49. **Purr the cat**: **Purr** is a devil named by Harsnett, although here the word may refer instead to the sound made by the cat.

51. **kicked**: i.e., she **kicked**

55. **I . . . joint stool**: a stock joke meaning "I did not notice you" (Here the fresh point may be that, while Goneril is not onstage, a stool may be.) **joint stool**: a stool made of parts joined or fitted together

56. **warped**: (1) twisted, bent; (2) perverse

57. **store**: stock, material; **on**: i.e., of

58. **Corruption in the place**: i.e., even the law court is corrupt

60. **five wits**: See note to 3.4.62.

61. **patience**: self-control

64. **counterfeiting**: i.e., disguise

67. **Avaunt**: i.e., get away

69. **or . . . or**: i.e., either . . . or

「To *Edgar*.」 Thou robèd man of justice, take thy place,

「To *Fool*.」 And thou, his yokefellow of equity,
Bench by his side. 「To *Kent*.」 You are o' th'
commission; 40

Sit you, too.

EDGAR Let us deal justly.

「Sings.」 Sleepest or wakest, thou jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn. 45
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Purr the cat is gray.

LEAR Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril. I here take my oath 50
before this honorable assembly, kicked the poor
king her father.

FOOL Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR She cannot deny it.

FOOL Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint stool. 55

LEAR

And here's another whose warped 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! 60

KENT, 「to *Lear*」

O pity! Sir, where is the patience now
That you so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR, 「aside」

My tears begin to take his part so much
They mar my counterfeiting.

LEAR The little dogs and all, 65

Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, 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, 70

72. **brach:** bitch-hound; **lym:** bloodhound
 73. **Bobtail tike:** dog with its tail cut short; **trundle-tail:** long-tailed dog
 76. **hatch:** bottom half of a divided door
 77. **wakes:** festivals
 78. **horn:** large ox horns worn by beggars from which to drink (The phrase "my horn is dry" was a plea for more drink.) See picture, page 166.
 80. **anatomize:** dissect
 82. **make:** i.e., makes
 83. **entertain for:** take into service as
 85. **Persian:** i.e., gorgeous and exotic
 88. **curtains:** i.e., imaginary bed **curtains**
 90. **I'll go . . . noon:** possibly an allusion to the plant called "**go to bed at noon**," which closes itself **at noon** and remains closed until the next morning (See picture, below.)
 94. **upon:** i.e., against
 101. **Stand in . . . loss:** i.e., will certainly be lost



Goat's beard, or "go to bed at noon." (3.6.90)
 From John Gerard, *The Herball* . . . (1597).

Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,

Hound or spaniel, brach, or 'lym,¹

Bobtail (tike,) or (trundle-tail,)

Tom will make him weep and wail;

For, with throwing thus my head,

Dogs leapt the hatch, and all are fled.

75

Do de, de, de. Sessa! Come, march to wakes
and fairs and market towns. Poor Tom, thy horn
is dry.

LEAR Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds
about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that
make these hard hearts? 'To Edgar.¹ 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, but let them be changed.

80

85

KENT

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

LEAR, 'lying down¹ Make no noise, make no noise.
Draw the curtains. So, so, we'll go to supper i' th'
morning.

[FOOL And I'll go to bed at noon.]

90

Enter Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER, 'to Kent¹

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,

95

And drive toward 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,

100

Stand in assurèd loss. Take up, take up,

102-3. **to some . . . conduct:** i.e., quickly take you to where you can find supplies

105. **balmed:** soothed; **sinews:** nerves

107. **Stand . . . cure:** i.e., are not likely to be cured

111. **bearing . . . woes:** suffering **woes** like ours

112. **We . . . foes:** perhaps, we almost forget our own suffering

114. **free:** carefree; **shows:** scenes

115. **sufferance:** i.e., suffering

116. **bearing:** enduring; **fellowship:** company

117. **portable:** enduring

120. **He childed . . . fathered:** i.e., his children are like my father (in driving him away; or, in seeking his life)

121. **Mark . . . noises:** pay attention to news of those in high places, i.e., those in power; **bewray:** reveal

124. **In thy just proof:** upon your being proved right; **repeals:** recalls; **reconciles:** i.e., **reconciles** you with your accusers

125. **What . . . King:** i.e., whatever **more** happens **tonight**, may **the king** escape safely

3.7 Cornwall dispatches men to capture Gloucester, whom he calls a traitor. Sending Edmund and Goneril to tell Albany about the landing of the French army, Cornwall puts out Gloucester's eyes. Cornwall is himself seriously wounded by one of his own servants, who tries to stop the torture of Gloucester.

1. **Post speedily:** hasten

And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

(KENT) Oppressèd nature sleeps.
This rest might yet have balmed thy broken sinews, 105
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure. *['To the Fool.']* Come, help to
bear thy master.
Thou must not stay behind.

GLOUCESTER) Come, come away. 110
['All but Edgar' exit, 'carrying Lear.']

(EDGAR)
When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers suffers most i' th' mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind.
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip 115
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 fathered. Tom, away. 120
Mark the high noises, and thyself bewray
When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile
thee,
In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.
What will hap more tonight, safe 'scape the King! 125
Lurk, lurk.)

['He exits.']

Scene 7

*Enter Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, 'Edmund, the' Bastard,
and Servants.*

CORNWALL, *['to Goneril']* Post speedily to my lord your
husband. Show him this letter. *['He gives her a
paper.']* The army of France is landed.—Seek out
the traitor Gloucester. *['Some Servants exit.']*

8. **our sister:** i.e., Goneril

8-9. **are bound:** (1) are obligated; (2) cannot fail

10-11. **Advise . . . preparation:** i.e., **advise** Albany, to whom **you are going**, to make speedy preparation (for war) **festinate:** speedy, hasty

12. **to the like:** i.e., to do the same thing; **posts:** messengers

12-13. **shall be . . . intelligent:** i.e., will carry intelligence (information)

14. **lord of Gloucester:** i.e., Edmund (Oswald will immediately use the same title to refer to Edmund's father.)

18. **Hot questrists:** keen seekers

19. **the lord's:** i.e., Gloucester's

26. **Pinion:** bind

27. **pass. . . life:** i.e., condemn him to death

29. **do a court'sy:** i.e., yield, bow down, defer

REGAN Hang him instantly.

5

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 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.

10

Enter Oswald, the Steward.

How now? Where's the King?

15

OSWALD

My lord of Gloucester hath conveyed 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 lord's dependents, Are gone with him toward Dover, where they boast To have well-armed friends.

20

CORNWALL Get horses for your mistress.

Oswald exits.

GONERIL Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL

Edmund, farewell. *Goneril and Edmund exit.*

Go seek the traitor Gloucester.

25

Pinion him like a thief; bring him before us.

Some Servants exit.

Though well we may not pass upon his life Without the form of justice, yet our power Shall do a court'sy to our wrath, which men May blame but not control.

30

Enter Gloucester and Servants.

Who's there? The

traitor?

34. **corky:** dry and withered
40. **none:** i.e., not a traitor
46. **Naughty:** wicked
48. **quicken:** come to life
49. **my . . . favors:** perhaps, the features (face) of your host; or, perhaps, **my hospitable** kindnesses to you
50. **ruffle:** bully, treat roughly
51. **late:** recently
52. **simple-answered:** i.e., direct in answering
54. **footed:** landed
57. **guessingly set down:** i.e., written without certainty; containing only speculations



A civet cat. (3.4.112)
From Edward Topsell, *The historie of foure-footed
beastes* . . . (1607).

REGAN Ingrateful fox! 'Tis he.

CORNWALL Bind fast his corky arms.

GLOUCESTER

What means your Graces? Good my friends,
consider 35

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

CORNWALL

Bind him, I say.

REGAN Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none. 40

CORNWALL

To this chair bind him. *['Servants bind Gloucester.]*

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? 45

GLOUCESTER

Naughty lady,

These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin

Will quicken and accuse thee. I am your host;

With robber's hands my hospitable favors

You should not ruffle thus. What will you do? 50

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

Be simple-answered, for we know the truth.

CORNWALL

And what confederacy have you with the traitors

Late footed in the kingdom?

REGAN

To whose hands 55

You have sent the lunatic king. Speak.

GLOUCESTER

I have a letter guessingly set down

64. **Wherefore:** why

67. **I . . . course:** i.e., **I am** like a bear in a bear-baiting, **tied to a stake**, facing the attack of the dogs, i.e., the **course** (See picture, below.)

71. **anointed:** i.e., with holy oil at his coronation

73-74. **buoyed up . . . fires:** i.e., risen up and extinguished the stars **stellèd fires:** (1) starry fires; (2) fixed stars

75. **holp:** helped

77-78. **turn the key:** i.e., let them in

79. **All . . . subscribe:** Perhaps: **All** cruel creatures, except for you, give in to feelings of compassion. **subscribe:** submit, yield

80. **wingèd vengeance:** probably, divine **vengeance**

83. **will think:** i.e., hopes, expects



A bear "tied to th' stake." (3.7.67)
From [William Lily,] *Antibossicon* (1521).

Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,
And not from one opposed.

CORNWALL Cunning.

60

REGAN And false.

CORNWALL Where hast thou sent the King?

GLOUCESTER To Dover.

REGAN

Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at
peril—

65

CORNWALL

Wherefore to Dover? Let him answer that.

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN Wherefore to Dover?

GLOUCESTER

Because I would not see thy cruel nails

Pluck out his poor old eyes, nor thy fierce sister

70

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.

The sea, with such a storm as his bare head

In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up

And quenched the stelled fires;

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

75

If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time,

Thou shouldst have said "Good porter, turn the
key."

All cruels else subscribe. But I shall see

The wingèd vengeance overtake such children.

80

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!

*As Servants hold the chair, Cornwall forces out
one of Gloucester's eyes.*

O cruel! O you gods!

85

88. **Hold your hand:** stop, refrain
95. **I'd ... quarrel:** i.e., I'd defy you openly in this cause; **What ... mean?:** an expression of astonishment and disbelief
96. **villain:** servant
97. **chance of anger:** i.e., risks of an angry fight
100. **mischief:** harm, injury
105. **sparks of nature:** i.e., natural feelings (as a son)
106. **quit:** requite, avenge
107. **Out:** i.e., out upon you (an interjection expressing abhorrence)
109. **overture:** revelation, disclosure

REGAN

One side will mock another. Th' other too.

CORNWALL

If you see vengeance—

[FIRST] SERVANT

Hold your hand,

my lord.

I have served you ever since I was a child,

90

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?

95

CORNWALL My villain?

⟨Draw and fight.⟩

[FIRST] SERVANT

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

REGAN, *to an Attendant*

Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus?

*⟨She takes a sword and runs
at him behind;⟩ kills him.*

[FIRST] SERVANT

O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left

To see some mischief on him. O!

⟨He dies.⟩ 100

CORNWALL

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

⟨Forcing out Gloucester's other eye.⟩

Where is thy luster now?

GLOUCESTER

All dark and comfortless! Where's my son

Edmund?—

Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature

105

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.

110

111. **abused:** wronged
 112. **prosper him:** cause him to flourish
 115. **How look you:** i.e., how are you
 117. **this slave:** i.e., the dead servant
 123. **old:** usual, customary
 125. **Bedlam:** i.e., Bedlam beggar, Tom o' Bedlam
 126. **would:** wishes to go
 126-27. **His . . . anything:** i.e., as a madman-vagabond, he can do **anything** (Anyone else would be punished for helping Gloucester.) **roguish:** like a vagabond
 128. **flax and whites of eggs:** prescribed (in the Renaissance) for wounded eyes



A Bedlam beggar. (1.2.143; 2.3.20; 3.4.43;
 3.6.31, 78-79; 3.7.125; 4.1.29, 65, 90)
 From *Bagford Ballads*, printed in 1878.

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.

Some Servants exit with Gloucester.

How is 't, my lord? How look you? 115

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.

Cornwall and Regan exit.

[SECOND] SERVANT

I'll never care what wickedness I do 120
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.

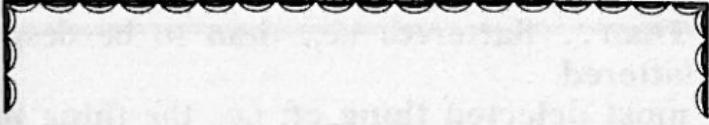
[SECOND] SERVANT

Let's follow the old earl and get the Bedlam 125
To lead him where he would. His roguish madness
Allows itself to anything.

[THIRD] SERVANT

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

They exit.)



The Tragedy of
KING LEAR

ACT 4



4.1 Edgar, still in disguise as Poor Tom, meets the blinded Gloucester and agrees to lead him to Dover.

1. **Yet . . . contemned:** i.e., it is **better to be** a beggar and openly despised

2. **Than . . . flattered:** i.e., **than** to be despised but **flattered**

3. **most dejected thing of:** i.e., the **thing most** cast down by (Edgar, in these lines, alludes to one's place on Fortune's wheel. When one is at the bottom of the wheel—as he thinks he is—the next turn of the wheel must bring one upward "**to laughter**" [line 6]. See pictures, pages 172 and 252.)

4. **still:** always; **esperance:** hope

6. **The . . . laughter:** i.e., any change from the worst is necessarily for the better

9. **Owes nothing to:** i.e., and therefore has **nothing to** fear from

10. **poorly led:** i.e., led by a poor peasant

11–12. **But . . . age:** i.e., **Life** yields to old **age** and death only because the **world**, with its strange twists and turns, **makes us hate** it.

16. **Thy comforts:** i.e., the relief that you can offer

ACT 4

Scene 1

Enter Edgar [in disguise.]

EDGAR

Yet better thus, and known to be contemned,
Than still contemned and flattered. 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; 5
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 and an old man.

My father, poorly led? World, world, O world, 10
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life 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, begone. 15
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

OLD MAN

You cannot see your way.

19. **want:** need
21. **Our . . . us:** i.e., our resources (while in prosperity) make us careless; **mere defects:** utter deficiencies
22. **commodities:** advantages
23. **abusèd:** deceived
35. **He . . . reason:** i.e., he is not completely mad
41. **wanton:** undisciplined
42. **sport:** amusement, fun
44. **trade:** i.e., occupation; **play . . . sorrow:** i.e., play the role of a **fool** to my grieving father
45. **Ang'ring:** irritating, vexing



Fortune's wheel. (2.2.188-89; 4.1.2-6; 5.3.209)
 From [John Lydgate], *The hystorye sege and dystruccyon
 of Troye* (1513).

GLOUCESTER

I have no way and therefore want no eyes.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen 20
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abusèd father's wrath,
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again. 25

OLD MAN How now? Who's there?

EDGAR, *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 30
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. 35
I' th' 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. 40

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods;
They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR, *aside* How should this be?

Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Ang'ring itself and others.—Bless thee, master. 45

GLOUCESTER

Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN Ay, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

(Then, prithee,) get thee away. If for my sake

49. **o'ertake us:** i.e., catch up to us; **twain:** two
50. **ancient:** long-established
52. **Which:** i.e., whom
54. **time's plague:** i.e., a sign of the sickness of our time
56. **Above the rest:** i.e., above all
57. **'parel:** apparel, clothes
58. **Come . . . will:** whatever the consequences on 't: of it
60. **daub it further:** i.e., act my part of Poor Tom anymore **daub:** literally, cover over with mortar
- 68-70. **Obidicut, Hobbididance, Mahu, Modo, Flibbertigibbet:** all names for devils based on Harsnett's *Declaration*
70. **mopping and mowing:** grimacing and making faces; **since:** i.e., since then
75. **humbled . . . strokes:** i.e., reduced to a humble acceptance of all miseries
77. **superfluous . . . man:** he who has more than he needs and who feeds his desires
78. **slaves your ordinance:** enslaves (to his own interest) the divine decree (to share)

Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain
I' th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love, 50
And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Which I'll entreat to lead me.

OLD MAN Alack, sir, he is mad.

GLOUCESTER

'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind.
Do as I bid thee, or rather do thy pleasure. 55
Above the rest, begone.

OLD MAN

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

GLOUCESTER Sirrah, naked fellow—

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold. *Aside.* I cannot daub it further. 60

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, horseway and footpath.

Poor Tom hath been (scared) out of his good wits. 65
Bless thee, good man's son, from the foul fiend.
(Five fiends have been in Poor Tom at once: of lust,
as Obidicut; Hobbididance, prince of dumbness;
Mahu, of stealing; Modo, of murder; 'Flibbertigib-
bet,' of 'mopping' and 'mowing,' who since pos- 70
sesses chambermaids and waiting women. So, bless
thee, master.)

GLOUCESTER, *giving him money*

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens'
plagues

Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched 75
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 does not feel, feel your power quickly.

83. **bending:** overhanging

84. **fearfully:** frighteningly; **in ... deep:** i.e., into the waters of the English Channel, **confined** in the Straits of Dover between England's cliffs and France's shore

87. **rich:** i.e., valuable; **about me:** i.e., that I have with me

4.2 Goneril and Edmund arrive at Albany and Goneril's castle. After Goneril has sent Edmund back to Cornwall, Albany enters and fiercely rebukes Goneril for her treatment of Lear. A messenger reports Gloucester's blinding and the death of the duke of Cornwall.

2. **Not met:** i.e., did not meet

10. **sot:** dolt, fool

12. **pleasant:** pleasing

13. **What like:** i.e., **what** he should **like**

So distribution should undo excess 80
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 confinèd deep.
Bring me but to the very brim of it, 85
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. 90

They exit.

Scene 2

Enter Goneril and 'Edmund, the' Bastard.

GONERIL

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

⟨Enter 'Oswald, the' Steward.⟩

Now, where's your master?

OSWALD

Madam, within, but never man so changed.
I told him of the army that was landed; 5
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 informed him, then he called me "sot" 10
And told me I had turned 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.

15. **cowish:** cowardly
16. **undertake:** commit himself to an enterprise;
feel wrongs: i.e., acknowledge offenses
17. **tie . . . answer:** i.e., would require him to retaliate; **wishes . . . way:** hopes expressed during our journey
18. **prove effects:** i.e., be fulfilled; **brother:** i.e., brother-in-law, Cornwall
19. **musters:** gathering of soldiers; **powers:** troops
20. **change names:** i.e., exchange roles with Albany; **distaff:** spinning staff (See picture, page 184.)
22. **like:** i.e., likely
29. **Conceive:** i.e., understand (my unspoken meaning)
35. **My fool:** i.e., my husband, who is a **fool**; **usurps:** possesses forcibly and without right
37. **worth the whistle:** Proverbial: "It is a poor dog that is not **worth the whistling.**"
40. **fear your disposition:** am fearful about your nature
41. **contemns:** despises
42. **Cannot . . . itself:** cannot be securely contained within **itself**; or, can have no reliable boundaries
- 43-44. **herself will sliver . . . sap:** i.e., tear herself away (from Lear) as if she were a branch tearing itself away from the tree that sustains it (See picture, page 192.)
45. **deadly use:** i.e., destruction (of herself and others)
46. **text:** i.e., theme of your sermon

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 names at home and give the distaff
 Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
 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. 25
['She gives him a favor.']
 Decline your head. *['She kisses him.']* 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. *He exits.* 30

GONERIL

My most dear

Gloucester!

[O, the difference of man and man!]

To thee a woman's services are due;

My fool usurps my body. 35

OSWALD Madam, here comes my lord. *(He exits.)**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. 40

That nature which contemns its origin

Cannot be bordered certain in itself.

She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap perforce must wither

And come to deadly use. 45

GONERIL No more. The text is foolish.

51. **head-lugged:** tugged by the head (hence, bad-tempered)

53. **barbarous, degenerate:** i.e., barbarously, degenerately

54. **maddèd:** driven mad

55. **brother:** i.e., brother-in-law; **suffer:** allow

62. **Milk-livered:** i.e., white-livered, cowardly

63. **bear'st . . . blows:** i.e., when you are struck, you turn the other **cheek**

64-65. **discerning . . . suffering:** which can tell the difference between what must be resisted in the defense of your **honor** and what may be permitted (i.e., suffered)

66-67. **Fools . . . mischief:** i.e., only **fools** have **pity** on **villains** who are **punished** before **they** can do harm

69. **France:** i.e., the king of France; **noiseless:** quiet, peaceful

70. **helm:** helmet; **thy . . . threat:** i.e., begins to threaten your power

71. **moral:** i.e., moralizing

74-75. **Proper . . . woman:** i.e., the ugliness that is **proper** (appropriate) for the devil **shows** (appears) more horrible **in a woman**

76. **vain:** idle, useless

77. **changèd:** transformed; **self-covered thing:** i.e., your true nature as a fiend concealed by your womanly appearance; or, perhaps, your true nature as a woman now covered up by your fiendishness

78. **Bemonster . . . feature:** i.e., do not deform yourself into a monster **feature:** shape; **my fitness:** appropriate for me

79. **blood:** feelings

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.
Filths savor but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?
A father, and a gracious agèd man, 50
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would
lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you
madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it? 55
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame ^{these} vile offenses,
It will come:
Humanity must perforce prey on itself, 60
Like monsters of the deep.)

GONERIL

Milk-livered man,

That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honor from thy suffering; (that not know'st 65
Fools do those villains pity who are punished
Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy
drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless land,
With plumèd helm thy state begins ^{to threat}, 70
Whilst thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries
"Alack, why does he so?")

ALBANY

See thyself, devil!

Proper deformity (shows) not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman. 75

GONERIL

O vain fool!

(ALBANY

Thou changèd and self-covered thing, for shame
Bemonster not thy feature. Were 't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear 80

81. **Howe'er**: i.e., however much
82. **shield**: i.e., protect you (from violence at my hands)
83. **Marry**: i.e., indeed; **mew**: a sound of derision
86. **going to**: i.e., as Cornwall was **going to**
89. **he bred**: i.e., Cornwall raised; **thrilled with remorse**: pierced with compassion
90. **Opposed against**: i.e., stood in opposition to
- 90-91. **bending ... To**: i.e., turning **his sword** against
92. **amongst them**: i.e., in a melee; or, between them (Cornwall and Regan)
- 93-94. **But ... after**: i.e., **but not before** Cornwall suffered the wound that has since killed **him**
96. **justicers**: i.e., heavenly justices
- 96-97. **our ... vengeance**: i.e., can so quickly avenge the **crimes** committed in our world beneath the heavens
102. **One way ... well**: i.e., in **one way** I am glad to hear that Cornwall is dead
103. **But ... widow**: i.e., **but** Regan now **being a widow**
104. **all ... pluck**: i.e., pull down the dreams I have constructed
106. **tart**: sour

Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL Marry, your manhood, mew—>

Enter a Messenger.

(ALBANY What news?)

MESSENGER

O, my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead, 85
Slain by his servant, going to put out
The other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY Gloucester's eyes?

MESSENGER

A servant that he bred, thrilled with remorse,
Opposed against the act, bending his sword 90
To his great master, who, (thereat) enraged,
Flew on him and amongst them felled him dead,
But not without that harmful stroke which since
Hath plucked him after.

ALBANY This shows you are above, 95
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. 100

「Giving her a paper.」

'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 105
The news is not so tart.—I'll read, and answer.

«She exits.»

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

MESSENGER

Come with my lady hither.

110. **back:** i.e., going **back**

4.3 In the French camp Kent and a Gentleman discuss Cordelia's love of Lear, which has brought her back to Britain at the head of the French army; they say that Lear is in the town of Dover, and that, though he is sometimes sane, his shame at his earlier action makes him refuse to see Cordelia.

5. **imports:** i.e., would cause

8. **general:** i.e., as **general**

14. **trilled:** rolled

16. **passion, who:** i.e., emotion, which



Woman with a distaff. (4.2.20)
From Johann Engel, *Astrolabium* ... (1488).

ALBANY He is not here.

MESSENGER

No, my good lord. I met him back again. 110

ALBANY Knows he the wickedness?

MESSENGER

Ay, my good lord. 'Twas he informed against him
And quit the house on purpose, that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I live 115
To thank thee for the love thou show'd'st the King,
And to revenge thine eyes.—Come hither, friend.
Tell me what more thou know'st.

They exit.

「Scene 3」

「Enter Kent 「in disguise」 and a Gentleman.

KENT Why the King of France is so suddenly gone
back know you no 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 5
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 demon- 10
stration of grief?

GENTLEMAN

Ay, 「sir,」 she took them, read them in my
presence,

And now and then an ample tear trilled down
Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen 15
Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
Fought to be king o'er her.

KENT

O, then it moved her.

19. **Patience:** self-control
20. **Who . . . goodliest:** i.e., about which would make her appear most beautiful
22. **like:** i.e., **like** sunshine and rain; **a better way:** i.e., but more lovely
24. **which:** i.e., the tears
26. **rarity most beloved:** i.e., something precious and sought after
27. **If . . . it:** i.e., if sorrow could be so becoming to others
28. **Made . . . question?:** i.e., did she say anything?
34. **believed:** i.e., **believed** to exist
36. **clamor moistened:** i.e., **moistened** her outburst of grief with tears
39. **conditions:** mental dispositions
- 40-41. **Else . . . issues:** i.e., otherwise the same couple could not conceive **such different** offspring
self: same **make:** mate, partner **issues:** offspring
44. **King:** i.e., of France; **returned:** i.e., to France
47. **better tune:** i.e., less jangled, more rational, state

GENTLEMAN

Not to a rage. Patience and sorrow ¹strove¹
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen 20
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
Were like a better way. Those happy smilets
That played on her ripe lip ¹seemed¹ not to know
What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief, 25
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" 30
Pantingly forth, as if it pressed her heart;
Cried "Sisters, sisters, shame of ladies, sisters!
Kent, father, sisters! What, i' th' storm, i' th' night?
Let pity not be believed!" There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes, 35
And clamor moistened. 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 make could not beget 40
Such different issues. You spoke not with her
since?

GENTLEMAN No.

KENT

Was this before the King returned?

GENTLEMAN

No, since. 45

KENT

Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear's i' th' 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? 50

51. **sovereign:** overpowering; **elbows him:** i.e., jostles (his mind)

53. **from his benediction:** i.e., of his blessing

53-54. **turned . . . casualties:** i.e., sent **her** away to take her chances in a **foreign** land

59. **powers:** armed forces

60. **afoot:** i.e., on the march

62. **attend:** wait upon; **dear:** important

64. **aright:** i.e., as Kent

64-65. **grieve/Lending me:** i.e., regret having extended to me

4.4 In the French camp Cordelia orders out a search party for Lear.

0 SD. **Drum and Colors:** i.e., drummers and soldiers carrying banners

3-5. **fumiter, furrow-weeds, hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers, Darnel:** Most of these weeds and plants may be called **idle** (i.e., worthless), but some (e.g., **fumiter**) were used as medicines for diseases of the brain.

6. **our sustaining corn:** wheat, which gives us sustenance; **A century:** a troop of one hundred soldiers

9. **What . . . wisdom:** i.e., **what can** human knowledge do

KENT

A sovereign shame so elbows him—his own
unkindness,
That stripped her from his benediction, turned her
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters—these things sting 55
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN 'Tis so. They are afoot. 60

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 65
Along with me.

[*They* exit.]

Scene [4]

*Enter with Drum and Colors, Cordelia, (Doctor,)
Gentlemen, and Soldiers.*

CORDELIA

Alack, 'tis he! Why, he was met even now
As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud,
Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,
With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow 5
In our sustaining corn. A century send forth.
Search every acre in the high-grown field
And bring him to our eye.

[*Soldiers* exit.]

What can man's wisdom

10. **his bereavèd sense:** i.e., his mind, of which he is bereaved

11. **outward worth:** i.e., wealth

14-15. **That . . . operative:** i.e., there are many medicinal plants or herbs (**simples**) that will be effective (**operative**) in inducing sleep in him

18. **unpublished:** perhaps, hidden; or, unknown; **virtues:** healing powers

19. **Spring:** grow; **Be . . . remediate:** i.e., be aids and remedies

21. **rage:** madness

22. **wants the means:** i.e., lacks the resources

29. **importuned:** importuning, pleading

30. **blown:** puffed-up, swollen; **our arms incite:** i.e., lead us to make war

4.5 Regan questions Oswald about Goneril and Edmund, states her intention to marry Edmund, and asks Oswald to dissuade Goneril from pursuing Edmund.

1. **my brother's powers:** i.e., Albany's armies

In the restoring his bereavèd sense? 10
 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 15
 Will close the eye of anguish.

CORDELIA All blest secrets,
 All you unpublished virtues of the earth,
 Spring with my tears. Be aidant and remediate
 In the good man's (distress.) Seek, seek for him, 20
 Lest his ungoverned rage dissolve the life
 That wants the means to lead it.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER News, madam.
 The British powers are marching hitherward.

CORDELIA
 'Tis known before. Our preparation stands 25
 In expectation of them.—O dear father,
 It is thy business that I go about.
 Therefore great France
 My mourning and importuned tears hath pitied.
 No blown ambition doth our arms incite, 30
 But love, dear love, and our aged father's right.
 Soon may I hear and see him.

They exit.

Scene '5'

Enter Regan and 'Oswald, the' Steward.

REGAN

But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD

Ay, madam.

REGAN Himself in person there?

4. **ado:** fuss and trouble
8. **What . . . letter:** i.e., what could my sister's letter say?
10. **is posted hence:** has hurried away
15. **nighted:** i.e., made as dark as night; **descry:** discover by observation
21. **charged my duty:** i.e., exhorted me to be dutiful
23. **Belike:** probably; or, possibly
28. **at . . . here:** when she was **here** recently
29. **eliads:** oellades, loving glances
30. **of her bosom:** in her confidence
32. **Y' are:** i.e., you are



"She that herself will . . . disbranch. . . ." (4.2.43)
 From Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britannia* . . . (1612).

OSWALD Madam, with much ado.

Your sister is the better soldier.

5

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.

REGAN

Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.

10

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

15

The strength o' th' enemy.

OSWALD

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

REGAN

Our troops set forth tomorrow. Stay with us.

The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD

I may not, madam.

20

My lady charged my duty in this business.

REGAN

Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you

Transport her purposes by word? Belike,

Some things—I know not what. I'll love thee much—

Let me unseal the letter.

25

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 eliams and most speaking looks

To noble Edmund. I know you are of her bosom.

30

OSWALD I, madam?

REGAN

I speak in understanding. Y' are; I know 't.

33. **take this note:** i.e., **take** note of the following
35-36. **more . . . lady's:** i.e., it is **more** appropriate that **he** marry me **than** Goneril

36. **gather:** infer, guess

37. **this:** Editors and readers can only guess what Regan is sending to Edmund.

38. **thus much:** i.e., what I am telling you

39. **call . . . her:** i.e., **call** back **her** good sense

4.6 To cure Gloucester of despair, Edgar pretends to aid him in a suicide attempt, a fall from Dover Cliff to the beach far below. When Gloucester wakes from his faint, Edgar (now in the disguise of a peasant) tells him that the gods intervened to save his life. The two meet the mad Lear, who talks with Gloucester about lechery, abuses of power, and other human follies. Lear runs off when some of Cordelia's search party come upon him. When Oswald appears and tries to kill Gloucester, Edgar kills Oswald and finds on his body a letter from Goneril to Edmund plotting Albany's death.

1. **that same hill:** the **hill** to which I asked to be led

8. **By:** i.e., because of

Therefore I do advise you take this note:
 My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talked,
 And more convenient is he for my hand 35
 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. 40
 If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
 Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD

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

REGAN

Fare thee well. 45

They exit.

Scene 「6」

Enter Gloucester and Edgar 「dressed as a peasant.」

GLOUCESTER

When shall I come to th' top of that same hill?

EDGAR

You do climb up it now. Look how we labor.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

5

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 altered and thou speak'st 10
 In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

17. **so low:** i.e., so far down
18. **wing . . . air:** i.e., are flying halfway down
19. **gross:** large
20. **samphire:** an aromatic herb; **dreadful:** terrifying
23-24. **bark . . . buoy:** i.e., ship appears no larger than its cockboat (a small ship's boat), and her cockboat appears the size of a buoy
25. **for sight:** i.e., to be seen
26. **unnumbered:** innumerable; **pebble:** pebbles (of the beach)
28-29. **the . . . Topple:** i.e., the unsteadiness of my perception causes me to **topple**
33. **upright:** i.e., up into the air
35. **'s:** i.e., is
37. **Prosper . . . thee:** i.e., make it increase and make you **prosper**

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 15
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. Halfway down

Hangs one that gathers samphire—dreadful trade; 20

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that (walk) upon the beach

Appear like mice, and yond tall anchoring bark

Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge 25

That on th' unnumbered idle pebble 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. 30

EDGAR

Give me your hand. You are now within a foot

Of th' 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 35

Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods

Prosper it with thee. *['He gives Edgar a purse.']*

Go thou further off.

Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR, *['walking away']*

Now fare you well, good sir. 40

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR, *['aside']*

Why I do trifle thus with his despair

Is done to cure it.

48. **To quarrel with:** i.e., into rebellion against;
opposeless: irresistible

49-50. **My snuff . . . out:** i.e., my useless and
despised life could end itself naturally **snuff:** par-
tially burnt candle wick **part:** remainder

53. **conceit:** imagination, thought

55. **Yields to:** i.e., cooperates in

58. **pass:** die

59. **What:** i.e., who

61. **aught:** anything

63. **Thou'dst shivered:** i.e., you would have bro-
ken to pieces

65. **heavy:** i.e., solid

67. **at each:** end to end

71. **chalky bourn:** i.e., chalk cliff (of Dover)

72. **a-height:** high; **shrill-gorged:** shrill-throated,
shrill-voiced

77. **beguile:** foil, cheat

- GLOUCESTER O you mighty gods! *(He kneels.)*
 This world I do renounce, and in your sights 45
 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 loathèd part of nature should
 Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O, bless him!— 50
 Now, fellow, fare thee well. *(He falls.)*
- EDGAR Gone, sir. Farewell.—
 And yet I know not how conceit may rob
 The treasury of life, when life itself
 Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought, 55
 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. 60
- EDGAR
 Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
 So many fathom down precipitating,
 Thou'dst shivered like an egg; but thou dost
 breathe,
 Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art 65
 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? 70
- 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 75
 To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort
 When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage
 And frustrate his proud will.

88. **whelked:** twisted

89. **happy father:** fortunate old man

90-92. **clearest . . . impossibilities:** i.e., most serene **gods, who** win veneration by doing what humans cannot do

94-95. **till . . . die:** i.e., until it ends; or, until I **die**

98. **free:** innocent (i.e., guilt-free); carefree

100-101. **safer sense . . . thus:** i.e., a sane mind will never allow its possessor to dress in this way

102. **touch:** censure; **coining:** making or issuing money

104. **side-piercing:** heartrending

106. **press-money:** money paid a new recruit upon enlistment (Lear speaks as if he were a recruiting officer.)

106-7. **like a crowkeeper:** i.e., inexpertly, like someone guarding a cornfield from crows

107. **Draw . . . yard:** i.e., draw your bow to a full arrow's length (the length of a **clothier's yard**)

- EDGAR Give me your arm.
 「He raises Gloucester.」
 Up. So, how is 't? Feel you your legs? You stand. 80
- GLOUCESTER
 Too well, too well.
- EDGAR This is above all strangeness.
 Upon the crown o' th' cliff, what thing was that
 Which parted from you?
- GLOUCESTER A poor unfortunate beggar. 85
- EDGAR
 As I stood here below, methought his eyes
 Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,
 Horns whelked and waved like the enragèd sea.
 It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them 90
 honors
 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, 95
 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.
- Enter Lear.*
- But who comes here?
- The safer sense will ne'er accommodate 100
 His master thus.
- LEAR No, they cannot touch me for (coining.) I am the
 King himself.
- EDGAR O, thou side-piercing sight!
- LEAR Nature's above art in that respect. There's your 105
 press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a
 crowkeeper. Draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look,

109. **prove it:** make it good, **prove** its worth
110. **brown bills:** i.e., soldiers carrying **brown bills** (weapons painted brown to prevent rust); **O, well flown, bird:** perhaps referring to the flight of an (imaginary) arrow
111. **clout:** bull's-eye; **Hewgh:** possibly, the sound of an arrow in flight; **word:** password
116. **like a dog:** i.e., as if they were dogs fawning on me; **white hairs:** representing wisdom
119. **divinity:** theology (Compare James 5.12: "Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay.")
122. **found:** exposed; **Go to:** an expression of impatience
124. **ague-proof:** immune to chills and fevers (**Ague** is pronounced ay-gue.)
125. **trick:** peculiarity
129. **thy cause:** the accusation against you
132. **lecher:** play the lecher (i.e., copulate)
134. **got:** begotten, conceived
135. **luxury:** lechery
- 136-37. **whose . . . snow:** i.e., whose looks predict a cold (i.e., icily chaste) response **forks:** perhaps, instruments for propping up a woman's hair; or, perhaps, legs
137. **minces virtue:** enacts virtue mincingly (i.e., in an affected way)
138. **The fitchew:** i.e., neither the polecat
139. **soiled:** perhaps, put out to stud; or, perhaps, lively because fed with green fodder
140. **centaurs:** mythological monsters that were bestial below the waist (See picture, page 206.)
141. **girdle:** i.e., waist
142. **inherit:** possess

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! 110
I' th' clout, i' th' clout! Hewgh! Give the word.

EDGAR Sweet marjoram.

LEAR Pass.

GLOUCESTER I know that voice.

LEAR Ha! Goneril with a white beard? They flattered 115
me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say "ay" and "no" to everything that I said "ay" and "no" to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the 120
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. 125
Is 't not the 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. 130
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 135
simp'ring 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, 140
though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit; beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell,

145. **civet:** musky perfume; **apothecary:** pharmacist

150. **so:** in the same way

152. **squinny:** squint; **Cupid:** the god of love, often depicted as blindfolded (See picture, page 208.)

156. **take:** believe, credit; **It is:** i.e., **it is** actually taking place

159. **case:** i.e., sockets

160. **are . . . me:** i.e., **are you with me** concerning this matter

162. **heavy case:** sad condition; **in a light:** i.e., empty

164. **feelingly:** by touch; through my feelings

167. **simple:** humble, ordinary

168. **handy-dandy:** a trick in which one asks a child to choose which of one's hands holds a treat

173. **image:** likeness, model

173-74. **a dog's . . . office:** i.e., even a dog is **obeyed** when it's in a position of power

there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit; burning, scalding, stench, consumption! Fie, fie, fie, pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary; sweeten my imagination. There's money for thee. 145

GLOUCESTER O, let me kiss that hand!

LEAR Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER

O ruined piece of nature! This great world
Shall so wear out to naught. Dost thou know me? 150

LEAR I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squinny 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 thy letters suns, I could not see. 155

EDGAR, *aside*

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

LEAR Read.

GLOUCESTER What, with the case of eyes?

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. 160

GLOUCESTER I see it feelingly.

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? 170

GLOUCESTER Ay, sir.

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

175. **beadle:** inferior parish officer responsible for punishing petty offenders

177. **kind:** way

178. **usurer:** moneylender

179. **cozener:** cheat, fraud, impostor

181–82. **Plate . . . gold:** literally, cover **sin with gold** armor plate

183. **hurtless:** i.e., harmlessly

185. **able:** authorize; vouch for

192. **matter and impertinency:** sense and absurdity

198. **Mark:** pay attention

201. **This':** i.e., this is; **block:** style of hat

202. **delicate:** wonderfully ingenious

203. **put 't in proof:** i.e., **put** it to the test



A centaur. (4.6.140)

From Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum* . . . (1611).

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand! 175
 Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back.
 Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
 For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the
 cozener.

Through tattered clothes (small) vices do appear. 180
 Robes and furred gowns hide all. [Plate sin¹ with
 gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks.
 Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.
 None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em. 185
 Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
 To seal th' accuser's lips.] Get thee glass eyes,
 And like a scurvy politician
 Seem to see the things thou dost not. Now, now,
 now, now. 190

Pull off my boots. Harder, harder. So.

EDGAR, *aside*¹

O, matter and impertinency mixed,
 Reason in madness!

LEAR

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
 I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester. 195
 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!

LEAR

When we are born, we cry that we are come 200
 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 son-in-laws,
 Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill! 205

Enter a Gentleman *and Attendants.*¹

210. **natural fool of Fortune:** one born to be the plaything of Fortune

214. **seconds:** attendants, supporters

215. **of salt:** i.e., of tears

218. **bravely:** (1) courageously; (2) gorgeously dressed; **smug:** neat, trim in appearance

222. **an:** if

223. **Sa . . . sa:** a cry to hunting dogs to chase their prey

224. **meanest:** of lowest degree, poorest

226. **general:** universal

227. **her:** i.e., nature

228. **gentle:** noble

229. **speed:** i.e., God **speed** (May God make you prosper!)

230. **toward:** about to happen

231. **vulgar:** of common knowledge

231-32. **Everyone . . . sound:** i.e., **everyone** who can hear hears of the battle (line 230)



"Blind Cupid." (4.6.152)

Anonymous engraving inserted in Jacques Callot,
La petite passion . . . (n.d.).

GENTLEMAN, *「noticing Lear」*

O, here he is. *「To an Attendant.」* Lay hand upon him.—Sir,

Your most dear daughter—

LEAR

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool of Fortune. Use me well. 210
You shall have ransom. Let me have surgeons;
I am cut to th' brains.

GENTLEMAN You shall have anything.

LEAR No seconds? All myself?

Why, this would make a man a man of salt, 215
To use his eyes for garden waterpots,
(Ay, and laying autumn's dust.)

I will die bravely like a smug bridegroom. What?
I will be jovial. Come, come, I am a king,
Masters, know you that? 220

GENTLEMAN

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR Then there's life in 't. Come, an you get it, you
shall get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.

«The King exits running 「pursued by Attendants.」»

GENTLEMAN

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking of in a king. Thou hast a daughter 225
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? 230

GENTLEMAN

Most sure and vulgar. Everyone hears that,
Which can distinguish sound.

EDGAR

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

235-36. **The . . . thought:** i.e., **the** sighting of the **main** part of the army is expected every hour

238. **Though that:** i.e., although; **on:** because of

244. **father:** common term of address to an old man

245. **what:** i.e., who

246. **tame:** servile, meek

247. **known:** experienced; **feeling:** deeply felt, acute

248. **pregnant:** inclined

249. **biding:** dwelling

251-52. **The bounty . . . and boot:** i.e., and, besides my thanks, I pray that you receive the gifts and blessing of heaven as your reward **To boot:** into the bargain

253. **happy:** fortunate, lucky

256. **thysself remember:** i.e., recall and repent your sins

GENTLEMAN

Near and on speedy foot. The main descry
Stands on the hourly thought. 235

EDGAR I thank you, sir. That's all.

GENTLEMAN

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

EDGAR I thank you, sir. 240
[Gentleman] exits.

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? 245

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 biding.

[He takes Gloucester's hand.]

GLOUCESTER Hearty thanks. 250

The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot, and boot.

Enter [Oswald, the] Steward.

OSWALD, [drawing his sword]

A proclaimed prize! Most happy!

That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor, 255
Briefly thyself remember; the sword is out
That must destroy thee.

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

[Edgar steps between Gloucester and Oswald.]

OSWALD Wherefore, bold peasant, 260

261. **published:** proclaimed
262. **Lest:** i.e., to prevent the possibility
263. **Like:** similar
264. **Chill:** i.e., I will; **vurther 'casion:** further occasion or cause (Here Edgar assumes a dialect that signaled that the speaker was from the country.)
266. **gait:** way
- 267-68. **An . . . life:** if I could have been killed by mere swaggering or blustering
- 268-69. **'twould . . . vortnight:** it (**my life**) would not have been so long as it is by a fortnight
270. **che vor' ye:** I warn you; **Ise:** I will; **costard:** head (slang)
271. **ballow:** perhaps, walking stick (This word is not recorded elsewhere.)
272. **Out:** See note to 3.7.107.
- 273-74. **no matter . . . foins:** i.e., I do not care about your (sword) thrusts
275. **Villain:** i.e., villein, peasant
277. **about:** upon
279. **Upon:** on; **party:** side
280. **serviceable:** active and diligent in service
287. **deathsman:** executioner
288. **Leave:** i.e., give me leave; permit me; **wax:** i.e., the seal on the letter
- 292-93. **your will want not:** i.e., you do not lack the will
293. **fruitfully:** (1) fully, completely; (2) so as to produce good results

Dar'st thou support a published traitor? Hence,
Lest that th' infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR Chill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.

OSWALD Let go, slave, or thou diest! 265

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 vort-
night. Nay, come not near th' old man. Keep out,
che vor' ye, or Ise try whether your costard or my 270
ballow be the harder. Chill be plain with you.

OSWALD Out, dunghill.

EDGAR Chill pick your teeth, zir. Come, no matter vor
your foins. *<They fight.>*

OSWALD, *falling*

Slave, thou hast slain me. Villain, take my purse. 275
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 English party. O, untimely death! Death!
<He dies.>

EDGAR

I know thee well, a serviceable villain, 280
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 285
May be my friends. He's dead; I am only sorry
He had no other deathsman. Let us see.

He opens a letter.

Leave, gentle wax, and, manners, blame us not.
To know our enemies' minds, we rip their hearts.
Their papers is more lawful. *Reads the letter.* 290

*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*

296-97. **supply . . . labor:** i.e., take his **place** as a reward for the **labor** (of killing him)

299. **for . . . venture:** i.e., empowered to put herself at risk for you **venture:** an enterprise involving risk

300. **indistinguished . . . will:** boundlessness of **woman's** desire

303. **rake up:** i.e., bury in a shallow grave; **post:** messenger

304. **in the mature time: in due time**

305. **ungracious:** wicked

306. **death-practiced duke:** i.e., **duke** whose death has been plotted

308-10. **How stiff . . . sorrows:** i.e., **how** stubborn is **my** disgusting sanity that it keeps me standing and makes me aware of **my** great **sorrows** **ingenious:** i.e., alert, fully conscious

310. **distract:** distracted, insane

312. **wrong imaginations:** false beliefs, delusions

316. **bestow:** house, lodge

4.7 In the French camp, Lear is waked by the doctor treating him and is reunited with Cordelia.

4. **o'erpaid:** i.e., to be paid too much

*nothing done if he return the conqueror. Then am I
the prisoner, and his bed my jail, from the loathed 295
warmth whereof deliver me and supply the place for
your labor.*

*Your (wife, so I would say) affectionate servant,
(and, for you, her own for venture,) Goneril.*

O indistinguished space of woman's will! 300
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 305
Of the death-practiced 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. 310
So should my thoughts be severed from my griefs,
And woes, by wrong imaginations, lose
The knowledge of themselves. *Drum afar off.*

EDGAR

Give me your hand.
Far off methinks I hear the beaten drum. 315
Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

They exit.

Scene 7

*Enter Cordelia, Kent ¹in disguise, ¹(Doctor,) and
Gentleman.*

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.

5. **All . . . go:** perhaps, may **all reports** about me conform; or, perhaps, **all my reports** to you have conformed

6. **Nor . . . clipped:** i.e., neither **more nor** less

7. **suited:** dressed

8. **weeds:** clothes; **memories:** reminders

11. **to be . . . intent:** i.e., **to be** recognized would make the plan I have formed fall short

12. **My . . . not:** i.e., I ask you, as a favor, not to acknowledge me

13. **meet:** fitting

15. **sleeps:** i.e., he **sleeps**

18. **wind up:** put in tune

19. **child-changed:** changed (driven mad) by his children

24. **I' th' sway:** i.e., according to the authority

28. **I . . . temperance:** i.e., I do not fear he will lose self-control

All my reports go with the modest truth,
Nor more, nor clipped, but so. 5

CORDELIA Be better suited.
These weeds are memories of those worser hours.
I prithee put them off.

KENT Pardon, dear madam. 10
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.—How does the King?
(DOCTOR) Madam, sleeps still. 15

CORDELIA O, you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abusèd nature!
Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up,
Of this child-changèd father!

(DOCTOR) So please your Majesty 20
That we may wake the King? He hath slept
long.

CORDELIA
Be governed by your knowledge, and proceed
I' th' sway of your own will. Is he arrayed?

Enter Lear in a chair carried by Servants.

GENTLEMAN
Ay, madam. In the heaviness of sleep, 25
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.

「Music.」

DOCTOR
Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there.) 30

CORDELIA, 「kissing Lear」

O, my dear father, restoration hang

32. **Thy medicine:** i.e., **medicine** for you
34. **thy reverence:** i.e., you, whom they should hold in **reverence**
36. **Had you:** i.e., even if **you had**; **flakes:** i.e., hairs
37. **challenge:** require, demand
39. **deep:** i.e., deep-voiced; **dread-bolted thunder:** i.e., dreadful bolts of **thunder** (See note to 2.1.55.)
41. **cross-lightning:** zigzag lightning; **watch:** stay awake, stand watch; **perdu:** i.e., a *sentinel perdu*, or solitary sentinel standing watch in a very dangerous place
42. **helm:** helmet (i.e., his thin hair)
44. **Against:** i.e., by; **fain:** glad
45. **rogues forlorn:** wretched vagabonds
46. **short:** i.e., broken
48. **concluded all:** **all** come to an end
53. **wheel of fire:** Those condemned to death were sometimes bound to a wheel and tortured. Here, the reference to fire seems to suggest torture in hell. (See picture, page 220.)
57. **wide:** i.e., wide of the mark (in a deluded state)
60. **abused:** (1) wronged; (2) deceived; (3) worn out

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. 35

CORDELIA

Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Did challenge pity of them. Was this a face
To be opposed against the jarring 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 40
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? 50

LEAR

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

CORDELIA

Sir, do you know me? 55

LEAR

You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA Still, still, far wide.

DOCTOR)

He's scarce awake. Let him alone awhile.

LEAR

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
I am mightily abused; I should e'en die with pity 60

61. **thus:** i.e., in my condition
69. **fond:** silly; dazed
74. **mainly:** entirely
90. **abuse:** deceive
91. **rage:** madness, insanity
92. **danger:** i.e., dangerous
93. **even o'er:** i.e., fill in; **lost:** forgotten



"Bound upon a wheel of fire." (4.7.52-53)
From Giovanni Ferro, *Teatro d'imprese* . . . (1623).

To see another thus. I know not what to say.
 I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see.
 I feel this pinprick. Would I were assured
 Of my condition!

CORDELIA O, look upon me, sir, 65
 And hold your hand in benediction o'er me.
 (No, sir,) you must not kneel.

LEAR Pray do not mock:
 I am a very foolish fond old man,
 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less, 70
 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 75
 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, *weeping* And so I am; I am. 80

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. 85

CORDELIA No cause, no
 cause.

LEAR Am I in France?

KENT In your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR Do not abuse me. 90

(DOCTOR)

Be comforted, good madam. The great rage,
 You see, is killed in him, (and yet it is danger
 To make him even o'er the time he has lost.)

95. **settling:** calming (of his mind)

100. **Holds it true:** i.e., is it a fact

103. **conductor:** leader

108. **powers . . . kingdom:** i.e., armies of Britain

109. **arbitrament:** settlement of the dispute; **like:** i.e., likely

111. **My . . . period:** i.e., the conclusion (of my life; or, perhaps, of my plans); **thoroughly wrought:** worked out completely

112. **Or . . . or:** either . . . or; **as . . . fought:** according to the outcome of today's battle

Desire him to go in. Trouble him no more
Till further settling.

95

CORDELIA Will 't please your Highness walk?

LEAR You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget, and forgive. I am old and
foolish. *(They exit. Kent and Gentleman remain.)*

GENTLEMAN Holds it true, sir, that the Duke of Corn- 100
wall was so slain?

KENT Most certain, sir.

GENTLEMAN Who is conductor of his people?

KENT As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

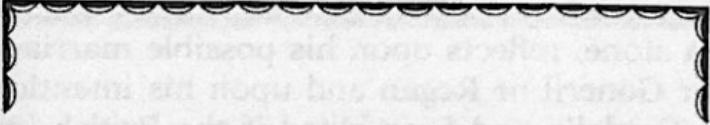
GENTLEMAN They say Edgar, his banished son, is with 105
the Earl of Kent in Germany.

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

GENTLEMAN The arbitrament is like to be bloody. Fare
you well, sir. *[He exits.]* 110

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

He exits.)



The Tragedy of
KING LEAR

ACT 5



5.1 Albany joins his forces with Regan's (led by Edmund) to oppose the French invasion. Edgar, still in disguise, approaches Albany with the letter plotting Albany's death, and promises to produce a champion to maintain the authenticity of the letter in a trial by combat. Edmund then enters and, when alone, reflects upon his possible marriage to either Goneril or Regan and upon his intention to have Cordelia and Lear killed if the British forces are victorious.

1. **Know . . . hold:** i.e., learn from Albany if he is firm in his latest decision
2. **since:** i.e., **since** then
3. **alteration:** changes (of mind)
4. **constant pleasure:** settled intention
5. **man:** i.e., Oswald; **miscarried:** come to harm, perished
6. **doubted:** feared
11. **honored:** i.e., honorable
13. **forfended:** forbidden
14. **That . . . you:** i.e., you wrong yourself in having such a **thought**
15. **doubtful:** fearful
- 15-16. **conjunct . . . hers:** i.e., intimate with her to the fullest extent

ACT 5

Scene 1

*Enter, with Drum and Colors, Edmund, Regan,
Gentlemen, and Soldiers.*

EDMUND, *['to a Gentleman']*

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.

['A Gentleman exits.']

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 honored 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 bosomed with her as far as we call hers.)

EDMUND No, by mine honor, madam.

20. **Fear me not:** do not doubt me
23. **bemet:** met
25. **rigor . . . state:** harshness of our government
26. **Where:** i.e., in situations **where; honest:** honorable
27. **For:** i.e., as for
28. **touches us:** concerns or moves me; **as . . . land:** i.e., in that it is a French invasion
- 29-30. **Not . . . oppose:** i.e., not insofar as France emboldens Lear and **others** who oppose us for **just and** serious reasons
32. **reasoned:** i.e., being discussed
34. **particular broils:** personal quarrels
36. **determine:** decide
37. **th' ancient of war:** i.e., our officers with the most military experience
38. **presently:** at once
39. **us:** i.e., me
41. **convenient:** suitable, proper

REGAN

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

EDMUND

Fear <me> not. She and the Duke, her husband. 20

Enter, with Drum and Colors, Albany, Goneril, Soldiers.

(GONERIL, *aside*)

I had rather lose the battle than that sister
Should loosen him and me.)

ALBANY

Our very loving sister, well bemet.—
Sir, this I heard: the King is come to his daughter,
With others whom the rigor of our state 25
Forced to cry out. (Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant. For this business,
It touches us as France invades our land,
Not bolds the King, with others whom, I fear,
Most just and heavy causes make oppose. 30

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.)

REGAN

Why is this reasoned?

GONERIL

Combine together 'gainst the enemy,
For these domestic and particular broils
Are not the question here. 35

ALBANY

Let's then determine

With th' ancient of war on our proceeding.

(EDMUND

I shall attend you presently at your tent.)

REGAN Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL No. 40

REGAN

'Tis most convenient. Pray, go with us.

GONERIL, *aside*

Oho, I know the riddle.—I will go.

They begin to exit.

47-48. **sound / For:** i.e., summon

49. **prove:** i.e., establish as true in a trial by combat

50. **avouchèd:** asserted; **miscarry:** lose; are killed

57. **o'erlook:** read

58. **powers:** armed forces

60. **discovery:** reconnaissance

62. **greet the time:** i.e., be ready when **the time** comes

64. **jealous:** suspicious

Enter Edgar 'dressed as a peasant.'

EDGAR, 'to Albany'

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

ALBANY, 'to those exiting'

I'll overtake you.—Speak.

45

Both the armies exit.

EDGAR, 'giving him a paper'

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 avouchèd there. If you miscarry,
Your business of the world hath so an end,
And machination ceases. Fortune (love) you.

50

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.

55

He exits.

ALBANY

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

Enter Edmund.

EDMUND

The enemy's in view. Draw up your powers.

'Giving him a paper.'

Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery. But your haste
Is now urged on you.

60

ALBANY

We will greet the time.

He exits.

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?

65

- 69. **hardly**: with difficulty
- 70. **Her**: i.e., Goneril's
- 71. **countenance**: rank and position; repute in the world
- 73. **taking off**: murder
- 76. **Shall**: i.e., they shall
- 76-77. **my state / Stands on me**: my position depends on me

5.2 Cordelia's French army is defeated.

- 0 SD. **Alarum**: call to arms ("All arm")
- 1. **father**: a polite address to an old man
- 5 SD. **Retreat**: trumpet call for a **retreat**
- 7. **ta'en**: i.e., have been taken

Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed
 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 70
 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, 75
 Shall never see his pardon, for my state
 Stands on me to defend, not to debate.

He exits.

Scene 2

*Alarum within. Enter, with Drum and Colors, Lear,
 Cordelia, and Soldiers, over the stage, and exit.
 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.

5

「Edgar」 exits.

Alarum and Retreat within.

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 further, sir. A man may rot even here.

5.3 Edmund sends Lear and Cordelia to prison and secretly commissions their assassination. Albany confronts Edmund and Goneril with their intended treachery against him and calls for the champion that Edgar said he would produce. Edgar himself, in full armor, appears to accuse Edmund of treachery. In the ensuing trial by combat, Edgar mortally wounds Edmund. Edgar reveals his identity, tells about his life as Poor Tom, and describes Gloucester's death. A messenger announces the deaths of Regan (who has been poisoned by Goneril) and Goneril (who has committed suicide). Kent, no longer in disguise, arrives in search of Lear. Edmund confesses that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and of Cordelia. While a messenger rushes to the prison to save them, Lear enters bearing the dead Cordelia. As Albany makes plans to restore Lear to the throne, Lear himself dies.

-
1. **Good guard:** i.e., guard them well
 3. **censure:** pronounce judicial sentence on
 5. **meaning:** purposes
 7. **else:** otherwise; **false:** inconstant, fickle (**Fortune** was considered fickle because she shows favor one moment and animosity the next.)
 8. **daughters . . . sisters:** i.e., Goneril and Regan
 18. **wear out:** outlast
 20. **That . . . moon:** i.e., whose fortunes change with the tides

EDGAR

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

10

[GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.]

They exit.

Scene 3

*Enter in conquest, with Drum and Colors, Edmund;
 Lear and Cordelia as prisoners; Soldiers, Captain.*

EDMUND

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

CORDELIA, [to Lear]

We are not the first

Who with best meaning have incurred the worst.
 For thee, oppressèd king, I am cast down.
 Myself could else outfrown false Fortune's frown.
 Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

5

LEAR

No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i' th' 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 walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by th' moon.

10

15

20

EDMUND

Take them away.

LEAR

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,

23. **throw incense:** The image is of a rite of sacrifice in which those celebrating the ritual throw incense on the burnt offering. Here, it is **the gods themselves** who celebrate the sacrifice.

25. **shall:** i.e., will have to; **brand:** i.e., piece of burning wood

26. **fire us . . . foxes:** i.e., drive **us** apart with fire as **foxes** are driven out of their dens

27. **good years:** It has been suggested that this should be printed as "goodyears," and that it is a rare plural form of a term used to denote an unnamed evil power. It seems just as likely that the Folio's **good years** is the correct reading and that Lear is simply referring to the passage of time. **fell:** skin

37. **Does . . . sword:** i.e., is not fitting for a soldier

38. **bear:** allow for

41. **write "happy":** i.e., regard yourself as fortunate; **th':** thou

42. **carry it so:** i.e., **carry it** out exactly

46. **strain:** (1) disposition; (2) lineage

48. **opposites of:** opponents in

The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?

He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven 25

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 starved
first.

Come. 30

['Lear and Cordelia'] exit, ['with Soldiers.']

EDMUND Come hither, captain. Hark.

['Handing him a paper.']

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 35

Are as the time is; to be tender-minded

Does not become a sword. Thy great employment

Will not bear question. Either say thou 'It do 't,

Or thrive by other means.

CAPTAIN I'll do 't, my lord. 40

EDMUND

About it, and write "happy" when th' 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.) *Captain exits.* 45

*Flourish. Enter Albany, Goneril, Regan, Soldiers ['and a
Captain.']*

ALBANY, *['to Edmund']*

Sir, you have showed today your valiant strain,

And Fortune led you well. You have the captives

Who were the opposites of this day's strife.

I do require them of you, so to use them

As we shall find their merits and our safety 50

May equally determine.

54. **retention . . . guard:** confinement under a specially **appointed guard**

55-57. **Whose . . . eyes:** i.e., Lear's old **age** and **title** will persuade the populace to take **his side**, and our own lancers (drafted from the populace) will turn against us

58. **Which:** i.e., who

61. **further space:** i.e., a later date

64-65. **And . . . sharpness:** i.e., before **the heat** of battle has cooled, **the best** of causes **are cursed by** those who have had to endure the pain of the battle

68. **by . . . patience:** a polite phrase, like "**by your leave**"

69. **hold:** regard; **but a subject of:** i.e., only as a subordinate in

71. **we list:** I choose; **grace:** confer dignity (or a title) on

72. **pleasure:** wishes; **demand:** consulted

74. **place:** position

75. **immediacy:** i.e., direct connection to me

79. **your addition:** the title you give him

80-81. **In . . . invested:** i.e., endowed with my power and authority

81. **compeers:** is equal to

82. **That were the most:** i.e., **that** would be **the most** (that you could invest him with)

83. **Jesters . . . prophets:** Here Regan combines two proverbs: "There is many a true word spoken in jest" and "Fools [**jesters**] and children do often prophesy."

85. **That . . . asquint:** Goneril replies by alluding to another proverb: "Love, being jealous, makes a good **eye** look **asquint**."

87. **full-flowing stomach:** i.e., with a great flow of angry words (**Stomach** often meant "anger.")

90. **the . . . thine:** Regan surrenders herself like a walled town or fortress.

91. **Witness the world:** i.e., let **the world witness**

94. **let-alone:** i.e., granting or withholding of permission

96. **Half-blooded:** illegitimate

97. **strike:** as a signal for battle

99. **On . . . treason:** for high **treason; in thine attaint:** (1) as another tainted by your crime; (2) as your accuser (as Goneril has become through Albany's possession of her letter to Edmund)

103. **subcontracted:** i.e., contracted, engaged

104. **your banns:** i.e., the proclamation of your marriage to Edmund

105. **make your loves to me:** i.e., woo me, court me

106. **bespoke:** already spoken for

107. **An interlude:** i.e., a farce (literally, a short play used to fill an interval)

112. **make it:** i.e., prove it true

113. **in nothing less:** i.e., in **no** respect **less** criminal

REGAN

Lady, I am not well, else I should answer
From a full-flowing stomach. *['To Edmund.']*

General,

Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony.

[Dispose of them, of me; the walls is thine.]

Witness the world that I create thee here

My lord and master.

90

GONERIL

Mean you to enjoy him?

ALBANY

The let-alone lies not in your goodwill.

EDMUND

Nor in thine, lord.

95

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,)

100

I bar it in the interest of my wife.

'Tis she is subcontracted to this lord,

And I, her husband, contradict your banns.

If you will marry, make your loves to me.

105

My lady is bespoke.

[GONERIL

An interlude!]

ALBANY

Thou art armed, Gloucester. Let the trumpet sound.

If none appear to prove upon thy person

Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,

There is my pledge. *['He throws down a glove.']*

110

I'll make it on thy heart,

Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less

Than I have here proclaimed thee.

116. **medicine:** i.e., poison
118. **What:** i.e., whoever
121. **who not:** i.e., whoever
125. **thy single virtue:** i.e., your own strength alone
133. **quality or degree:** rank
136. **He:** i.e., Edmund
139 SD. **within:** offstage; **armed:** dressed in full armor (See picture of an armed knight, below.)



An armed knight.
From Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britanna* . . . (1612).

REGAN Sick, O, sick! 115

GONERIL, *aside* If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

EDMUND

There's my exchange. *He throws down a glove.*

What in the world (he is)

That names me traitor, villain-like he lies.

Call by the trumpet. He that dares approach, 120

On him, on you, who not, I will maintain

My truth and honor firmly.

ALBANY

A herald, ho!

(EDMUND A herald, ho, a herald!)

(ALBANY)

Trust to thy single virtue, for thy soldiers, 125

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.

Regan is helped to exit.

Enter a Herald.

Come hither, herald. Let the trumpet sound, 130

And read out this. *He hands the Herald a paper.*

(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 defense. 135

[First trumpet sounds.]

HERALD Again!

Second trumpet sounds.]

HERALD Again!

Third trumpet sounds.]

Trumpet answers within.]

Enter Edgar armed.

142. **What:** who

146. **canker-bit:** destroyed like a rosebud by the cankerworm (See picture, below.)

148. **cope:** encounter

156-58. **mine honors . . . oath . . . profession:**
All these refer to Edgar's status as a knight.

159. **Maugre:** in spite of

160. **fire-new:** brand-new

163. **Conspirant:** conspiring; or, conspirator

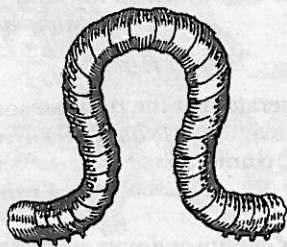
164. **upward:** top

165. **descent:** lowest part

166. **toad-spotted:** loathsomely tainted; **Say thou:** i.e., if you say

167. **bent:** directed

170. **wisdom:** prudence



A cankerworm. (5.3.146)

From John Johnstone, *Opera aliquot . . .* (1650-62).

ALBANY, *['to Herald']*

Ask him his purposes, why he appears 140
Upon this call o' th' trumpet.

HERALD

What are you?

Your name, your quality, and why you answer
This present summons?

EDGAR

Know my name is lost, 145

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 150
Gloucester?

EDMUND

Himself. What sayest thou to him?

EDGAR

Draw thy sword,

That if my speech offend a noble heart,
Thy arm may do thee justice. Here is mine. 155

['He draws his sword.']

Behold, it is my privilege, the privilege of mine
honors,

My oath, and my profession. I protest,
Maugre thy strength, place, youth, and eminence,
(Despite) thy victor-sword and fire-new fortune, 160

Thy valor, and thy heart, thou art a traitor,
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father,
Conspirant 'gainst this high illustrious prince,
And from th' extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust below thy foot, 165

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, 170

But since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,

172. **that:** i.e., since; **say:** assay, sign; **breeding:** i.e., noble birth

173-74. **What . . . disdain:** i.e., **I disdain** the cautious course of claiming my right, under the rules **of knighthood**, to refuse combat with a challenger whose name and rank I do not know **nicely:** scrupulously

175. **treasons to:** i.e., accusations of treason at

176. **the . . . lie:** i.e., **the lie** that charges me with treason, which I hate as I hate hell

177-79. **for . . . forever:** i.e., because my counter-charges **glance** off your armor without even bruising you, I will now use my **sword** to open a passage to your heart, where they will **forever** lodge

180. **Save him:** i.e., let him live

181. **This is practice:** i.e., you were tricked into fighting

184. **cozened and beguiled:** duped and deceived

186. **stopple:** close with a stopple or plug; **Hold, sir:** Perhaps this repeats Albany's earlier command to Edgar to let Edmund live.

194. **Govern:** (1) restrain; (2) look after

198. **fortune on:** success over

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, 175

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 forever. Trumpets, speak!

He draws his sword. Alarums. Fights.

Edmund falls, wounded.

ALBANY, *to Edgar*

Save him, save him! 180

GONERIL

This is practice, Gloucester.

By th' law of war, thou wast not bound to answer

An unknown opposite. Thou art not vanquished,

But cozened and beguiled.

ALBANY

Shut your mouth, dame, 185

Or with this paper shall I stopple it.—Hold, sir.—

Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil.

No tearing, lady. I perceive you know it.

GONERIL

Say if I do; the laws are mine, not thine.

Who can arraign me for 't? 190

ALBANY

Most monstrous! O!

Know'st thou this paper?

(GONERIL)

Ask me not what I know.

She exits.

ALBANY

Go after her, she's desperate. Govern her.

A Soldier exits.

EDMUND, *to Edgar*

What you have charged me with, that have I done, 195

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.

200. **charity:** i.e., forgiveness
201. **no . . . blood:** i.e., am of **no less** honorable birth or descent
202. **If more:** i.e., because I am legitimate and the firstborn; **th':** thou
204. **pleasant:** pleasure-giving
206. **thee he got:** he begot you
209. **wheel:** i.e., Fortune's **wheel**, which draws one up to a position of power and then casts one down as it continues to turn (See pictures, pages 172 and 252.) **here:** i.e., at the bottom of the wheel, where I began
217. **List:** listen to
219. **The . . . escape:** i.e., in order **to escape** from the **proclamation** condemning me to death
224. **this habit:** these garments
225. **rings:** i.e., eye sockets
229. **past:** ago
230. **success:** result
232. **flawed:** damaged

- EDGAR Let's exchange charity. 200
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more th' hast wronged me.
My name is Edgar and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us. 205
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.
- EDMUND Th' hast spoken right. 'Tis true.
The wheel is come full circle; I am here.
- ALBANY, *['to Edgar']*
Methought thy very gait did prophesy 210
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? 215
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 followed me so near—O, our lives' sweetness, 220
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
Into a madman's rags, t' assume a semblance
That very dogs disdain'd, and in this habit
Met I my father with his bleeding rings, 225
Their precious stones new lost; became his guide,
Led him, begged for him, saved him from despair.
Never—O fault!—revealed myself unto him
Until some half hour past, when I was armed.
Not sure, though hoping of this good success, 230
I asked his blessing, and from first to last
Told him our pilgrimage. But his flawed heart
(Alack, too weak the conflict to support)

242. **period:** highest point (of woe)

243. **another:** i.e., **another** sorrowful event

244. **To amplify too much:** i.e., to increase what was already too sorrowful

245. **top extremity:** i.e., overtop the utmost point

246. **big in clamor:** i.e., loudly lamenting Gloucester's death

251. **As:** i.e., **as if**; **threw . . . father:** i.e., **threw** himself on Gloucester's body

254. **puissant:** powerful

256. **tranced:** in a trance

259. **enemy king:** Lear, who could be called Kent's **enemy** for having banished him

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

235

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.

240

(EDGAR

This would have seemed a period

To such as love not sorrow; but another,
To amplify too much, would make much more
And top extremity. Whilst I

245

Was big in clamor, came there in a man
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunned my abhorred society; but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fastened on my neck and bellowed out

250

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.

255

ALBANY

But who was this?

EDGAR

Kent, sir, the banished Kent, who in disguise
Followed his enemy king and did him service
Improper for a slave.)

260

Enter a Gentleman (with a bloody knife.)

GENTLEMAN

Help, help, O, help!

EDGAR

What kind of help?

ALBANY, 'to Gentleman'

Speak, man!]

EDGAR What means this bloody knife?

265. **smokes:** steams
 277. **compliment:** formal greeting
 278. **very:** mere
 280. **aye:** forever
 285. **object:** spectacle



Fortune turning her wheel. (2.2.188–89; 4.1.2–6; 5.3.209)
 From Gregor Reisch, *Margarita philosophica* . . . [1503].

GENTLEMAN

'Tis hot, it smokes! It came even from the heart
Of—O, she's dead! 265

ALBANY Who dead? Speak, man.

GENTLEMAN

Your lady, sir, your lady. And her sister
By her is poisoned. She confesses it.

EDMUND

I was contracted to them both. All three
Now marry in an instant. 270

[EDGAR Here comes Kent.

Enter Kent.]ALBANY, *['to the Gentleman']*

Produce the bodies, be they alive or dead.

['Gentleman exits.']

This judgment of the heavens, that makes us
tremble, 275

Touches us not with pity. O, is this he?

['To Kent.'] The time will not allow the compliment
Which very manners urges.

KENT

I am come

To bid my king and master aye goodnight.
Is he not here? 280

ALBANY

Great thing of us forgot!

Speak, Edmund, where's the King? And where's
Cordelia?

Goneril and Regan's bodies brought out.

Seest thou this object, Kent?
Alack, why thus? 285

EDMUND Yet Edmund was beloved.

The one the other poisoned for my sake,
And after slew herself.

ALBANY Even so.—Cover their faces.

290

EDMUND

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do

293-94. **my writ . . . life:** i.e., I have issued written orders commanding the death

306. **fordid:** destroyed

314. **stone:** i.e., mirror's surface

316. **promised end:** i.e., doomsday, the end of the world promised in the Bible

Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send—
 Be brief in it—to th' castle, for my writ
 Is on the life of Lear, and on Cordelia.
 Nay, send in time.

295

ALBANY

Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR

To who, my lord? *['To Edmund.']* Who has the office?
 Send
 Thy token of reprieve.

EDMUND

Well thought on. Take my sword. Give it the
 Captain.

300

EDGAR, *['to a Soldier']*

Haste thee for thy life.

*['The Soldier exits with Edmund's sword.']*EDMUND, *['to Albany']*

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.

305

ALBANY

The gods defend her!—Bear him hence awhile.

['Edmund is carried off.']

*Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms,
 followed by a Gentleman.*

LEAR

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
 forever.

310

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.

315

ENT

Is this the promised end?

DGAR

Or image of that horror?

318. **Fall and cease:** probably addressed to the heavens or the universe

333. **falchion:** sword

335. **crosses:** troubles, adversities; **spoil:** impair, weaken

337. **tell:** recognize; **straight:** straightway, in a moment

338. **loved and hated:** i.e., first **loved** and then **hated**

342. **Caius:** Kent's name when he was in disguise (This is the only time the name is used in the play.)

ALBANY

Fall and cease.

LEAR

This feather stirs. She lives. If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows 320
That ever I have felt.

KENT

O, my good master—

LEAR

Prithee, away.

EDGAR

'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all! 325
I might have saved her. Now she's gone forever.—
Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha!
What is 't thou sayst?—Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman.
I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee. 330

GENTLEMAN

'Tis true, my lords, he did.

LEAR

Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made him skip. I am old now,
And these same crosses spoil me. *['To Kent.']* Who 335
are you?

Mine eyes are not o' th' best. I'll tell you straight.

KENT

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

LEAR

This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent? 340

KENT

The same,

Your servant Kent. Where is your servant Caius?

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— 345

346. **see:** attend to

347. **your first . . . decay:** i.e., the beginning of the change and decline of your fortunes (**Difference** may also mean "quarrel" and may refer to Lear's relations with his daughters.)

352. **fordone:** destroyed

353. **desperately:** in despair

356. **us:** i.e., ourselves

357. **bootless:** useless

361. **What . . . come:** i.e., whatever opportunities that **may** become available for comforting (Lear in **this great decline**)

362. **For us, we:** i.e., as for myself, I

365. **boot:** advantage; **addition:** titles

369. **poor fool:** i.e., Cordelia (**Fool** can be a term of endearment.)

LEAR I'll see that straight.

KENT

That from your first of difference and decay
Have followed your sad steps.

LEAR

「You」 are welcome

hither.

350

KENT

Nor no man else. All's cheerless, dark, and deadly.
Your eldest daughters have fordone themselves,
And desperately are dead.

LEAR

Ay, so I think.

ALBANY

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

355

EDGAR

Very bootless.

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY That's but a trifle here.—

You lords and noble friends, know our intent:

360

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 Honors

365

Have more than merited. All friends shall taste

The wages of their virtue, and all foes

The cup of their deservings. O, see, see!

LEAR

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life?

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,

370

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!

He dies.] 375

381. **rack:** instrument of torture on which a victim's limbs were torn apart (See picture, below.)

390. **journey:** i.e., to death

394. **The oldest hath:** he who is **oldest** has



Victims tortured on a rack. (5.3.381)

From Girolamo Maggi, *De tintinnabulis liber* . . . (1689).

EDGAR He faints. [*To Lear.*] 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
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 usurped his life.

ALBANY
Bear them from hence. Our present business
Is general woe. *['To Edgar and Kent.]* 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. 390

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. 395
They exit with a dead march.