

KING LEAR

A line-by-line translation

Act 1, Scene 1

Shakespeare

*Enter KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND***KENT**

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

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

[indicating EDMUND] Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

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

GLOUCESTER

But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year older 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, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.— Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND

No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

My services to your lordship.

KENT

I must love you and sue to know you better.

EDMUND

Sir, I shall study deserving.

Shakescleare Translation

*KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND enter.***KENT**

I thought the king liked the Duke of Albany more than the Duke of Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER

It always seemed like that to me, too. But now that he has divided the kingdom, no one can tell which duke he prefers the most. He's divided the kingdom so evenly that not even the closest scrutiny reveals any favoritism to either one.

KENT

[Pointing to EDMUND] Isn't this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

Well, his education has certainly been at my expense. I used to be embarrassed to acknowledge him as my son, but I've done it so many times now that I can do it without blushing.

KENT

I can't conceive of what you mean by that.

GLOUCESTER

Well, sir, this young fellow's mother certainly could conceive—she conceived *him*. She got pregnant and had a son for her crib before she had a husband in her bed. Do you perceive a sin in this?

KENT

Well, I can't wish to undo the sin, since its result—your son—turned out so well.

GLOUCESTER

I also have a legitimate son, sir, a few years older than this one, though he's not more valuable to me than Edmund. This rascal Edmund may have come into this world somewhat rudely, and before he was meant to, but his mother was beautiful, we had a good time making him, and I must now acknowledge the bastard as my son.*[To EDMUND]* Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND

No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

This is Lord Kent. Remember him from now on, as he is my honorable friend.

EDMUND

I'm at your service, my lord.

KENT

I sincerely look forward to knowing you better.

EDMUND

Sir, I'll try to earn your approval.

GLOUCESTER

30 He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.

Sennet.

The king is coming.

Enter one bearing a coronet, then King LEAR, then the Dukes of CORNWALL and ALBANY, next GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and attendants

LEAR

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

I shall, my lord.

Exit GLOUCESTER

LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.—

35 Give me the map there.— Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom, and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths while we
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.
The two great princes, France and Burgundy,
45 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,
(Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state)
50 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 do love you more than words can wield the
55 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—
60 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

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
65 With shadowy forests and with champains riched,
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.

REGAN

70 Sir, 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,
75 Which the most precious square of sense possesses.
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

GLOUCESTER

He's been abroad for nine years, and he's soon leaving again.

A trumpet call announces the arrival of the king.

The king is coming.

A man enters bearing a crown, followed by KING LEAR; then the Dukes of CORNWALL and ALBANY; then GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and attendants.

LEAR

Go attend to the rulers of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

I will, my lord.

GLOUCESTER and EDMUND exit.

LEAR

In the meantime I will discuss my more secret plan. Give me that map there. I now declare that I have divided my kingdom into three parts, which will be handed over to my sons-in-law. It's my firm intention to free myself from all worry and business in my old age, so that I can crawl unburdened towards death. To you, my son-in-law Cornwall, and to you, my equally loving son-in-law Albany, at this time I want to publicly announce what each of my daughters will inherit from me, so as to prevent quarreling after I die. The two great rulers of France and Burgundy—who are rivals in pursuing my youngest daughter Cordelia's love—have stayed at my court for a long time. And they will soon have their answer. Now tell me, my daughters, (since I'm about to give up my throne, my lands, and the worries and stress of being a ruler), tell me which one of you loves me the most. Then I can give my greatest gifts to the one who best deserves them. Goneril, my oldest, you speak first.

GONERIL

Sir, I love you more than words can express, more dearly than eyesight, space, and liberty, beyond all wealth, no matter how valuable or precious. I love you as much as life itself, and I love you with all my grace, health, beauty, and honor, as much as any daughter ever loved, or any father ever received. My love is so great that it makes my voice weak and my words fail. I love you beyond any comparison I could ever make.

CORDELIA

[To herself] What will I do when it's my turn to speak? I can only love, and be silent.

LEAR

[To GONERIL] I now give you all this land, from this line to that one, containing dark forests, fertile plains, bountiful rivers, and wide meadows. This land will forever belong to you and Albany's descendants. Now what does my second daughter, my dear Regan, Cornwall's wife, have to say? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made of the same materials as my sister, and I consider myself her equal in my love for you. Truly, she has described my feelings for you exactly—but she fell a little short. I reject any joy whatsoever except my love for you, which is everything I need in life, and I find that the only thing that makes me truly happy is your dear Highness's love.

CORDELIA

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

LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,
No less in space, validity, and pleasure
Than that conferred on Goneril.— But now, our joy,
85 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.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

90 Nothing?

CORDELIA

Nothing.

LEAR

How? Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
95 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,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
100 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
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
105 Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

LEAR

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, good my lord.

LEAR

110 So young and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

LEAR

Let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower.
For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
115 By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be—
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity, and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
120 Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved

CORDELIA

[To herself] And now it's poor Cordelia's turn! And yet I'm
not poor at all, since I know my love is weightier and more
sincere than my words.

LEAR

[To REGAN] To you and your heirs I now give this large third
of my fair kingdom, which is no less in area, value, or beauty
than the land I gave to Goneril. But now for Cordelia, the joy
of my life—though the youngest of my daughters—who has
been courted so seriously by the rulers of fertile France and
Burgundy. What can you tell me that will earn a larger
portion of my kingdom than your sisters?

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing?

CORDELIA

Nothing.

LEAR

What is this? "Nothing" will earn you nothing. Speak again.

CORDELIA

I am unlucky, for I can't put my heart's emotions into
words. I love your Majesty as a daughter should love her
father, no more and no less.

LEAR

What is this, Cordelia? Fix your speech a little, or you may
damage your future.

CORDELIA

My good lord, you fathered me, raised me, and loved me. In
return, I am dutiful to you, as I should be. I obey you, love
you, and honor you. Why do my sisters have husbands if
they claim that they love only you? I hope that when I get
married, my husband will take half of my love, and half of
my care and sense of duty. Surely I'll never get married like
my sisters are married—loving only their father.

LEAR

But do you really mean this?

CORDELIA

Yes, my good lord.



LEAR


So young and so heartless?


CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and honest.

LEAR

Then this is how it will be: your truth will be your only
inheritance. For now I swear by the holy light of the sun, the
mysteries of witchcraft  and the night, and by all the stars
whose movements control our lives—I hereby disown you
as my daughter. I give up all my duties as a father and
dissolve all family ties between us. From now on you will be
a stranger to me. Even a foreign barbarian  who eats his
own children will be as close to my heart, pitied, and
helped during difficult times as you were, my former
daughter.

 In the original text, King Lear refers to Hecate, who was the ancient Greek goddess of the dark, and often associated with witchcraft.

 We see Lear in the original text referring to the Scythians—an ancient Near Eastern people whom the Greek historians considered barbarous.

As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT

125 Good my liege—

LEAR

Peace, Kent.

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.

I loved her most and thought to set my rest

130 On her kind nursery. [*To CORDELIA*] Hence, and avoid my sight!—

So be my grave my peace as here I give

Her father's heart from her.— Call France. Who stirs?

Call Burgundy.—

Exeunt several attendants

Cornwall and Albany,

135 With my two daughters' dowers digest this third.

Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.

I do invest you jointly with my power,

Preeminence, and all the large effects

That troop with majesty. Ourselves, by monthly course,

140 With reservation of an hundred knights

By you to be sustained, shall our abode

Make with you by due turns. Only shall we retain

The name, and all th' additions to a king.

The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,

145 Belovèd sons, be yours; which to confirm,

This coronet part between you.

[*Gives CORNWALL and ALBANY the coronet*]

KENT

Royal Lear,

Whom I have ever honored as my king,

150 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.

KENT

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade

The region of my heart. Be Kent unmannerly

155 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 bound

When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state,

And in thy best consideration check

160 This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment,

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,

Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound

Reverbs no hollowness.

LEAR

Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT

165 My life I never held but as a pawn

To wage against thy enemies, nor fear to lose it,

Thy safety being motive.

LEAR

Out of my sight!

KENT

See better, Lear, and let me still remain

170 The true blank of thine eye.

KENT

But your Majesty—

LEAR

Quiet, Kent. Don't come between the dragon and its anger. I

loved Cordelia most of all, and had hoped to spend my old

age in her loving care.

[*To CORDELIA*] Now go away, and get out of my sight! I'll

only have peace when I'm dead, now that I've decided to

stop loving her.

[*To his servants*] Call the King of France. Will someone go?

Call the Duke of Burgundy.

Several attendants exit.

Cornwall and Albany, you divide Cornelia's third of my

kingdom between you. Let her marry her pride, which she

calls "honesty." I now give the two of you all my power,

privileges, and the riches that come with kingship. For

myself I will keep an entourage of a hundred knights, and I

will live with one of you one month, and the other the next

month. I'll keep the title of king and its accompanying

honors, but everything else—the power, responsibility, and

income—is now yours, my beloved sons-in-law. To confirm

this, take this crown and share it between you. [*He gives*

CORNWALL and ALBANY the crown]

KENT

Royal Lear, I've always honored you as my king, loved you

as my father, followed you as my master, and thanked you

as my benefactor in my prayers—

LEAR

I've already bent my bow and taken aim. Get out of the way

of the arrow.

KENT

Let it strike me, no matter what, even if the arrow strikes my

heart. Kent must be rude when Lear is acting madly. What

are you doing, old man? Do you think that loyal men will be

afraid to speak when a king gives in to flattery? If I consider

myself honorable, then I'm obligated to speak bluntly when

majesty turns to foolishness. Use your best judgment and

rethink this rash, horrible decision. I swear on my life that

your youngest daughter doesn't love you the least—just

because her words don't echo hollowly, it doesn't mean her

heart is unloving.

LEAR

Kent, if you value your life, say nothing more.

KENT

I've never valued my life except as a tool you could use

against your enemies. I don't fear to lose my life if it will

help preserve your safety.

LEAR

Get out of my sight!

KENT

Lear, if it will help you see better, let me stay here and

always be the target of your angry looks.

LEAR

Now, by Apollo—

KENT

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

LEAR

O vassal! Miscreant!

ALBANY, CORNWALL

175 Dear sir, forbear!

KENT

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

LEAR

180 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,
185 Our potency made good, take thy reward:
Five days we do allot thee for provision
To shield thee from diseases of the world.
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom. If on the next day following
190 Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

KENT

Why, fare thee well, King. Sith thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.
195 [To CORDELIA]
The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
That justly think'st and hast most rightly said!
[To REGAN and GONERIL]
And your large speeches may your deeds approve,
200 That good effects may spring from words of love.—
Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu.
He'll shape his old course in a country new.

Exit KENT

Flourish. Enter GLOUCESTER with the King of FRANCE, the Duke of BURGUNDY, and attendants

GLOUCESTER

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

LEAR

My lord of Burgundy.
205 We first address towards 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,
210 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.

215

LEAR

Now, I swear by Apollo —

KENT

You swear by Apollo, King? Now you're taking the names of
the gods in vain.

LEAR

You peasant! Villain!


ALBANY, CORNWALL

Dear sir, please stop!

KENT

Go ahead, kill your doctor and pay the medical bill to your
foul disease. Take back your gift to Albany and Cornwall, or
as long as I can make a fuss, I'll keep telling you that you've
done an evil thing.

LEAR

Listen to me, you traitor! If you still show me allegiance as
my subject, hear me. You've tried to make me break my
promise to Cornwall and Albany, and I've never broken a
promise yet. You tried to overturn my sentence of judgment
on Cordelia, and neither my personality nor my role as king
can accept such disrespect of power. To prove my authority,
here is the reward for your actions: you have five days to
gather whatever you need to survive the misfortunes of the
world. And on the sixth day you must turn your hated back
on my kingdom. If your banished self is found here after
that day, you will be immediately killed. Now go away! I
swear by Jupiter  I'll never take back what I've promised
to do.

KENT

Well, farewell then, King. Since this is how you insist on
acting, freedom has left this kingdom and been replaced by
banishment.

[To CORDELIA] Lady, may the gods shelter you, for you've
thought with justice and spoken correctly.

[To REGAN and GONERIL] And may your actions live up to
your grand words, so that we can see good deeds spring
from words of love. And so Kent bids you all farewell, you
princes. He'll go be his same old self in a new country.


KENT exits.

*Trumpets play. GLOUCESTER, the King of FRANCE, the Duke
of BURGUNDY, and attendants enter.*

GLOUCESTER

The rulers of France and Burgundy are here, my noble lord.


LEAR


My lord of Burgundy, I'll address you first. You've been a
rival to this king in pursuing my daughter. What is the least
amount you will accept as her dowry  before you give up
seeking her love?


BURGUNDY


Your most royal Majesty, I want nothing more than what
your Highness has already offered, and I know you won't
offer less than that.


LEAR

Noble Burgundy, when my love for Cordelia was great, I
considered her worth to be great too. But now her price has
fallen. There she is, sir. If there's anything your Grace  like

 Apollo was the ancient Greek god of the sun, also associated with poetry and medicine, among other things.

 Jupiter was the king of the gods in ancient Roman mythology.

 In Shakespeare's time, a dowry was the money or property that a wife brought to her husband upon their marriage. This was often provided by the wife's father.

 "Your Grace" is a term used to address royalty and other high-

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.

LEAR

- 220 Sir, will you, with those infirmities she owes—
Unfriended, new adopted to our hate,
Dowered with our curse and strangled with our oath—
Take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY

- Pardon me, royal sir.
225 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.
[To FRANCE] For you, great King,
I would not from your love make such a stray
230 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,
235 That she that even but now was your best object—
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
Most best, most dearest— should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle
So many folds of favor. Sure, her offense
240 Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it (or your fore-vouched affection
Fall into taint), which to believe of her
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Could 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,
I'll do 't before I speak— that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
250 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:
A still-soliciting eye and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
255 Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR

Go to, go to. Better thou
Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me
better.

FRANCE

- Is it no more but this—a tardiness in nature
260 Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do?— My lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stands
Aloof from th' entire point. Will you have her?
265 She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY

[To LEAR] Royal King,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

about that small, worthless creature, who is now
inseparable from my anger, then there she is—she's yours.

*ranking people. It is used much like
"your Majesty" or "your Highness."*

BURGUNDY

I don't know what to say.

LEAR

Sir, now that you know her flaws—that she is friendless and
just now hated by her father, and that her only dowry is my
curse—will you take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY

Forgive me, royal sir. It's impossible to choose in such a
situation.

LEAR

Then leave her, sir, for I swear to God that I've described to
you all the value she has.

[To FRANCE] And you, great King: I would never want to
alienate you by making you marry someone I hate. So
please look elsewhere for a wife and forget this worthless
girl, who can barely be called human.

FRANCE

This is very strange. How could Cordelia—who until just
now was your favorite, the object of all your praise, your
comfort in your old age, and your best and dearest—have
done something so monstrous that she suddenly stripped
away the many layers of your love and favor? Surely she
must have committed an atrocious crime to make your
formerly strong affection for her turn rotten. But it would
take a miracle to make me believe that she could do
something like that.

CORDELIA

[To LEAR] Please, your Majesty, I lack the glib art of flattery
and empty words. When I want to do something, I just do it
instead of talking about it. So let it be known that it wasn't
because I committed an act of murder, lust, or dishonor
that I lost your love and favor. It was because I lack a
flattering tongue and a greedy eye. I'm a richer person even
without these things. And I'm glad that I don't have them,
although lacking them has lost me your love.

LEAR

Enough, go away. It would've been better for you to have
never been born than to have displeased me like you did.

FRANCE

Is that all? You're banishing her because she has a quiet
nature that makes her act without telling the world about
her actions? My lord of Burgundy, what do you have to say
to the lady? Love is not love when it mingles with irrelevant
matters. Will you marry her? She is a valuable dowry in and
of herself.

BURGUNDY

[To LEAR] Royal king, if you'll only give me the dowry that
you offered me originally, then I'll marry Cordelia right
away and make her the Duchess of Burgundy.

LEAR

270 Nothing. I have sworn. I am firm.

BURGUNDY

[To CORDELIA] I am sorry then. You have so lost a father

That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA

Peace be with Burgundy.

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

FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised!

280 Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st
neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect.—
Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
285 Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.—
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

LEAR

290 Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. [To CORDELIA] Therefore be
gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.—
295 Come, noble Burgundy.

Flourish

Exeunt all but FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA

FRANCE

Bid farewell to your sisters.

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

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

305 Prescribe not us our duty.

GONERIL

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

CORDELIA

310 Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,
Who covers faults at last with shame derides.
Well may you prosper.

FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

Exeunt FRANCE and CORDELIA

LEAR

I'll give nothing. I have sworn. I'll stand firm.

BURGUNDY

[To CORDELIA] I am sorry then. In losing the king as a father,
you've also lost me as a husband.

CORDELIA

Peace be with you, Burgundy. Since your real love is money,
I won't be your wife.

FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia—in being poor you have become most rich;
in being abandoned you are valuable; and in being hated
you are loved! I accept you and your virtues right away, if
it's legal to pick up and keep something that has been cast
away by another man. Gods, gods! It's strange that in
treating you so coldly, they've fanned the flames of my love
and made me respect you as well. King, your daughter
without a dowry, whom you've rejected and thrown to me
by chance, will now become the Queen of France and of my
heart. No duke of watered-down Burgundy could buy this
priceless, precious girl from me. Cordelia, bid them
farewell, even though they've been unkind to you. You've
lost your life here to find a better life elsewhere.

LEAR

You can take her, King of France. Let her be your wife, for
she's no daughter of mine, and I'll never see that face of
hers again.

[To CORDELIA] So go away, and leave without any love or
blessing from me. Come, noble Burgundy.

Trumpets play.

*Everyone except the King of FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and
CORDELIA exits.*

FRANCE

Say goodbye to your sisters.

CORDELIA

Sisters, you jewels of our father's love, I leave you now with
tears in my eyes. I know what you really are, but as a sister I
am reluctant to criticize your faults and call them by their
true names. Love our father and take care of him. I leave
him to you who have claimed to love him so dearly. But, oh,
I wish I were still in his favor, so I could recommend him to
better caretakers. So farewell to you both.

REGAN

Don't tell us what our duty is.

GONERIL

You should focus on pleasing your lord and husband, who
has accepted you out of charity. You have failed to be
obedient to our father, and you deserve to lose the love that
you yourself have lacked.

CORDELIA

Time will reveal what you're hiding under your cunning
flattery. Those who cover their faults always end up being
shamed by them. May you have prosperous lives.

FRANCE

Come along, my fair Cordelia.

The King of FRANCE and CORDELIA exit.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

GONERIL

325 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-engrafted condition, but
therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and
choleric years bring with them.

REGAN

330 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's sit together. If our
father carry authority with such dispositions as he
bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us.

REGAN

335 We shall further think on 't.

GONERIL

We must do something, and i' th' heat.

Exeunt

GONERIL

Sister, I have much to say about things that concern us
both. I think our father will leave tonight.

REGAN

Certainly, and he'll go to stay with you. Next month he'll
stay with us.

GONERIL

I know you see how moody and fickle he's gotten in his old
age, as we've both been observing him so closely. He
always loved our sister the most, and his poor judgment in
banishing her now seems obvious.

REGAN

It's the sickness of his old age. But even when he was
younger, he never understood himself very well.

GONERIL

Even in the prime of his life he was impulsive. Now that he's
old, we must deal not only with his deeply-rooted bad
habits, but also with the unpredictable bad temper that
comes with old age and senility.

REGAN

We're likely to see more unpredictable outbursts from him,
like his banishment of Kent.

GONERIL

There is still going to be a farewell ceremony between the
King of France and our father. Please, let's sit together and
come up with a plan. If our father continues to wield his
authority in such a fickle way, then his recent surrender to
his passions will only hurt us.

REGAN

We must think more about it.

GONERIL

We have to do something, and should strike while the iron
is hot.

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter EDMUND the bastard, with a letter

EDMUND


Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me
5 For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why "bastard?" Wherefore "base?"
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
10 With "base," with "baseness," "bastardy," "base,"
"base"—
Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
More composition and fierce quality

Shakescleare Translation

EDMUND  enters with a letter.

EDMUND

You, Nature, are my goddess, and I only serve the laws of
nature. So why should I put up with the sick injustice of
man-made social rules, which deprive me of rights just
because I was born some twelve or fourteen months after
my brother? Why call me a "bastard?" Why is a bastard
inherently "worthless" when I'm as sound in my body and
my mind as any legitimate child? Why do they call us
"worthless," with "worthlessness," "bastard," "worthless,"
"worthless?" We bastards were at least conceived in a
moment of passionate, stealthy lust, and so we have a
stronger and fiercer nature than those shallow fools who
were conceived in a dull, stale, tired marriage bed, where
half-asleep couples churn out whole tribes of children. Well

 The original text refers to Edmund
as "the bastard," highlighting the fact
that he is the Earl of Gloucester's
illegitimate son.

15 Than doth within a dull, stale, tirèd bed
Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops
Got 'tween a sleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate.— Fine word, "legitimate!"—
20 Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Enter GLOUCESTER. EDMUND looks over his letter

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

[pocketing the letter] So please your lordship, none.

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

30 I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What paper were you reading?

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

I beseech you, sir, pardon me. It is a letter from my
brother that I have not all o'er-read. And for so much
40 as I have perused, I find it not fit for 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.

GLOUCESTER

[taking the letter] Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

[reads] "This policy and reverence of age makes the
world bitter to the best of our times, keeps our
fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I
50 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
55 beloved of your brother,

then, legitimate brother Edgar, I must have your land. Our
father loves me just as much as he loves his legitimate son.
What a fine word, "legitimate!" Well, my legitimate brother,
if this letter succeeds and my plan goes well, Edmund the
worthless will triumph over Edgar the legitimate. I will
grow, I will prosper. Now, gods, stand up for the bastards!

GLOUCESTER enters. EDMUND looks over his letter.

GLOUCESTER

Has Kent really been banished like this? And the King of
France has gone away angry? And King Lear has left tonight,
having given up all his power except for some money and
his title? All this done on the spur of the moment? Edmund,
what's going on? What's the news?

EDMUND

[Slipping the letter into his pocket] There is no news, my
lord.

GLOUCESTER

Why are you being so secretive about that letter?

EDMUND

I don't have any news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What's that letter you were reading?

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord

GLOUCESTER

No? Why did you look so terrified and stuff it in your pocket
then? If it's nothing, then there's no need to hide it. Let's
see it. Come on, if it's nothing, I won't need my glasses to
read it.

EDMUND

Please sir, forgive me. It's a letter from my brother that I
haven't finished reading yet. And, judging by what I have
read, it's not fit for you to look over.

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND

I see that I'll offend you whether I keep it or give it to you.
The only offensive thing is the content of the letter, as far as
I can understand it.

GLOUCESTER

[Taking the letter] Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND

I hope, for my brother's sake, that he wrote this just to test
my virtue.

GLOUCESTER

[Reading] "The craftiness of old men and society's custom
of treating them with reverence makes life bitter for those
of us in the prime of our lives, and keeps us from our
inheritance until we're too old to enjoy it. I begin to see a
kind of useless, foolish slavery in the oppressive power of
the elderly—and they only have this power because we
allow them to have it. Come visit me, so I can speak more
about this. If our father should happen to go to his eternal
rest, then you would enjoy half of his wealth forever, and

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 this to you? Who brought it?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

It is his.

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

Hath he never heretofore sounded you in this business?

EDMUND

Never, my lord. But I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age and fathers declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

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

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.

GLOUCESTER

He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND

Nor is not, sure.

live as my beloved brother.

Edgar"

Hmm, is this a conspiracy? "If our father should happen to go to his eternal rest, then you would enjoy half of his wealth"—my son Edgar said this? How could he have a hand that would write such things, and a heart and brain to think them up? When did this letter come to you? Who brought it?

EDMUND

It wasn't brought to me, my lord. That's what's cunning about it. I found it. It had been thrown through the window of my room.

GLOUCESTER

And you're sure this is your brother's handwriting?

EDMUND

My lord, if the letter's contents were good, I would swear that it was his handwriting. But because of what the letter *does* say, I would rather believe otherwise.

GLOUCESTER

It is his.

EDMUND

It is his handwriting, my lord. But I hope he didn't really mean what he said.

GLOUCESTER

Has he ever spoken to you about anything like this before?

EDMUND

Never, my lord. But I've often heard him argue that when sons reach full maturity and their fathers grow old and feeble, the son should take care of the father, and manage his money.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, the villain, the villain! That's the same opinion he expresses in the letter! The hateful villain! The unnatural, hateful, beastly villain—worse than a beast! Go, sirrah, and find him. I'll arrest him. The abominable villain! Where is he?

EDMUND

I don't know, my lord. If you can, you should restrain your anger against my brother until you can find out exactly what his intentions are. That would be a safer course. For if you immediately act violently against him and are mistaken about his purpose, then it would damage your own honor and badly hurt his loyalty to you. I would dare to bet my life that he wrote this letter only to test my love for you, and he didn't actually mean anything dangerous.

GLOUCESTER

Do you think so?

EDMUND


If it would be acceptable to your sense of honor, I can hide you somewhere where you can hear us talking about the letter, and then you'll have the proof of your own hearing about his intentions. We can do it this very evening.

GLOUCESTER

He can't be such a monster—

EDMUND

I'm sure he isn't.

 Gloucester uses the term "sirrah" in the original text. The term of address is a variant of "sir," and demonstrates the speaker's superior social rank or overall authority.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide, in cities mutinies, in countries discord, in palaces treason, and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction—there's son against father. The king falls from bias of nature—there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund. It shall lose thee nothing. Do it carefully.—And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished, his offense honesty! 'Tis strange, strange.

Exit GLOUCESTER

EDMUND

This is the excellent foppery of the world that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behavior—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting-on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. *Fut*, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. *Edgar*—

Enter EDGAR

and pat on 's cue he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. Oh, these eclipses do portend these divisions! *Fa, sol, la, mi*.

EDGAR

How now, brother Edmund? What serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

Do you busy yourself about that?

EDMUND

I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily — as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent, death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient

GLOUCESTER

—to his own father, who so tenderly and completely loves him. By heaven and earth! Edmund, go find him, and gain his confidence for my sake, please. Do whatever needs to be done, and use your own common sense. I would give up anything to relieve my doubts.

EDMUND

Sir, I'll find him immediately, and manage the business in the best way I can. Then I'll tell you everything.

GLOUCESTER

These recent eclipses of the sun and moon are evil omens for us. Though science can explain how they happen, they are still omens, and bad things always follow eclipses. Love loses its passion, friendships fall apart, brothers become enemies, riots break out in cities, civil wars begin, treason infiltrates palaces, and the bond between fathers and sons is broken. This villainous son of mine fits the prediction of the bad omens—that's son against father. The king goes against his former nature—that's father against child. The best part of our age has passed. Schemes, emptiness, treachery, and chaos will follow us loudly to our graves. Find out the truth about this villain, Edmund. It won't damage your reputation. Just do it carefully. And the noble and true-hearted Kent has been banished, for the crime of being honest! It's strange, strange.

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDMUND

This is the foolishness of the world, that when we are having bad luck—often because of our own excesses—we lay the blame for our disasters on the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if they forced us to be villains! As if we were fools because of the heavens' decree, or scoundrels, thieves, and traitors because of the influence of the planets, or drunkards, liars, and adulterers because the planets forced us to act that way. As if all our evil was the result of some divine compulsion! This is a good technique for avoiding blame, a trick by which a lustful man can blame his lechery on a star! My father slept with my mother under the influence of Draco, and I was born under the Big Dipper, so it naturally follows that I have a rude and lustful nature. *Good God!* I would have turned out the way I am even if the most virginal star in the sky had twinkled over my conception. *Edgar*—

EDGAR enters.

And here he comes, right on cue, like the neat ending of a clichéd comedy. My role is to be falsely sad, and sigh like a crazy beggar. Oh, these eclipses are bad omens of such disasters! *Fa, sol, la, mi*.

EDGAR

How's it going, brother Edmund? What are you thinking about so seriously?

EDMUND


Brother, I am thinking of a prediction I read about the other day. An astrologer wrote about what will follow these eclipses.


EDGAR


Are you really wasting your time with such things?

EDMUND

I promise you, the predictions he made keep getting worse—things like divisions among children and parents, death, famine, the breaking of old friendships, political

 In Shakespeare's time, "fut" or "sfoot"—referring to Christ's foot—was a strong oath.

 In the original text, Edmund refers to Bedlam, a London hospital for the mentally ill that was founded in 1330.

 These are syllables assigned to musical notes to practice pitch in singing.

amities, divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles, needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR

150 How long have you been a sectary astronomical?

EDMUND

Come, come. When saw you my father last?

EDGAR

Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND

Spake you with him?

EDGAR

Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

None at all.

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND

165 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 ye, go. There's my key. If you do stir abroad, go armed.

EDGAR

Armed, brother?

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

Shall I hear from you anon?

EDMUND

175 I do serve you in this business.

Exit EDGAR

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

Exit

fighting, treason and threats against kings and nobles, baseless suspicions, the banishment of friends, the desertion of troops, adultery, and I don't even know what else.

EDGAR

How long have you been a follower of astrology?

EDMUND

Come now. When did you last see my father?

EDGAR

Why, just last night.

EDMUND

Did you speak with him?

EDGAR

Yes, we spent two hours together.

EDMUND

Did you part on good terms? Did he seem displeased with you, in either his words or in his expression?

EDGAR

Not at all.

EDMUND

Try to remember how you might have offended him. And let me advise you to avoid his presence until he has some time to let off his rage. At this moment his anger is so hot that even physically injuring you would hardly cool it down.

EDGAR

Some villain has told a malicious lie about me.

EDMUND

That's what I'm afraid of. But please, keep control of yourself until his rage slows down a little. And now come with me to my rooms, and at the right moment I'll bring you to hear my father speak. Please, go. There's my key. If you do go outside, arm yourself.

EDGAR

Arm myself, brother?

EDMUND

Brother, I'm giving you the best advice I can. Arm yourself. I would be lying if I said that our father had good intentions towards you. I've told you what I've seen and heard—but only vaguely. I've toned down the horrible reality. Now please, go.

EDGAR

Will I hear from you soon?

EDMUND

Everything I'm doing in this business is to help you.

EDGAR exits.

A gullible father, and a noble brother, whose nature is so innocent of evil that he suspects no evil. My plots will easily work on his foolish honesty. I see what I must do. If I can't have lands by birthright, then let me have them through cunning. Everything that I can shape to fit my own purposes is good for me.

He exits.

Act 1, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter GONERIL and her steward OSWALD

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

OSWALD

He's coming, madam. I hear him.

Hunting horns within

GONERIL

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellow servants. I'll have it come to
15 question.
If he distaste it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine I know in that are one,
Not to be overruled. Idle old man
That still would manage those authorities
20 That he hath given away! Now by my life,
Old fools are babes again and must be used
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused.
Remember what I have said.

OSWALD

Very well, madam.

GONERIL

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

Exeunt severally

Shakescleare Translation

GONERIL enters with her steward, OSWALD.

GONERIL

Did my father strike one of my servants for scolding his
fool?

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

He offends me constantly, day and night. Every hour he has
an outburst, causing some new offense that makes
everyone start fighting. I won't endure it anymore. His
knights are getting unruly, and he himself criticizes us
about every little thing. When he returns from hunting, I
won't speak to him. Say that I'm sick. And if you do less
than you used to do to serve the king, you'll be doing the
right thing. I'll take the blame for it.

OSWALD

He's coming, madam. I hear him.

Hunting horns play offstage.

GONERIL

Now be as tired and neglectful as you desire, you and your
fellow servants. I want to confront him about it. If he
dislikes it, let him go to my sister. I know that she and I are
of the same mind about this matter, and both of us will
stand up to him. That foolish old man, who thinks he can
still wield the power he's given away! I swear by my life, old
fools become like babies again, and you have to discipline
them instead of flatter them--especially when they're
clearly misguided. Remember what I've said.

OSWALD

Very well, madam.

GONERIL

And be unfriendly to his knights as well. Don't worry about
what might happen. Tell your fellow servants about this. I
want confrontations to come from this, so I can scold my
father. I'll write to my sister right away and tell her to do
exactly as I do. Now go, prepare for dinner.

They exit in opposite directions.

Act 1, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter KENT disguised

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,
5 If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned,
So may it come thy master, whom thou lovest,
Shall find thee full of labors.

Shakescleare Translation

KENT (in disguise) enters.

KENT

If I can disguise my voice as well as I've disguised my
appearance, then I can carry out the plan for which I erased
my true identity. Now, banished Kent, you can serve the
master who condemned you. Hopefully it will work out so
that my master, whom I love, will find me to be an excellent
worker.

Horns within. Enter LEAR with attendant knights

LEAR

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

Exit attendant

[To KENT] How now, what art thou?

KENT

10 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
15 little, to fear judgment, to fight when I cannot choose, and to eat no fish.

LEAR

What art thou?

KENT

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

LEAR

If thou beest as poor for a subject as he's for a king,
20 thou'rt poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT

Service.

LEAR

Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT

You.

LEAR

Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT

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

LEAR

What's that?

KENT

Authority.

LEAR

What services canst thou do?

KENT

30 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.

LEAR

How old art thou?

KENT

35 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.

Horns play offstage. LEAR enters with his attendant knights.

LEAR

Don't make me wait even a second for dinner. Go get it ready.

An attendant exits.

[To KENT] Well now, who are you?

KENT

A man, sir.

LEAR

What's your profession? What do you want with me?

KENT

I swear that I am just what I seem to be. I'll faithfully serve a master who puts his trust in me, I'll love those who are honorable, and I'll associate with those who are wise and don't say much. I fear God, fight when I have to, and don't eat fish.

LEAR

Who are you?

KENT

I'm a very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the king.

LEAR

If you're as poor a subject as he is a king, then you're certainly poor enough. What do you want?

KENT

To serve.

LEAR

Whom do you want to serve?

KENT

You.

LEAR

Do you know me, fellow?

KENT

No, sir. But there's something in your face that makes me want to call you master.

LEAR

What's that in my face?

KENT

Authority.

LEAR

What services can you perform?

KENT

I can keep secrets, ride a horse, run, ruin an elaborate story by trying to tell it, and deliver a plain message bluntly. I'm qualified for anything that ordinary men can do. And the best part of me is that I'm hardworking.

LEAR

How old are you?

KENT

Sir, I'm not young enough to fall in love with a woman because she sings. But I'm not old enough to dote on a woman for any reason. I'm forty-eight years old.

LEAR

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

Exit attendant

Enter OSWALD the steward

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

OSWALD

So please you—

Exit OSWALD

LEAR

What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back.

Exit FIRST KNIGHT

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

Enter FIRST KNIGHT

How now? Where's that mongrel?

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

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

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

He would not?

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

Ha! Sayest thou so?

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

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

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

Follow me. You'll serve me. If I still like you after dinner,
then I'll keep you around.

[To his attendants] Dinner, hey, dinner! Where's my fool?

[To KENT] You, go and call my fool to come here.

An attendant exits.

OSWALD enters.

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

OSWALD

Excuse me, I'm busy—

OSWALD exits.

LEAR

What did that fellow say? Call the blockhead back in here.

The FIRST KNIGHT exits.

Hey, where's my fool? It seems like the whole world's
asleep.

The FIRST KNIGHT enters.

What's going on? Where's that mangy dog of a steward?

FIRST KNIGHT

My lord, he says that your daughter isn't feeling well.

LEAR

Why didn't that rascal come back to me when I called him?

FIRST KNIGHT

Sir, he answered me bluntly and said that he didn't want to.

LEAR

He didn't want to?

FIRST KNIGHT

My lord, I don't know what's the matter, but it seems to me
that your Highness isn't being given the love and respect
that you're used to. The duke himself, the servants, and
your daughter all seem to share in this loss of respect
towards you.

LEAR

What! Do you think so?

FIRST KNIGHT

My lord, I beg your pardon if I'm mistaken—but I can't be
silent when I think your Highness is being wronged.

LEAR

No, you're just reminding me of what I've noticed as well.
I've observed a lazy neglectfulness in my subjects lately.
But I had blamed it on my own sensitivity, and didn't
suspect that they were being deliberately disrespectful. I'll
look into it further. But where's my fool? I haven't seen him
these last two days.

FIRST KNIGHT

Sir, ever since my lady Cordelia has gone away to France,
the fool has been sad and solitary.

LEAR

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

Exit an attendant

Go you, call hither my fool.

Exit another attendant

Enter OSWALD

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

OSWALD

My lady's father.

LEAR

75 "My lady's father?" My lord's knave, your whoreson dog! You slave, you cur!

OSWALD

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

LEAR

Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?
[*He strikes OSWALD*]

OSWALD

80 I'll not be stricken, my lord.

KENT

[*tripping OSWALD*]
Nor tripped neither, you base football player.

LEAR

[*To KENT*] I thank thee, fellow. Thou servest me, and I'll love thee.

KENT

85 [*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.

Exit OSWALD

LEAR

Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee.

Enter FOOL

90 [*gives KENT money*] There's earnest of thy service.

FOOL

Let me hire him too.—Here's my coxcomb.
[*offers KENT his cap*]

LEAR

How now, my pretty knave? How dost thou?

FOOL

[*To KENT*] Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

LEAR

95 Why, Fool?

LEAR

No more talking about that. I've noticed it too. Go and tell my daughter Goneril that I want to speak with her.

An attendant exits.

And you, go call my fool here.

Another attendant exits.

OSWALD enters.

Oh you, sir, you, come here, sir. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD

My lady's father.

LEAR

"My lady's father?" You wretch, you bastard dog! You rogue, you dog!

OSWALD

I'm not any of those things, my lord. I beg your pardon.


LEAR


Do you dare make a face at me, you villain? [*He strikes OSWALD*]

OSWALD

I will not be struck, my lord.

KENT

[*Tripping OSWALD*] Or tripped, you filthy [football player](#) .

 Soccer—or "football" in the original text—was considered to be a lower-class game in Shakespeare's time.

LEAR

[*To KENT*] I thank you, fellow. If you serve me like that, I'll love you.

KENT

[*To OSWALD*] Come on, sir. Get up and go away! I'll teach you to respect your superiors. Away, away. If you want to be tripped again, then stay here. If not, go on. Do you have any common sense? Then go.

OSWALD exits.

LEAR

Now, my friendly servant, I thank you.

The FOOL enters.

[*Giving KENT money*] There's a down payment for your service.

FOOL

Let me hire him too. Here's my fool's cap. [*He offers KENT his cap*]

LEAR

How are you, my clever fool? How are you doing?

FOOL

[*To KENT*] Sir, you had better take my cap.

LEAR

Why, Fool?

FOOL

Why? For taking one's part that's out of favor. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow has banished two on 's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will. If thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.— How now, nuncle? Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters.

LEAR

Why, my boy?

FOOL

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

LEAR

Take heed, sirrah—the whip.

FOOL

Truth's a dog that must to kennel. He must be whipped out, when 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.

FOOL

Mark it, nuncle.
Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest,
Leave thy drink and thy whore
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score.

KENT

This is nothing, Fool.

FOOL

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

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.

FOOL

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

FOOL

Why? For taking the side of this unpopular king. If you can't suck up to whoever has power, then you'll soon suffer for it. Here, take my fool's cap. Why, this fellow here has banished two of his daughters, and gave the third a blessing without meaning to [do so](#). If you're going to follow *him*, you're a fool, and so you should wear my cap.

[To LEAR] How's it going, uncle [do you](#)? I wish I had two caps and two daughters.

LEAR

Why, my boy?

FOOL

If I gave them everything I owned, then I'd keep the caps for myself, to show what a fool I was. Here's my fool's cap. Beg your daughters for another one.

LEAR

Be careful, boy—remember you can be whipped.

FOOL

Truth's a dog that must go to his kennel. He must be whipped and driven out of the house, while Lady Bitch can stay by the fire, stinking with lies.

LEAR

Constantly irritating me!

FOOL

Sir, I'll teach you a speech.

LEAR

Do.

FOOL

Listen closely, uncle. Have more than you show, speak less than you know, lend less than you own, ride more than you walk. Don't believe everything you hear. Don't bet everything on a throw of the dice. Leave your drink and your whore, and stay indoors, and you'll surely prosper.

KENT

That's nothing, Fool.

FOOL

Then it's like the speech of an unpaid lawyer—you gave me nothing for it, and you get what you pay for. Can't you make some use out of nothing, uncle?

LEAR

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

FOOL

[To KENT] Please, remind him that no land means no income. He won't believe a fool.

LEAR

What a bitter fool.

FOOL

My boy, do you know the difference between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?

[do so](#) The Fool inverts how Lear has treated his daughters. He thus emphasizes how Goneril and Regan may have gained land, but aren't as blessed as Cordelia (the one who was actually banished).

[do you](#) "Nuncle" in the original text--is abbreviated form of "mine uncle"--is the Fool's familiar term of address for Lear.

LEAR

No, lad. Teach me.

FOOL

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

LEAR

Dost thou call me fool, boy?

FOOL

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

KENT

This is not altogether fool, my lord.

FOOL

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

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 clovest
155 thy crown i' th' middle, and gavest away both parts,
thou borest thy ass o' th' back o'er the dirt. Thou
hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy
golden one away. If I speak like myself in this, let him
be whipped that first finds it so.
160 *[Sings]*
Fools had ne'er less wit in a year,
For wise men are grown foppish.
They know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.

LEAR

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

FOOL

I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy
daughters thy mothers. For when thou gavest them the
rod, and put'st down thine own breeches,
[Sings]
170 *Then they for sudden joy did weep*
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep
And go the fools among.
Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy
175 fool to lie. I would fain learn to lie.

LEAR

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

FOOL

I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll
have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me
whipped for lying, and sometimes I am whipped for
180 holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than
a fool. And yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast
pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing i' th'

LEAR

No, boy. Teach me.

FOOL

Bring me the lord who advised you to give away your land,
and place him here by me. You stand in his place. The sweet
and bitter fool will instantly appear—the sweet fool in
jester's clothes here, and the bitter fool over there.

LEAR

Are you calling me a fool, boy?

FOOL

Well, you've given away all the other titles you were born
with, so you might as well keep the title of "fool."

KENT

This fool's words aren't totally foolish, my lord.

FOOL

No, truly, lords and important men won't let me be totally
foolish. If I had a monopoly on foolishness, they would
insist that I share it. And ladies too—they won't ever let me
be the biggest fool. They're always snatching away my role.
Uncle, give me an egg, and I'll give you two crowns.

LEAR

What two crowns do you mean?

FOOL

Why—after I've cut the egg in half and eaten the whites, the
yolk will be like two golden crowns. When you cut your
crown and your kingdom in two and gave away both parts,
you were carrying your donkey on your back and foolishly
reversing the order of nature. You didn't have much wit in
the bald crown of your head when you gave your golden
crown away. If anyone thinks I'm speaking nonsense like a
fool when I say this, let him be whipped.
[Singing]
Fools have had a hard year,
For wise men have grown foolish.
They don't know how to use their wits,
They can only stupidly imitate others.

LEAR

When did you become so full of songs, boy?

FOOL

I've made a habit of singing, uncle, ever since you made
your daughters into your mothers by giving them the switch
and pulling down your own pants,
[Singing]
Then they wept for sudden joy,
And I sang for sorrow,
That such a king should play a child's game
And go about with fools for company.
Uncle, please hire a schoolteacher who can teach your fool
to lie. I want to learn how to lie.

LEAR

If you lie, boy, then I'll have you whipped.

FOOL

I'm amazed at how alike you and your daughters are.
They'll have me whipped for telling the truth, you'll have
me whipped for lying, and sometimes I'm whipped for
keeping quiet too. I wish I were anything but a fool. And yet
I wouldn't want to be you, uncle. You've sliced off your wits

middle. Here comes one o' the parings.

Enter GONERIL

LEAR

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

FOOL

[To LEAR] 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.

190 *[To GONERIL]* Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue. So your face bids me, though you say nothing.
Mum, mum,
He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
Weary of all, shall want some.

195 *[indicates LEAR]* That's a shelled peascod.

GONERIL

[To LEAR] 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,
200 I had thought by making this well known unto you
To have found a safe redress, but now grow fearful
By what yourself too late have spoke and done
That you protect this course and put it on
By your allowance— which if you should, the fault
205 Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep
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

210 For you know, nuncle,
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

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

FOOL

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

LEAR

Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear.
Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
225 Are lethargied. Ha, sleeping or waking?
Sure, 'tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL

Lear's shadow.

on both sides of your brain, and left nothing in the middle.
Here comes one of the slices.

GONERIL enters.

LEAR

How are you, daughter? Why are you wearing such a frown?
It seems like you've been frowning too much lately.

FOOL

[To LEAR] You were a fine fellow back when you didn't need to care whether she was frowning or not. Now you're a zero without a digit in front of it to give it value. I'm better than you are now. I am a fool. You are nothing.

[To GONERIL] Yes, I will be quiet. That's what your face is commanding me to do, even though you don't say anything aloud. Mum, mum, he who gives away his crust and crumbs when he's weary of possessions, will soon want some back. *[Pointing at LEAR]* That's an empty pea pod right there.

GONERIL

[To LEAR] Sir, not just your fool here--who is allowed to say whatever he wants--but others in your rude entourage keep complaining, fighting, and breaking out in foul and intolerable wildness. Sir, I had thought that if I told you about this disrespectful behavior you would find a sure solution to it. But now I'm worried because of what you yourself have said and done all too recently. I'm worried that you encourage this kind of behavior by allowing it to continue. If that's the case, then your actions won't escape punishment, and there will be some kind of payment required of you for the good of the kingdom. I realize that having to punish your knights will seem shameful to you, but it's necessary in this instance.

FOOL

For you know, uncle, a sparrow raised a cuckoo in its nest for a long time, until the cuckoo grew up and the sparrow had its head bitten off by its own child. And so the candle went out, and we were all left in the dark.

LEAR

Are you my daughter?

GONERIL

Come now, sir. I wish you would use your wisdom--which I know you are well-provided with--to snap out of these fickle moods that you've been in lately, so you can return to your true self.

FOOL

Even a fool can tell when everything's upside down and the cart is pulling the horse, can't he? Whoop, sweetheart! I love you!

LEAR

Does anyone here know who I am? Why, I can't be Lear.
Does Lear walk like this? Talk like this? Where are his eyes?
Either his mind is getting weak or his senses are failing. Hey,
am I awake? Surely not. Who can tell me who I am?

FOOL

You are Lear's shadow.

LEAR

I would learn that. For by the marks
230 Of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason,
I should be false persuaded I had daughters.

FOOL

Which they will make an obedient father.

LEAR

[to GONERIL] Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL

This admiration, sir, is much o' th' savor
235 Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
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
240 That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy. Be then desired
245 By her that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train,
And the remainder that shall still depend
To be such men as may besort your age,
Which know themselves and you.

LEAR

250 Darkness and devils!
Saddle my horses. Call my train together.—
Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee.
Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL

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

Enter ALBANY

LEAR

Woe that too late repents!—
[To ALBANY] O sir, are you come?
Is it your will? Speak, sir.—Prepare my horses.

Exit attendant

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
260 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
265 That all particulars of duty know
And in the most exact regard support
The worships of their name. O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,
That, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature
270 From the fixed place, drew from heart all love,
And added to the gall! O Lear, Lear, Lear!
[strikes his head]
Beat at this gate that let thy folly in
And thy dear judgment out!—Go, go, my people.

LEAR

I want to learn who I am. The evidence given to me by my
kingly nature, my knowledge, and my reason tries to falsely
persuade me that I have daughters.

FOOL


Daughters who will turn you into an obedient father.

LEAR

[To GONERIL] What's your name, dear lady?

GONERIL

Sir, this pretended astonishment of yours seems very
similar to your other recent pranks. Please try to
understand my purpose. You are old and respected, so try
to be wise too. You're keeping a hundred knights and
squires here—men so disorderly, vulgar, and bold that our
court has become infected with their manners and now
seems like a cheap, rowdy inn. Their **gluttony** and lust
make this place feel more like a tavern or a brothel than an
honored palace. It's so shameful that it requires immediate
action. Therefore it's my desire—and if you won't do it
when I ask politely, then I'll do it myself by force—that you
reduce the number of knights in your entourage a little.
Keep the ones who are older, who suit your advanced age,
and who know their proper place—as well as yours.

 In the original text, Shakespeare alludes to Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher who emphasized the importance of pleasure.

LEAR

Darkness and devils!

[To his attendants] Saddle my horses. Call my knights
together.

[To GONERIL] I won't trouble you any more, you worthless
bastard. I still have one true daughter left.

GONERIL

You strike my servants, and your disorderly rabble of
knights treats their superiors like servants.

ALBANY enters.

LEAR

[To GONERIL] You'll regret this, but by then it'll be too late!

[To ALBANY] Oh, sir, are you here? Have you come to me?
Speak, sir.

[To an attendant] Prepare my horses.

An attendant exits.

Ingratitude is a cold-hearted devil, and it's always at its
ugliest when it appears in an ungrateful child. It's more
hideous than a sea monster!

ALBANY

Sir, please be patient.

LEAR

[To GONERIL] You hateful vulture, you lie! My knights are
men of excellent qualities and accomplishments, and they
perfectly do their duty and live up to their honorable
reputation. Oh, how ugly did Cordelia's small flaw seem to
me! And now it has tortured me and broken my body,
sucking the love from my heart and replacing it with
bitterness! Oh Lear, Lear, Lear! *[Striking himself on the
head]* Let me beat at this gate that let precious wisdom go
out and foolishness come in!

[To his attendants] Go, go, my people.

ALBANY

275 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
280 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,
285 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
290 To laughter and contempt, that she may feel—
That she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.— Away, away!

Exeunt LEAR, FOOL, KENT, FIRST KNIGHT and the other attendants

ALBANY

Now gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONERIL

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

Enter LEAR and FOOL

LEAR

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

ALBANY

300 What's the matter, sir?

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
305 Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
Th' untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out
And cast you, with the waters that you loathe,
310 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 wolfish visage. Thou shalt find
315 That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever. Thou shalt, I warrant thee.

Exit LEAR

GONERIL

Do you mark that, my lord?

ALBANY

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

GONERIL

320 Pray you, content.
Come, sire, no more.—What, Oswald, ho!

ALBANY

My lord, I'm innocent and ignorant of whatever it is that's
angered you.

LEAR

That may be true, my lord. Now hear me, Nature, dear
goddess, hear me! If you had intended for this woman to
bear children, then change your purpose for her. Make her
womb sterile, and dry it up so that no baby will ever emerge
from her hateful body and honor her. But if she must give
birth, then give her a spiteful child, so it might live to be a
perverse, unnatural torment to her. May it give her wrinkles
in her youth, and carve lines in her cheeks from so many
falling tears. Turn all her motherly care and nurturing into
mockery and hatred, so she may feel . . . so she may feel how
an ungrateful child is sharper than a serpent's tooth.

[To his attendants] Now let's leave this place!

*LEAR, the FOOL, KENT, the FIRST KNIGHT, and the other
attendant knights exit.*

ALBANY

By the gods, what caused all this?

GONERIL

Don't trouble yourself about it. Just let him be the foolish
old man that he is in his senility.

LEAR and the FOOL enter.

LEAR

What, fifty of my knights dismissed at a clap of your hands?
After only two weeks?

ALBANY

What's the matter, sir?

LEAR

I'll tell you.

*[To GONERIL] By life and death! I'm ashamed that you have
the power to upset me like this, and that these hot tears
that spring forth against my will reveal that I care enough
about you to shed them. May pain and sickness strike you!
May you feel all the incurable pains a father's curse can
inflict! If these old foolish eyes weep again because of you,
I'll pluck them out and throw them to the ground so their
wet tears can water the dirt. Has it really come to this? Has
it? Then so be it. I have another daughter, who I'm sure is
kind and hospitable. When she hears what you've done,
she'll rip up your wolfish face with her fingernails. Then
you'll find that I can again take up the power you thought I
had cast off forever. I will, I promise you.*

LEAR exits.

GONERIL

Did you hear all that, my lord?

ALBANY

Goneril, I can't be anything but biased in your favor
because of my great love for you—

GONERIL

Please, be quiet and don't worry. No more protests, sir.

[to FOOL] You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

FOOL

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

A fox when one has caught her
And such a daughter
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter.

330 So the fool follows after.

Exit FOOL

GONERIL

This man hath had good counsel—a hundred knights!
'Tis politic and safe to let him keep

At point a hundred knights, yes, that on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,

335 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,

340 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—

Enter OSWALD the steward

OSWALD

Here, madam.

GONERIL

345 How now, Oswald?

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,

350 And thereto add such reasons of your own

As may compact it more. Get you gone

And hasten your return.

Exit OSWALD

No, no, my lord,

This milky gentleness and course of yours

355 Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon

You are much more attasked 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

360 Nay, then—

[To her servant] Hey, Oswald, come here!

[To the FOOL] And you, sir, who are more a villain than a fool, run after your master.

FOOL

Uncle Lear, uncle Lear, wait and take your fool with you. A fox, when you've caught her—and such a daughter—would certainly both be slaughtered. If my fool's cap is worth trading for a noose, so the fool follows you.

The FOOL exits.

GONERIL

This man has had good advice—a hundred knights! Yes, it's safe and prudent to let him keep a hundred knights around, so that every time he has an outburst, a dream, a change of mood, a complaint, or something that upsets him, he has a hundred swords to back up his senile whims and violently force us to accept them!

[To her servant] Oswald, I say! Where is he?

ALBANY

You might be overly nervous about this.

GONERIL

It's better to be too nervous than too trusting. Let me always get rid of what frightens me, rather than risk being hurt by it. I've written to my sister and told her what he's said. If she welcomes him and his hundred knights after I've described his unwillingness to behave—

OSWALD enters.

OSWALD

Here I am, madam.

GONERIL

How are you, Oswald? Have you written that letter to my sister yet?

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

Then take some men with you and ride off to deliver it. Tell her about my specific fears, and add details of your own to back them up. Now get going, and hurry back.

OSWALD exits.

No, no, my lord, I'm not condemning your mild gentleness in dealing with my father. But—if you'll excuse me for saying so—you should be criticized much more for lacking wisdom than be praised for being misguidedly gentle.

ALBANY

I can't tell how far ahead you can see, or how deeply you can perceive. But often we break something in trying to fix it.

GONERIL

No, but then—

ALBANY

Well, well, th' event.

Exeunt

ALBANY

All right, all right. We'll see what happens.

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter LEAR, KENT disguised, and FOOL

LEAR

[to KENT, giving him letters] 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.

KENT

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

Exit KENT

FOOL

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

LEAR

10 Ay, boy.

FOOL

Then, I prithee, be merry. Thy wit shall ne'er go slipshod.

LEAR

Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL

15 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.

LEAR

Why, what canst thou tell, my boy?

FOOL

20 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?

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

25 Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

Shakescleare Translation

LEAR, The FOOL, and KENT (in disguise) enter.

LEAR

[To KENT, giving him a letter] Go ahead of me to Gloucester, and give this letter to Regan. Don't tell her anything or answer her questions about the letter. If you don't go fast enough, I'll get there before you.


KENT

My lord, I won't sleep until I've delivered your letter.

KENT exits.

FOOL

If a man's brains were in his feet, wouldn't they be in danger of chilblains?

 "Kibes"—or chilblains—are painful, itching swellings on extremities like the toes, which occur after exposure to the cold.

LEAR

Yes, boy.

FOOL

Then please cheer up. Your brains won't ever have to wear slippers. Feet with brains would never make this useless journey.

LEAR

Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL

Your other daughter will treat you kindly, you'll see. Even though she and Goneril are as similar as two crabapples, I can still tell what I can tell.

LEAR

Why, what can you tell, my boy?

FOOL

That Regan will taste just like Goneril—both of them like sour crabapples. Can you tell me why a man's nose stands in the middle of his face?

LEAR

No.

FOOL

Why, to keep his eyes separated, so he can see whatever he can't sniff out.

LEAR

I did her wrong—

FOOL

Can you tell me how an oyster makes his shell?

LEAR

No.

FOOL

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

LEAR

Why?

FOOL

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

LEAR

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

FOOL

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

LEAR

35 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.

LEAR

40 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! I would not be mad.

45 Keep me in temper. I would not be mad.

Enter a GENTLEMAN

How now? Are the horses ready?

GENTLEMAN

Ready, my lord.

LEAR

Come, boy.

*Exeunt LEAR and GENTLEMAN***FOOL**

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

*Exit***LEAR**

No.

FOOL

Me neither. But I can tell you why a snail carries its house.

LEAR

Why?

FOOL

Why, to keep himself dry. And then he can't give his house away to his daughters and leave himself without a place to go.

LEAR*[To himself]* I will forget my fatherly feelings. I was such a kind father!*[To FOOL]* Are my horses ready?**FOOL**

Your attendant asses are getting them. There's a pretty reason why the constellation Pleiades has only seven stars.

LEAR

Because it doesn't have eight?

FOOL

Yes indeed. You would make a good fool.

LEAR

I could have taken back my kingdom by force. What monstrous ingratitude!

FOOL

Uncle, if you were my fool, I'd have you beaten for getting old before your time.

LEAR

How's that?

FOOL

You shouldn't have gotten old until you'd also gotten wise.

LEAR

Oh, don't let me go crazy, not crazy, sweet God! I don't want to go crazy. Keep me sane. I don't want to go crazy.

A GENTLEMAN enters.

Well, are the horses ready?

GENTLEMAN

Ready, my lord.

LEAR

Come on, boy.

*LEAR and the GENTLEMAN exit.***FOOL**

Any girl who laughs at my departure won't be a virgin for long—not unless men are all castrated.

He exits.

Act 2, Scene 1

Shakespeare

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

5 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

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

EDMUND

Not a word.

CURAN

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

Exit CURAN

EDMUND

15 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

20 My father watches. O sir, fly this place. Intelligence is given where you are hid. You have now the good advantage of the night. Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall aught? He's coming hither—now, i' th' night, i' th' haste,
25 And Regan with him. Have you nothing said Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany? Advise yourself.

EDGAR

I am sure on 't, not a word.

EDMUND

I hear my father coming. Pardon me.
30 In cunning I must draw my sword upon you. Draw. Seem to defend yourself. Now quit you well.—
[*loudly*] Yield! Come before my father. Light, ho! Here!
[*aside to EDGAR*] Fly, brother, fly.
[*loudly*]
35 Torches, torches!
[*aside to EDGAR*] So, farewell.

Shakescleare Translation

EDMUND and CURAN enter from different directions.

EDMUND

Hello, Curan. God bless you.

CURAN

And you, sir. I've seen your father recently, and I told him that the Duke of Cornwall and the Duchess Regan will be staying here with him tonight.

EDMUND

Why is that?

CURAN

I don't know. Have you heard the news from abroad? I mean the whispered rumors, since that's all they are right now.

EDMUND

No, but please tell me. What are they?

CURAN

You haven't heard that there might be a war soon between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

EDMUND

Not at all.

CURAN

You may soon. Farewell, sir.

CURAN exits.

EDMUND

The duke will be here tonight? This is even better—in fact, it's the very best! This can be woven into my plan. My father is waiting to catch Edgar in the act of plotting against him, and I still have one risky action to take. May swift action and good fortune make me succeed! Brother, could I have a word with you? Come down, brother, I say.

EDGAR enters.

My father is looking for you. Oh, sir, flee this place. Someone has spied out your hiding place. Leave now, while you have the cover of darkness. Have you said anything criticizing the Duke of Cornwall? He's coming here—rushing here tonight, and Regan is with him. Have you said anything against the Duke of Albany, his enemy? Consider carefully.

EDGAR

I'm sure of it, not a word.

EDMUND

I hear my father coming. Pardon me. We must pretend to fight now. Draw your sword. Pretend to defend yourself. Now play your role convincingly. [*Loudly*] Give up! I'll bring you before my father. Hey, bring in some light! Here!

[*To EDGAR so that so only he can hear*] Run, brother, run.

[*Loudly*] Torches, bring torches!

[*To EDGAR, so that only he can hear*] Farewell, then.

Exit EDGAR

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion
Of my more fierce endeavor.

[cuts his own arm]

- 40 I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport.— Father, father!—
Stop, stop!—No help?

Enter GLOUCESTER and servants with torches

GLOUCESTER

Now Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

- 45 Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
To stand 's auspicious mistress—

GLOUCESTER

But where is he?

EDMUND

Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

- 50 Fled this way, sir, when by no means he could—

GLOUCESTER

Pursue him, ho! Go after.

Exeunt some servants

"By no means" what?

EDMUND

- Persuade me to the murder of your lordship,
But that I told him the revenging gods
55 'Gainst parricides did all the thunder bend,
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,
60 With his preparèd sword he charges home
My unprovided body, latched mine arm.
And when he saw my best alarumed spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to the encounter,
Or whether ghastr'd by the noise I made,
65 Full suddenly he fled.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

- When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight to do it, with cursed speech
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
80 Make thy words faith'd? No. What I should deny—
As this I would, ay, though thou didst produce
My very character—I'd turn it all

EDGAR exits.

[To himself] Some blood on me would give the impression
that I fought more fiercely. *[He cuts his own arm]* I've seen
drunkards do more than this as a joke.

[To GLOUCESTER] Father, father! Stop, stop! Will no one
help me?

GLOUCESTER enters with servants carrying torches.

GLOUCESTER

Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

He was standing here in the dark with his sharp sword out,
mumbling some wicked spells, asking the moon to give him
good luck in his dark deeds—

GLOUCESTER

But where is he?

EDMUND

Look, sir, I'm bleeding.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

He fled that way, sir, when he couldn't—

GLOUCESTER

After him, now! Go.

Some servants exit.

"When he couldn't" what?

EDMUND

When he couldn't persuade me to murder you, my lord. I
told him that the angry gods unleash all their thunder on
those who kill their fathers, and reminded him of the
strong, sacred bond between a child and his father. Sir, in
the end he saw how firmly opposed I was to his monstrous
plan, and with a deadly thrust of his sword, he lunged at my
unprotected body and pierced my arm. But when he saw
my spirits rally and, as I prepared to fight, my boldness in
defending my righteous cause, he suddenly ran away.
Otherwise he was scared off by my shouting.

GLOUCESTER

Let him run far. He won't escape for long in this country.
And once he's found, he'll be executed. The Duke of
Cornwall, my noble master and patron, is coming tonight.
I'll proclaim this by his authority: that whoever finds Edgar
and helps bring the murderous coward to justice will be
rewarded. And if anyone conceals Edgar, they will die.

EDMUND

When I tried to persuade him not to kill you, and found him
still determined to do it, I angrily threatened to expose him.
He replied, "You penniless bastard! Do you think that if I
were to testify against you, anyone would put any trust,
value, or worth in your words? You think they'd take your
word over mine? No. I'd deny everything—yes, even if you
produced evidence in my own handwriting—I'd turn it all
against you, making it into evidence of your malice and
treachery. And you must think people are stupid if you think

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 spirits
To make thee seek it."

Tucket within

GLOUCESTER

O strange and fastened villain!
Would he deny his letter, said he? I never got him.—
90 Hark, the duke's trumpets. I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar. The villain shall not 'scape.
The duke must grant me that. Besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have the due note of him.— And of my land,
95 Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.

Enter the Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, and attendants

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

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

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
105 That tend upon my father?

GLOUCESTER

I know not, madam. 'Tis too bad, too bad.

EDMUND

Yes, madam, he was of that consort.

REGAN

No marvel then, though he were ill affected.
110 'Tis they have put him on the old man's death,
To have th' expense and spoil 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
115 I'll not be there.

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

120 He did bewray his practice, and received
This hurt you see striving to apprehend him.

they wouldn't realize everything you would gain if I were to
die, and thereby realize that you have motive to try to frame
me."

Trumpets play offstage.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, that monstrous, incurable villain! He would deny his
letter, he said? Surely I never fathered him. Listen, there are
the duke's trumpets. I don't know why he's come here. I'll
shut the town gates and keep any ships from leaving our
ports. The villain won't escape. The duke must agree with
me about that. I'll also send his picture near and far, so that
all the kingdom will be able to look for him. And about my
lands, you loyal and loving boy, I'll find a way to make you
my legitimate heir.

The Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, and attendants enter.

CORNWALL

How are you, my noble friend? Ever since I came here--
which was only just recently--I've been hearing strange
news.

REGAN

If it's true, no punishment could be harsh enough for the
offender. How are you doing, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

Oh, madam, my old heart is broken, it's broken.

REGAN

What, did my father's godson really try to kill you? The one
whom my father named--your son, Edgar?

GLOUCESTER

Oh, lady, lady, it's so shameful that I wish I could hide it

REGAN

Wasn't he a companion of those unruly knights who tend to
my father?

GLOUCESTER

I don't know, madam. It's too bad, too bad.

EDMUND

Yes, madam, he was friendly with those knights.

REGAN

It's no surprise then that they had a bad influence on him.
They must have put him up to killing his father, so they
could loot the estate once Edgar inherited it. Just tonight I
got a letter from my sister, telling me all about them—and
warning me that if they should come to stay at my house, I
shouldn't be there.

CORNWALL

I won't be there either, Regan, I assure you. Edmund, I hear
that you have been a true and loving son to your father.

EDMUND

It was my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER

He exposed Edgar's plans, and got this wound trying to stop
him.

CORNWALL

Is he pursued?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

CORNWALL

If he be taken, he shall never more

125 Be feared of doing harm. Make your own purpose
How in my strength you please.— For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours.
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need.
130 You we first seize on.

EDMUND

I shall serve you, sir,
Truly, however else.

GLOUCESTER

[to CORNWALL] For him I thank your grace.

CORNWALL

You know not why we came to visit you—

REGAN

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

GLOUCESTER

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

Flourish. Exeunt

CORNWALL

Is Edgar being pursued?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, my good lord.

CORNWALL

If he's caught, we won't have to worry about him ever causing trouble again. Use my power and authority however you like in order to help your cause. As for you, Edmund, your virtue and obedience have been clear throughout this whole affair, so you will serve me from now on. I need people as trustworthy as you are. You are the first one I'll employ.

EDMUND

I will serve you truly and faithfully sir, if nothing else.

GLOUCESTER

[To CORNWALL] Your Grace, I thank you for honoring him like this.

CORNWALL

You don't know why we came to visit you—

REGAN

And why we came in this way, unexpectedly and traveling through the dark-eyed night. Noble Gloucester, there are some weighty matters that we could use your advice about. My father has written to me, and so has my sister, both of them describing an argument between them. I thought it would be best if I dealt with this away from my home, as the king might be on his way there. The messengers from Goneril and the king are here, waiting to be sent with a response. So, our good old friend, give us some badly needed advice about this business. We need to act immediately.

GLOUCESTER

I'm at your service, madam. Your Graces are welcome here.

Trumpets play. They all exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter KENT disguised 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.

OSWALD

5 Prithee, if thou lovest me, tell me.

Shakescleare Translation

KENT (in disguise) and OSWALD enter from different directions.

OSWALD

Good morning to you, friend. Are a servant in this house?

KENT

Yes.

OSWALD

Where can we stable our horses?

KENT

In the swamp.

OSWALD

Please, my friend, 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.

OSWALD

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

KENT

Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD

What dost thou know me for?

KENT

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service; and art nothing but the composition of a knave, 15 beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch; one whom I will beat into clamorous whining if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.

OSWALD

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

KENT

What a brazen-faced varlet art thou to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days ago since I tripped up thy heels and beat thee before the king? Draw, you rogue, for though it be night yet the moon shines. I'll make a 30 sop o' th' moonshine of you. *[draws his sword]* Draw, you whoreson cullionly barber-monger, draw!

OSWALD

Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT

Draw, you rascal. You come with letters against the king and take Vanity the puppet's part against the 35 royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado your shanks. Draw, you rascal! Come your ways.

OSWALD

Help, ho! Murder! Help!

KENT

Strike, you slave. Stand, rogue. Stand, you neat slave, strike! *[strikes OSWALD]*

OSWALD

40 Help, ho! Murder, murder!

Enter EDMUND the bastard with his rapier drawn, the Duke of CORNWALL, the Duchess REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and servants

EDMUND

How now? What's the matter? Part.

KENT

I'm not your friend.

OSWALD

Well then. If you're going to be like that, I don't care for you either.

KENT

If I had you between my teeth, I'd make you care.

OSWALD

Why are you treating me like this? I don't know you.

KENT

But I know you, fellow.

OSWALD

What do you know about me then?

KENT

I know that you're a villain and a rascal; that you eat kitchen scraps; and that you're filthy, arrogant, shallow, and shameless. You're a cheapskate servant in dirty stockings; a cowardly villain who loves to sue people; a bastard; a narcissistic, effeminate rogue; and a villain with so few possessions, you could fit them all in one trunk. You'd play the pimp to please your masters. You're nothing but a combination of villain, beggar, coward, pimp, and the son and heir of a mangy bitch, and I'll beat you until you whine if you try to deny even a single one of my words.

OSWALD

What a monstrous fellow you are, that you would slander someone you don't know, and who doesn't know you!

KENT

And what a bold-faced servant you are to deny that you know me! Wasn't it just two days ago that I tripped you and beat you up in front of the king? Draw your sword, you scoundrel. It might be nighttime, but there's enough moonlight to fight by. I'll stab you so many times you can soak up the moonlight through your holes! *[Drawing his sword]* Draw, you villainous, preening son-of-a-bitch, draw!

OSWALD

Away with you! I want nothing to do with you.

KENT

Draw your sword, you rascal. You're here with a letter plotting against the king, and you take the side of that vain puppet Goneril against her royal father. Draw your sword, you scoundrel, or I'll slice you up like a hog. Draw, you rascal! Come on and fight!

OSWALD

Help, hey! Murder! Help!

KENT

Fight, you rogue. Stand still, scoundrel. Fight, you dainty villain, fight! *[He strikes OSWALD]*

OSWALD

Help, hey! Murder, murder!

EDMUND enters with his sword drawn, followed by the Duke of CORNWALL, the Duchess REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and servants.

EDMUND

What's going on? What's the matter? Stop fighting!

KENT

[to EDMUND] With you, goodman boy, if you please. Come, I'll flesh ye. Come on, young master.

GLOUCESTER

Weapons, arms? What's the matter here?

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

The messengers from our sister and the king.

CORNWALL

What is your difference? Speak.

OSWALD

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT

50 No marvel, you have so bestirred your valor. You cowardly rascal, nature disclaims in thee. A tailor made thee.

CORNWALL

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

KENT

55 Ay, a tailor, sir. A stone-cutter or painter could not have made him so ill though they had been but two 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

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

CORNWALL

65 Peace, sirrah!
You beastly knave, know you no reverence?


KENT


Yes, sir, but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL

Why art thou angry?

KENT

[To EDMUND] I'll take you on then, boy , if you like! Come on, I'll strike first. Come on, young master.

 In the original text, Kent uses the term "goodman"—a form of address for men of lower social rank—in order to insult Edmund.

GLOUCESTER

Swords out? What's the matter here?

CORNWALL

Calm down, I command you. The next person to strike again will die. What is the matter?

REGAN

These two are the messengers from my sister and the king.


CORNWALL


What are you fighting about? Speak.

OSWALD

I'm out of breath, my lord.

KENT

No wonder, with all your brave exertions. You cowardly rascal, Nature is ashamed to admit that she created you. A tailor made you .

 Kent is insulting Oswald by saying he is artificial—someone who was made (tailored) to "fit" his master rather than a true, natural person in his own right.

CORNWALL

You're a strange fellow. How could a tailor make a man?

KENT

Yes, a tailor, sir. A sculptor or a painter could never have made something that awful, even if they had only been practicing their craft for two years.

CORNWALL

But tell me: what are you fighting about?

OSWALD

This old ruffian, sir, whose life I spared because of my respect for the elderly—

KENT

[To OSWALD] You bastard, you're a "z," an unnecessary letter!

[To CORNWALL] My lord, if you'll allow me, I'll grind this coarse villain into powder and plaster the bathroom walls with him.

[To OSWALD] So you spared my life because I'm old, did you, you puppy?

CORNWALL

Quiet, sir! Don't you have any respect, you beast?

KENT

Yes, sir, but not when I'm angry.

CORNWALL

Why are you angry?

KENT

That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
70 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,
Bring oil to fire, snow to the colder moods;
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
75 With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following,—
A plague upon your epileptic visage!
Smile you my speeches as I were a fool?
Goose, an I had you upon Sarum plain,
80 I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL

Why, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER

[to KENT] How fell you out?
Say that.

KENT

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

CORNWALL

Why dost thou call him "knave?" What's his offense?

KENT

His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL

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

KENT

Sir, in good faith, or in sincere verity,
Under th' allowance of your great aspect,
105 Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phoebus' front—

CORNWALL

What mean'st by this?

KENT


To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so much.
I know, sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguiled you in
110 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?

KENT

I'm angry that a dishonorable servant like this should wear
a sword like a gentleman. Smiling scoundrels like him undo
the holy bonds of love between people, gnawing like rats at
knots that are too intricate to untie. They encourage only
the worst parts of their masters' personality, bringing oil to
the fire of their anger and snow to the coldness of their
cruelty. They're like weathervanes, turning whichever way
the wind is blowing, never taking a stand for anything true,
and ignorantly following their masters like dogs.

[To OSWALD] Damn your ugly face! Are you smiling at my
words like I'm a fool? You goose, if I found you on [Salisbury Plain](#) , I'd send you cackling all the way back to [Camelot](#).

 Here, Kent refers to an expanse of land north of Salisbury, and later to mythical King Arthur's court, Camelot.

CORNWALL

What, are you crazy, old man?

GLOUCESTER

[To KENT] How did this fight begin? Tell us that.

KENT

No two opposites could hate each other more than myself
and that scoundrel.

CORNWALL

Why do you call him "scoundrel?" What crime has he
committed?

KENT

I don't like his face.

CORNWALL

But perhaps you don't like mine either, or his, or hers.



KENT



Sir, it's my job to be honest, and I've seen better faces in my
day than those I see standing on the shoulders around me
right now.

CORNWALL

Look at this fellow, who gets praised for his honesty and
then acts rude and insolent, using his "bluntness" as a
cover for his cruelty. He cannot flatter, not he! He is honest
and blunt, and so must speak the truth. And if people
accept it, well and good. But if not, he's telling the truth and
they just can't handle it! I know this kind of villain, whose
honesty hides more cunning and corruption than twenty
brown-nosed servants who can only bow and flatter.

KENT

Sir, truthfully, sincerely, if you'll give the approval of your
magnificent face, which glows with the radiance of [Phoebus](#)  
' forehead—

  Phoebus was another name for the ancient Greek god Apollo when he was identified with the sun.

CORNWALL

What do you mean by this?

KENT

I'm changing my manner of speech, since you disliked my
plain words so much. Sir, I know that I'm no flatterer. If a
man tricked you with plain language, then he's just a plain
scoundrel. But I'm not like that, though it's tempting to try
to anger you.

CORNWALL

[To OSWALD] How did you offend him?

OSWALD

I never gave him any.

- 115 It pleased the king his master very late
To strike at me upon his misconstruction
When he, conjunct and flattering his displeasure,
Tripped me behind; being down, insulted, railed,
And put upon him such a deal of man
- 120 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

- 125 But Ajax is their fool.

CORNWALL

Fetch forth the stocks, ho!—
You stubborn ancient knave, you reverend braggart,
We'll teach you.

KENT

Sir, I am too old to learn.

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

CORNWALL

- 135 Fetch forth the stocks!
As I have life and honor, there shall he sit till noon.

REGAN

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

KENT

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

REGAN

- 140 Sir, being his knave, I will.

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

145 Will check him for 't. Your purposed low correction
Is such as basest and contemned'st wretches
For pilferings and most common trespasses
Are punished with.
The king his master needs must take it ill,

150 That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrained.

CORNWALL

I'll answer that.

REGAN

My sister may receive it much more worse
To have her gentleman abused, assaulted

155 For following her affairs.—Put in his legs.


KENT is put in the stocks

OSWALD


I never did. Recently his master the king felt like striking me because of a misunderstanding, and then this man here took the king's side, encouraging his anger, and tripped me from behind. When I was down on the ground he insulted me, slandered me, and built himself up so he would seem like a worthy man to the king. The king then praised him for his courage in assaulting me, even though I never tried to fight back at all. And just now, excited by remembering his last "mighty battle" with me, he drew his sword and attacked me again.


KENT

These sorts of cowardly villains always boast like [Ajax](#) .

 In Greek mythology, the warrior Ajax, who fought at Troy, was a braggart.

CORNWALL

Bring out the stocks!  We'll teach you, you stubborn old rascal, you arrogant geezer.

 The stocks were a punishment for criminals. They consisted of a wooden frame with holes for the ankles, and often the wrists as well. The offender would then be locked inside and left there to be publicly humiliated.

KENT

Sir, I'm too old to learn. Don't put me in the stocks. I serve the king, who sent me here to you. You'll be insulting my master's royal and personal honor if you put his messenger in the stocks.

CORNWALL

Bring the stocks! I swear on my life and honor, he'll be locked up until noon.

REGAN

Until noon? Until night, my lord--and all night too.

KENT

Why, madam, you wouldn't treat me so badly even if I was your father's dog.

REGAN

But you're his villainous servant, sir. So I will.

CORNWALL

This is exactly the kind of fellow your sister warned us about.—Come on, bring in the stocks!

The stocks are brought out.

GLOUCESTER

Let me ask you not to do this, your Grace. The man has done wrong, and the good king his master will punish him for it. But the kind of punishment you intend for him is more appropriate for petty thieves than for royal servants. His master, the king, will surely be insulted when he finds out that you value him so little, locking up and humiliating his messenger like this.

CORNWALL

I'll take responsibility for it.

REGAN

My sister may be more insulted to learn that her messenger was abused and assaulted just for following her orders.

[To servants] Put his legs in the stocks.

KENT is put in the stocks.

CORNWALL

[to GLOUCESTER] Come, my good lord, away.

Exeunt all but GLOUCESTER and KENT

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

160 Pray you do not, sir. I have watched and traveled hard.
Some time I shall sleep out. The rest I'll whistle.
A good man's fortune may grow out at heels.
Give you good morrow.

GLOUCESTER

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

Exit GLOUCESTER

KENT

165 Good King, that must approve the common saw,
Thou out of heaven's benediction comest
To the warm sun.
[takes out a letter]
Approach, thou beacon to this underglobe,
170 That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,
Who hath most fortunately been informed
Of my obscurèd course and [reads the letter] "shall
175 find time
From this enormous state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies." All weary and o'erwatched,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
This shameful lodging.
180 Fortune, good night. Smile once more. Turn thy wheel.
[sleeps]

CORNWALL

[To GLOUCESTER] Come on, my good lord, let's go.

Everyone except for GLOUCESTER and KENT exits.

GLOUCESTER

I'm sorry for you, friend. It's what the duke wants, and everyone knows that he won't allow even the slightest opposition once he's made up his mind. But I'll try to persuade him to release you.

KENT

Please don't, sir. I've been awake and traveling for a long time. I can catch up on sleep while I'm locked up here, and I'll whistle for the rest of the time to entertain myself. Even good men can have their luck wear out. Have a good morning.

GLOUCESTER

The duke's to blame for this. The king won't be happy about it.

GLOUCESTER exits.

KENT

Good King Lear, you're just proving the old saying that everything goes from good to bad. [He takes out a letter] Rise, sun, and shine on me so I can read this letter. Only those who are miserable are granted miracles. I know that this letter is from Cordelia, who fortunately knows about my attempts to look after the king in this disguise. [Reading the letter] She says that she "will have time to fix things now that she's away from the monstrous state of affairs in this country." I'm exhausted, and I've been awake for far too long. I'll take advantage of my fatigue and shut my weary eyes, so I can't see my own humiliating situation. Good night, Fortune. Smile once more. Turn your wheel of fate. [He falls asleep]

Act 2, Scene 3

Shakespeare

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
5 Does not attend my taking. Whiles I may 'scape,
I will preserve myself, and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury in contempt of man
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
10 Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who with roaring voices
15 Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms
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,
20 Enforce their charity. "Poor Turlygod!" "Poor Tom!"—

Shakescleare Translation

EDGAR enters.

EDGAR

I heard myself declared an outlaw, and I was lucky to escape those hunting me by hiding in the trunk of a tree. No port or road is safe for me, and everywhere people are watching and waiting to arrest me. But I'll survive as long as I can avoid being captured. I've decided to disguise myself as the filthiest, lowliest beggar that was ever hated by man. I'll smear my face with dirt, wear a loincloth, make my hair tangled and knotted, and face the wind and bad weather almost naked. I've seen in this country beggars who come from insane asylums, who shriek and stab pins, skewers, nails, and sprigs of rosemary into their numb and deadened arms. With this horrible spectacle, along with their insane curses and occasional prayers, they force lowly farmers and poor villagers to give them alms. "Poor Turlygood!" "Poor Tom!" 🗨️ they call themselves. That's at least something to be. I'm nothing when I'm known as Edgar.

🗨️ These are names of the kinds of beggars in whose image Edgar is disguising himself.

That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.

Exit

He exits.

Act 2, Scene 4

Shakespeare

KENT in the stocks. 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
5 Of this remove.

KENT

[to LEAR] Hail to thee, noble master!

LEAR

Ha! Makest thou this shame thy pastime?

KENT

No, my lord.

FOOL

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

LEAR

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

KENT

15 It is both he and she:
Your son and daughter.

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

LEAR

No, I say.

KENT

20 I say "Yea."

LEAR

No, no, they would not.

KENT

Yes, they have.

LEAR

By Jupiter, I swear "No."

KENT

By Juno, I swear "Ay."

Shakescleare Translation

KENT is in the stocks. LEAR, the FOOL, and a GENTLEMAN enter.

LEAR

It's strange that Regan and Cornwall left their home without
sending back my messenger.

GENTLEMAN

I heard that, as of last night, they had no intention of
leaving and going to stay with Gloucester.

KENT

[To LEAR] Greetings to you, noble master!

LEAR

What! Are you in this humiliating position as a joke?

KENT

No, my lord.

FOOL

Ha, ha! Look, he's wearing wooden stockings. Horses are
tied up by their heads, dogs and bears by their necks,
monkeys by their waists, and men by their legs. When a
man wants to run, then he must wear stockings like these.

LEAR

[To KENT] What man misunderstood your role as the king's
messenger, and locked you up here?

KENT

It was a man and a woman: your son-in-law and daughter.

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

LEAR

No, I say.

KENT

And I say "yes."

LEAR

No, no, they wouldn't.

KENT


Yes, they have.

LEAR

By Jupiter, I swear "no."

KENT

By Juno , I swear "yes."

 Juno was the ancient Roman
queen of the gods, and wife to Jupiter.

LEAR

- 25 They durst not do 't.
They could not, would not do 't. 'Tis worse than murder
To do upon respect such violent outrage.
Resolve me with all modest haste which way
Thou mightst deserve or they impose this usage,
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 horse,
40 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—
Being the very fellow which of late
45 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
The shame which here it suffers.

FOOL

- 50 Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way.
Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind.
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.
55 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.

LEAR

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

KENT

With the earl, sir, here within.

LEAR

Follow me not. Stay here.

Exit LEAR

GENTLEMAN

Made you no more offense but what you speak of?

KENT

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

FOOL

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

KENT

Why, Fool?

FOOL

- 70 We'll set thee to school to an ant to teach thee
there's no laboring i' th' winter. All that follow their

LEAR

They wouldn't dare. They couldn't. They wouldn't. It's
worse than murder to so violently humiliate a king like this.
Tell me as quickly as you can what you did to deserve this
punishment--or what made them abuse you like this--
knowing that you were my messenger.


KENT

My lord, I arrived at your son-in-law and daughter's home
and delivered your Highness's letter. But before I had risen
from my respectful kneeling position, a stinking messenger
arrived, out of breath and panting out greetings from his
mistress Goneril. He didn't care at all about interrupting
me, and he presented a letter from his lady, which they read
immediately. Once they understood its contents, they
summoned their servants and got on their horses to ride off
straight away. They commanded me to follow them if I
wanted the pleasure of getting their answer, and they
glared at me coldly. Once we got here, I met that other
messenger again, the rude one whom they welcomed while
scorning me—and he was the very same fellow who was so
insolent to you recently, your Highness. I had more anger
than intelligence in me, so I drew my sword against him. He
then woke up the whole house with his loud and cowardly
cries. Your son-in-law and daughter decided that my error
deserves this punishment of being locked so shamefully in
the stocks here.

FOOL

If your daughter Regan and Cornwall are acting like that,
then your troubles aren't over yet. Fathers who wear rags
make their children blind to their needs. But fathers with
bags of gold make their children kind. Fortune, that fickle
whore, never opens the door to the poor. But despite all
this, your daughters will give you as many dollars—or
maybe sorrows—as you can count in a whole year.

LEAR

[To himself] Oh, how this hysteria  swells up and
squeezes my heart! Panic, stay back, you choking sorrow.
You belong in my stomach, not in my head.

[To KENT] Where is this daughter of mine?

KENT

With the earl, sir, inside the castle.

LEAR

Don't follow me. Stay here.

LEAR exits.

GENTLEMAN

Did you really not commit any worse crime than what you
told the king?

KENT

I committed no crime at all. Why did the king come with
such a small entourage of knights?

FOOL


If they had put you in the stocks for asking that question,
you would've deserved it.

KENT

Why, Fool?

FOOL

You should learn from the ant that there's no use in working
in the winter—no one will work for a master who can't pay

 *Hysteria was regarded as a
traditionally female disease, thought
to be caused by a womb wandering up
towards the throat. It produced the
kind of suffocating feeling that Lear
experiences here.*

noses are led by their eyes but blind men, and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it. But the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again. I would have none but knaves follow it since a fool gives it.

80 That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry. The fool will stay.

85 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.

Enter LEAR and GLOUCESTER

LEAR

90 Deny to speak with me? They are sick? They are weary?
They have traveled all the night?—mere fetches, ay!
The images of revolt and flying off.
Fetch me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER

My dear lord,
95 You know the fiery quality of the duke,
How unremoveable and fixed he is
In his own course.

LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!
"Fiery?" What "quality?" Why, Gloucester, Gloucester,
100 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.

LEAR

The king would speak with Cornwall. The dear father
105 Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends service.
Are they "informed" of this? My breath and blood!
"Fiery?" The "fiery" duke? Tell the hot duke that Lear—
No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.
Infirmity doth still neglect all office
110 Where to our health is bound. We are not ourselves
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
115 For the sound man.
[notices KENT again]
Death on my state! Wherefore
Should he sit here? This act persuades me
That this remotion of the duke and her
120 Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.
Go tell the duke and 's wife I'd speak with them—
Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me,
Or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum
Till it cry sleep to death.

them. Everyone but the blind can see that the king has fallen on bad luck, and even the blind can smell his decaying fortunes. If a huge wheel goes rolling down a hill, don't try to cling to it, or else you'll break your neck. But if you see a wheel going up the hill, let it pull you up after it. When a wise man gives you better advice than this, give me my advice back. I'm a fool dispensing advice, so I want only scoundrels taking it. The man who works only for profit, and puts on a show of loyalty, will pack up when it starts to rain and leave you in the storm. But I will stay. The fool will stay. And let the wise man flee. The servant who runs away becomes a fool, but this fool is no scoundrel, so help me God.

KENT

Where did you learn all this, Fool?

FOOL

Not in the stocks, fool.

LEAR and GLOUCESTER enter.

LEAR

They refuse to speak with me? They're sick? They're weary? They've traveled all night? These are just excuses! These are the signs of rebellion and desertion. Go back and bring me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER

My dear lord, you know the duke's fiery, stubborn nature, and how unshakeable he is once he's made a decision.

LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, and destruction! "Fiery?" What "stubborn nature?" Why, Gloucester, Gloucester, I want to speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I've informed them of that.

LEAR

"Informed them?" Do you understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, my good lord.

LEAR

The king wants to speak with Cornwall. The dear father wants to speak with his daughter. He commands that she attend to him. Are they "informed" of this? By my breath and blood! "Fiery?" The "fiery" duke? Well tell that hot-headed duke that Lear . . . But no, not yet. Maybe he's sick. Sickness can make us forget the duties that we owe when we're healthy. We're not ourselves when illness makes our minds suffer along with our bodies. I'll restrain my rage, and fight against my fickle temper, which makes me want to judge a sick man like a healthy one. *[He notices KENT again]* A curse on my kingship! Why should Kent be locked up here? His punishment persuades me that the duke and Regan's refusal to see me is just trickery. Have my servant released. Go tell the duke and his wife that I will speak with them—now, immediately. Tell them to come out and listen to me, or else I'll beat a drum outside their bedroom door until they have to wake up.

GLOUCESTER

125 I would have all well betwixt you.

Exit GLOUCESTER

LEAR

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

FOOL

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

Enter the Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and 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

135 Regan, I think you are. I know what reason I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad, I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, Sepulchring an adultress.
[*to KENT*] Oh, are you free?
140 Some other time for that.

Exit KENT

Belovèd Regan,
Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture, here.
[*indicates his heart*]

145 I can scarce speak to thee. Thou'lt not believe
With how depraved a quality— O Regan!

REGAN

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

LEAR

150 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,
'Tis on such ground and to such wholesome end
155 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
Of his confine. You should be ruled and led
160 By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return.

GLOUCESTER

I want there to be peace between you.


GLOUCESTER exits.

LEAR

Oh, my heart, my hysterical rising heart! But stay down,
heart.

FOOL

Good, uncle, yell at your heart like the housewife who yelled at the live eels she was putting in her pie. She hit them on their heads with a stick and cried, "Down, you naughty things, stay down!" And her brother wanted to be kind to his horse, so he buttered its hay.

 This is another example of well-meaning foolishness, as horses won't eat grease.

The Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and servants enter.

LEAR

Good morning to you both.

CORNWALL

Greetings to your Grace.

KENT is set free.

REGAN

I am glad to see your Highness.

LEAR

I believe you are glad, Regan. And I know why I believe you: if you weren't glad to see me, then I'd divorce your dead mother, since you would be a bastard—no true daughter of mine—and I would know she had committed adultery.

[*To KENT*] Oh, are you free? We'll talk later.

KENT exits.

Beloved Regan, your sister Goneril is worthless and wicked. Oh, Regan, she's torn me apart with her sharp unkindness, like a vulture, right here. [*He points to his heart*] I can hardly speak about it. You won't believe how horribly—Oh, Regan!

REGAN

Please, sir, calm down. I think it's more likely that you don't know how to value her good qualities than that she would neglect her duties to you.

LEAR

What do you mean by that?

REGAN

I can't believe that my sister would fail in her obligations at all. Sir, if she happened to restrain the rowdiness of your knights, then she must have had a good enough reason for it that she's free from all blame.

LEAR

My curses on her!

REGAN

Oh, sir, you are old. You're at the very edge of your allotted lifespan. You should let yourself be ruled and led by someone who understands you better than you can understand yourself. So please go back to my sister's house. Admit that you've wronged her, sir.

Say you have wronged her, sir.

LEAR

Ask her forgiveness?

165 Do you but mark how this becomes the house?—
[*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."

REGAN

Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks.

170 Return you to my sister.

LEAR

[*rising*] Never, Regan.

She hath abated me of half my train,
Looked black upon me, struck me with her tongue,
Most serpentlike, upon the very heart.

175 All the stored vengeances of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!

CORNWALL

Fie, sir, fie!

LEAR

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!

180

REGAN

O the blessed gods!

So will you wish on me when the rash mood is on.

LEAR

185 No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.
Thy tender-hafted 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,
190 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.
195 Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endowed.

REGAN

Good sir, to the purpose.

LEAR

Who put my man i' th' stocks?

Tucket within

CORNWALL

What trumpet's that?

Enter OSWALD the steward

REGAN

200 I know 't—my sister's. This approves her letter
That she would soon be here. [*to OSWALD*]
Is your lady come?

LEAR

This is a slave whose easy borrowed pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.—

205 Out, varlet, from my sight!

LEAR

I should ask her forgiveness? Do you understand how that
would shame our royal family's honor? [*He kneels*] "Dear
daughter, I confess that I am old. Old people are
unnecessary. On my knees I beg you to give me clothes, a
bed, and food."

REGAN

Stop this, good sir. These are shameful antics. Go back to
my sister.

LEAR

[*Standing up*] Never, Regan. She's dismissed half of my
knights, glared at me evilly, and struck me in the heart with
her venomous insults. May all the anger of heaven strike her
ungrateful head! May she get sick with infectious airs, and
may her young limbs go lame!

CORNWALL

Stop, sir! Shame on you!

LEAR

May lightning strike her in her scornful eyes! May swampy,
poisonous fog blister her face and ruin her beauty!

REGAN

Oh, by the blessed gods! You'll aim the same curses at me if
the mood strikes you.

LEAR

No, Regan, I'll never curse you. Your tender nature will
never turn harsh and cruel. Her eyes are fierce and vicious,
but yours are comforting. You would never deny me my
pleasures, dismiss my knights, thoughtlessly insult me,
reduce my privileges, or lock the door against me. You
know better than she does the natural duties of a child to a
parent, the politeness and love that comes with gratitude.
You haven't forgotten your half of the kingdom that I gave
you.

REGAN

Good sir, get to the point.

LEAR

Who put my messenger in the stocks?

A trumpet plays offstage.

CORNWALL

What's that trumpet?

OSWALD enters.

REGAN

I know it—it's my sister's. This is just what her letter said,
that she would be here soon.

[*To OSWALD*] Has your lady arrived?

LEAR

This is the villain whose cheap arrogance comes from his
position as a steward to that fickle Goneril.

[*To OSWALD*] Out, you wretch, get out of my sight!

CORNWALL

What means your grace?

Enter GONERIL

LEAR

Who stocked my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on 't.—Who comes here? O heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
210 Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part!
[*to GONERIL*] Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?—
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONERIL

Why not by th' hand, sir? How have I offended?
215 All's not offense that indiscretion finds
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
220 Deserved much less advancement.

LEAR

You! Did you?

REGAN

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
225 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
230 To be a comrade with the wolf and owl—
To wage against the enmity o' th' air—
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her?
Why, the hot-blooded France that dowerless took
Our youngest born— I could as well be brought
235 To kneel his throne, and, squirelike, pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom. [*indicates OSWALD*]

GONERIL

At your choice, sir.

LEAR

240 Now, 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,
245 Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore or embossed carbuncle
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee.
Let shame come when it will. I do not call it.
I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
250 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.

CORNWALL

What do you mean, your Grace?

GONERIL enters.

LEAR

Who put my servant in the stocks? Regan, I hope you didn't
know anything about it. Who's coming? Oh, gods, if you
love old men and approve of children being obedient to
their parents—if you yourselves are old—then take my side.
Hurl down a lightning bolt for my cause!

[*To GONERIL*] Aren't you ashamed to look at me, after
you've abused me so badly in my old age?

[*To REGAN*] Oh, Regan, are you really taking her by the
hand?

GONERIL

Why shouldn't she take me by the hand, sir? What crime
have I committed? Just because a senile old man calls
something an insult doesn't mean it is one.

LEAR

Oh, how can my ribs contain my grieving heart? Why don't
they burst? How did my messenger come to be put in the
stocks?

CORNWALL

I put him there, sir. But his disorderly behavior deserved a
worse punishment.

LEAR

You! You did this?

REGAN

Please, father, you are weak. Stop pretending to be strong.
Dismiss half your knights and go back to stay with my sister
for the rest of the month. Then you can stay with me the
next month. I'm away from home right now, so I can't
provide you with the hospitality you deserve.

LEAR

Return to her, and dismiss fifty knights? No, I would rather
refuse to live under any roof at all, and choose to live as a
comrade of the wolf and the owl—fighting against the
harshness of the open air, and living with the sharp pinch of
poverty! Return with *her*? Why, it would be better for me to
visit the hot-blooded King of France— who took my
youngest daughter without a dowry—kneel before his
throne, and beg like a servant that he should give me a
pension to support my worthless life. Return with *her*? I'd
rather be a scoundrel and a packhorse to this detestable
stablehand here! [*He points to OSWALD*]

GONERIL

Do any of that if you want to, sir.

LEAR

No, please, daughter, don't make me go crazy. I won't
bother you, my child. Farewell. We'll never meet or see each
other again. But you're still my child, my daughter, my flesh
and blood—or rather you're a disease that's in my flesh,
which is still technically my "flesh and blood." You're a
pimple, a sore, a raised tumor corrupting my blood. But I
won't criticize you. Shame will come to you when it decides
to. I won't encourage it now. I won't ask the gods to smite
you with lightning, or complain about you to them. Mend
your ways if you can. Better yourself at your leisure. I can be
patient. I can stay with Regan, along with my hundred
knights.

REGAN

Not altogether so, sir.

255 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
Must be content to think you old, and so—
But she knows what she does.

LEAR

260 Is this well spoken now?

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,
265 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,
270 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.

LEAR

I gave you all—

REGAN

275 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
With five and twenty, Regan? Said you so?

REGAN

280 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 with thee.

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

GONERIL

Hear me, my lord.
What need you five and twenty, ten, or five
To follow in a house where twice so many
290 Have a command to tend you?

REGAN

What need one?

REGAN

Not quite, sir. I wasn't expecting your arrival, and I'm not ready to take care of you. Listen to what my sister is saying, sir. We're trying to mix some reason in with your passionate anger, even though we realize that you're old. But Goneril knows what she's doing.

LEAR

Do you really mean what you've just said?

REGAN

I'll dare to say yes, sir. What, fifty knights? Isn't that enough for you? Why should you need more—or even that many—since fifty knights are expensive and dangerous to keep? How can many people serve two masters and still be at peace under one roof? It's hard, almost impossible.

GONERIL

Why can't you let yourself be attended by Regan's servants, or mine?

REGAN

Why not, my lord? Then if they happened to neglect you, we could control them. But now that I think about how dangerous fifty knights are, I must say that if you come to stay with me, please bring only twenty-five along with you. I won't house or acknowledge any more than that.

LEAR

I gave you everything—

REGAN

And you took your time in giving it.

LEAR

I made you the protectors and trustees of my kingdom, on the condition that I could keep a hundred knights for myself. So why should I have to come to you with only twenty-five, Regan? Is that what you said?

REGAN

Yes, and I'll say it again, my lord. I'll accept no more than twenty-five.

LEAR

Wicked people start to look better when others become even more wicked. Not being the worst daughter deserves a little praise, I suppose.

[To GONERIL] I'll go with you. Your fifty is still twice her twenty-five, so you must love me twice as much as she does.

GONERIL

Hear me, my lord. Why do you need twenty-five, or ten, or even five to follow you, when you'll be in a house with twice that many servants to take care of you?

REGAN

Why do you need even one?

LEAR

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

Storm and tempest

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

Exeunt LEAR, GENTLEMAN, FOOL, and GLOUCESTER

CORNWALL

315 Let us withdraw. 'Twill be a storm.

REGAN

This house is little. The old man and his people
 Cannot be well bestowed.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

GONERIL

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

CORNWALL

Followed the old man forth. He is returned.

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

325 The king is in high rage.

CORNWALL

Whither is he going?

GLOUCESTER

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

CORNWALL


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

GONERIL

330 *[to GLOUCESTER]* My lord, entreat him by no means to
 stay.

LEAR

Oh, don't be so logical about needs! Even the poorest
 beggars have at least something they don't need. If you
 only allow people to have what they need to survive, then a
 man's life becomes as cheap as an animal's. You are a
 fashionable lady. If you dressed only to stay warm, then you
 wouldn't need the gorgeous clothes you're wearing, as they
 hardly keep you warm at all. But as for my true needs—may
 the heavens give me endurance, the endurance that I need.
 You see me here, you gods, a poor old man, as wretched in
 his grief as he is in his frailty. If it's you who inspire these
 daughters to turn against their father, then at least don't
 make me such a fool as to take their insolence without
 protesting. Give me noble anger, and don't let any womanly
 tears stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags, I'll
 have such a revenge on you both that the whole world will .
 . . I'll do such things . . . I don't know what things I'll do yet,
 but they will be terrible. You think I'll weep? No, I won't
 weep.

 In Shakespeare's time, a man who
 expressed emotions was considered
 to be highly effeminate.

A storm begins.

I have good reason to weep, but my heart will break into a
 hundred thousand pieces before I'll let myself weep. Oh,
 Fool, I'll go crazy!

LEAR, the GENTLEMAN, the FOOL, and GLOUCESTER exit.

CORNWALL

Let's go inside. There will be a storm.

REGAN

This house is small. We can't properly shelter the old man
 and his followers here.

GONERIL

That's his own fault. He has deprived himself of sleep, and
 must taste the results of his foolishness.

REGAN

I'll be happy to keep him in my house, but I won't house a
 single one of his followers.

GONERIL

And I'll do the same. Where is the lord of Gloucester?

CORNWALL

He followed the old man. But now he's coming back.

GLOUCESTER enters.

GLOUCESTER

The king is enraged.

CORNWALL

Where is he going?

GLOUCESTER

He called for his horse, but I don't know where he intends
 to ride.

CORNWALL

It's best to just let him go. He'll only allow himself to be lead
 by himself.

GONERIL

[To GLOUCESTER] My lord, don't try to convince him to stay.

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN

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

CORNWALL

340 Shut up your doors, my lord. 'Tis a wild night.
My Regan counsels well. Come out o' th' storm.

Exeunt

GLOUCESTER

Alas, night is falling, and the high winds are blowing angrily.
There's hardly a bush for many miles around. He won't
have any shelter at all.

REGAN

Oh, sir, willful men only learn their lessons from the injuries
they get in their foolishness. Shut your doors. His
attendants are violent men, and I'm afraid of what they
might encourage him to do, especially since he can be
deceived so easily.

CORNWALL

Shut your doors, my lord. It's a wild night. My sister Regan's
advice is good. Come in out of the storm.

They all exit.

Act 3, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Storm still. Enter KENT disguised and 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.
5 Bids the winds blow the earth into the sea
Or swell the curlèd water 'bove the main,
That things might change or cease. Tears his white
hair,
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
10 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,
The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
15 Keep their fur dry—unbonneted he runs,
And bids what will take all.

KENT

But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

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

Shakescleare Translation

*The storm continues. KENT (in disguise) and the
GENTLEMAN enter from different directions.*

KENT

Who's there, besides bad weather?

GENTLEMAN

One whose mood is like the weather—very troubled.

KENT

I know you. Where's the king?

GENTLEMAN

Out struggling with the elements. He cries out for the winds
to blow the earth into the sea, or make the sea's waves
flood the land, that all life might end or change forever. He
tears at his white hair, which the fierce winds blow about
disdainfully, blind in their fury. He is just a small mortal
against the elements, but he's trying to be even angrier and
wilder than the rain and winds blowing back and forth. On a
night like this, when even hungry bears, lions, and wolves
would hide in their dens—he runs about bareheaded,
calling for the world to end.

KENT

But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN

Only the fool, who tries to soothe the wounds in the king's
heart with his joking.

KENT

Sir, I know you, and based on what I know about you, I will
dare to trust you with an important job. There is a feud
growing between Albany and Cornwall, though they've
cleverly hidden it so far. Like other rulers given power by
destiny, Albany and Cornwall both have some servants who
seem to be loyal to them, but who are actually French spies
and scouts gathering intelligence against our country. The
spies have noticed something—the quarrels and intrigues
of the dukes, or their harsh treatment of the kind old king,
or something deeper, which is perhaps the root of both
those problems. But it's true. There are already French

Against the old kind king, or something deeper,
Whereof perchance these are but furnishings—
But true it is. From France there comes a power
Into this scattered kingdom, who already,
35 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
40 Some that will thank you, making just report
Of how unnatural and bemoaning sorrow
The king hath cause to plain.
I am a gentleman of blood and breeding,
And from some knowledge and assurance offer
45 This office to you.

GENTLEMAN

I will talk further with you.

KENT

[giving GENTLEMAN a purse and a ring]
No, do not.

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

GENTLEMAN

Give me your hand. Have you no more to say?

KENT

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

Exeunt severally

troops entering this divided kingdom. They are aware of our negligence and have secretly occupied some of our best ports. And they're almost at the point of declaring open war. But this is where you come in. If you trust me enough to hurry to Dover, you'll find some people there who will be very grateful if you'll deliver an accurate report of the monstrous and maddening sorrow of the king's suffering. I am a gentleman of noble blood, and I know what I'm doing in offering this task to you.

GENTLEMAN

I'll need to discuss it further before I can give you an answer.

KENT

[Giving the GENTLEMAN a purse and a ring] No, don't. To confirm that I'm much more than I seem from my outward appearance, open this purse and take the money inside. If you see Cordelia—which you can be sure that you will—show her this ring. And she will tell you who I really am. A curse on this storm! I will go and find the king.

GENTLEMAN

Let me shake your hand. Do you have anything else to say?

KENT

Only a few words, but they're more important than all the rest. Once we've found the king—you go that way, and I'll go this way—the first one to see him should shout to the other.

They exit in opposite directions.

Act 3, Scene 2

Shakespeare

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 sulfurous and thought-executing fires,
5 Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' th' world,
Crack nature's molds, all gemens spill at once
That make ingrateful man!

FOOL

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

LEAR

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

Shakesclare Translation

The storm continues. LEAR and the FOOL enter.

LEAR

Blow, winds, until your cheeks crack! Rage on, storm! You whirlwinds and tornadoes, pour out water until you've drenched the steeples of our churches and drowned their weathervanes! You sulfurous and deadly lightning--herald of the mighty thunderbolts that split oak trees--sing the white hair on my head! And you, thunder that shakes everything, crush the spherical world flat, and crack open the molds from which nature forms humans, and spill all the seeds that grow up to become ungrateful mankind!

FOOL

Oh, uncle, encountering false holy water (like flattering courtier's speeches) in a dry house is better than being outside getting soaked by rainwater. Please, uncle, let's go inside and ask your daughters to forgive you. This stormy night has no pity for either wise men or fools.

LEAR

Rumble your belly, thunder! Spit, fire! Pour down, rain! The rain, wind, thunder, and fire are not my daughters. I don't blame you, you elements of the storm, for being unkind. I

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

FOOL

- 25 He that has a house to put 's head in has a good
headpiece.
The codpiece that will house
Before the head has any—
The head and he shall louse.
30 So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.
35 For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths
in a glass.

Enter KENT disguised

LEAR

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

KENT

Who's there?

FOOL

- 40 Marry, here's grace and a codpiece—that's a wise man
and a fool.

KENT

[to LEAR] 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.

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 man of virtue
That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast 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?
Gracious my lord, hard by here is a hovel.
65 Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest.
Repose you there, while I to this hard house—
More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised,
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in—return, and force
70 Their scanted courtesy.

never gave you a kingdom or called you my children. You
don't owe me obedience. So be as horrible as you want to.
Here I stand, your slave—a poor, sick, weak, and hated old
man. But I can still accuse you of joining forces with my two
wicked daughters, and using your heavenly powers to strike
my old, white head. Oh! It's foul!

FOOL

Whoever has a house to cover his head has a good hat.
If a man finds housing for his genitals  before he finds
housing for his head—he'll end up poor and lice-infested.
So whores have "married" many men by giving them
housing. The man who values his toe more than he values
his heart will always have corns to complain of, and be kept
awake at night. For there's never been a pretty woman who
didn't practice making pretty faces in the mirror.

 *The Fool uses the word "codpiece" as a metonym for genitals. In Shakespeare's time, men wore codpieces—pouches which covered the genitals and were attached on the front of their breeches.*

KENT (in disguise) enters.


LEAR


No, I will act like a model of patience. I will say nothing.

KENT

Who's there?

FOOL


By God , here's majesty and genitalia—that is, a wise
man and a fool.


 *In the original text, the Fool uses the term "marry"—an Elizabethan oath which derives from the Virgin Mary's name.*

KENT

[To LEAR] Alas, sir, are you here? Even creatures of the night
avoid nights like this. These angry skies frighten even the
bats and make them keep to their caves. Never in my whole
life have I seen or heard such fiery lightning, such bursts of
horrible thunder, and such groans of roaring wind and rain.
Human nature cannot bear all this danger and fear.

LEAR

May the great gods who stirred up this commotion in the
sky find and crush their enemies tonight . Tremble in
fear, you wretched people who have committed secret
crimes and gone unpunished by justice. Hide yourselves,
you bloody-handed murderers, you perjurers, you men who
seem to be virtuous but really practice incest. Tremble until
you fall to pieces, you villains who have plotted against
human lives in secret. Let all your secret, pent-up guilts
burst from their hiding places, and beg for mercy from the
dreadful gods who summoned such a storm. I am a man
who has been sinned against more than he has sinned.

 *Lear believes the storm has come as punishment for those who wronged him. Thus, the gods' enemies are also Lear's enemies.*

KENT

Alas, you're not even wearing a hat or hood? My gracious
lord, there is a cow shed nearby. It will lend you some
protection from this storm. Go there and rest, while I ask for
help at the house where your heartless daughters are
staying—those daughters who are more heartless than the
stones the house is made of. Just now I went there and
asked about you, but they wouldn't let me in. But now I'll
return and force them to be courteous.

LEAR

My wits begin to turn.—

[to FOOL] Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold? I am cold myself.

75 [to KENT] Where is this straw, my fellow?

The art of our necessities is strange

That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart

80 That's sorry yet for thee.

FOOL

[sings]

He that has and a little tiny wit—

With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain—

Must make content with his fortunes fit,

85 *For the rain it raineth every day.*

LEAR

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

Exeunt LEAR and KENT

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,

90 When brewers mar their malt with water,

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,

95 When slanders do not live in tongues,

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

100 Come to great confusion.

Then comes the time, who lives to see 't,

That going shall be used with feet.

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

Exit

LEAR

I begin to see things differently.

[To the FOOL] Come on, my boy. How are you, my boy? Are you cold? I am cold myself.

[To KENT] Where is this cow shed you spoke of, my fellow?

It's strange how in a time of need even a worthless thing can become precious. Come, bring me to this shed. My poor fool, part of my heart still feels sorry for you.

FOOL

[Singing]

The man with even a tiny bit of wit—

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain—

Must learn to take what he can get,


For the rain it rains every day.

LEAR


True, my good boy. Come, bring us to this cow shed.

LEAR and KENT exit.

FOOL

Such a night would cool even a prostitute's hot lust. I'll deliver a prophecy before I go: when priests don't practice what they preach; when brewers dilute their beer with water; when noblemen follow fashion more closely than their tailors do; when the only heretics being burned are faithless lovers, who burn with venereal disease; when every law case is just; when no servants or knights are in debt; when tongues don't slander each other, and pickpockets don't steal from crowds; when moneylenders have nothing to hide; and pimps and whores build churches—then the kingdom of England will come to ruin. Then those who live to see that day will stroll around on foot. This is a prophecy Merlin will make, because I live before his time. 

He exits.

 Merlin was the wizard at the legendary court of King Arthur. He was said to make prophecies through rhymes similar to the one the Fool makes here. This play is set in a time period before Merlin was supposed to have existed.

Act 3, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter GLOUCESTER and EDMUND the bastard, with lights

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

Most savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

Go to, say you nothing. There's a division betwixt the dukes. And a worse matter than that: I have received a
10 letter this night. 'Tis dangerous to be spoken. I have locked the letter in my closet. These injuries the king now bears will be revenged home. There's part of a power already footed. We must incline to the king. I will look him and privily relieve him. Go you and maintain

15

Shakescleare Translation

GLOUCESTER and EDMUND enter, carrying torches.

GLOUCESTER

Alas, alas, Edmund, I don't like this horrible business. When I asked the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall if I could help the king and give him shelter, they took away my command of my own house and ordered me to never speak of him, lobby on his behalf, or help him in any way, or else I should suffer their permanent anger.

EDMUND

How savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

Oh well, say nothing about this. There is a quarrel between the two dukes. And there's worse news than that: I received a letter tonight. It's dangerous to discuss. I've locked the letter in my bedroom. The injuries done to the king will be thoroughly avenged. Armed forces have already landed. We must side with the king. I will find him and secretly help him. You go and talk to the duke, so he won't notice that I'm

talk with the duke, that my charity be not of him perceived. If he ask for me, I am ill and gone to bed. Though I die for it—as no less is threatened me—the king my old master must be relieved. There is some strange thing toward, Edmund. Pray you, be careful.

Exit GLOUCESTER

EDMUND

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

Exit

helping the king. If he asks for me, say that I'm ill and have gone to bed. Even if I must die for it—as they've threatened—I must help the king, my old master. There is something strange coming, Edmund. Please, be careful.

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDMUND

I'll tell the duke right now about this forbidden kindness to the king, and about that letter too. Betraying my father is something that will get me a reward: it will win me everything my father will lose—which is everything he has. The young will rise when the old fall.

He exits.

Act 3, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter LEAR, KENT disguised, 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

- 5 Good my lord, enter here.

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.
10 But where the greater malady is fixed The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'dst shun a bear, But if thy flight lay toward the raging sea Thou'dst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the mind's free,
15 The body's delicate. The tempest in my mind Doth from my senses take all feeling else Save what beats there—filial ingratitude. Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand For lifting food to 't? But I will punish home.
20 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— Oh, that way madness lies. Let me shun that.
25 No more of that.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR

Prithce, go in thyself. Seek thine own ease. This tempest will not give me leave to ponder

Shakescleare Translation

LEAR, KENT (in disguise), and the FOOL enter.

KENT

Here's the place, my lord. Please go in, my lord. Tonight's storm is too rough for human nature to endure.

The storm continues.

LEAR

Leave me alone.

KENT

My good lord, please enter the shed.

LEAR

Do you want to break my heart?

KENT

I would rather break my own than yours. My good lord, please go in.

LEAR

You think it's bad that this angry storm soaks us to the skin. So it seems to *you*. But a large pain makes a small pain feel insignificant. You would run from a bear, but if the only way to run was into the raging sea, then you'd turn and face the bear head-on. When the mind is untroubled, the body is sensitive. The storm in my mind keeps me from noticing anything but the thing that tortures me—my ungrateful children. Isn't their ingratitude like the mouth biting the hand that feeds it? I will punish them thoroughly. No, I won't weep anymore. To shut me out on a night like this! But pour on, rain, I will endure. On a night like this! Oh Regan, Goneril, your kind old father, whose generous heart gave you everything . . . But no, that path leads to insanity. Let me avoid such thoughts. No more of that.

KENT

My good lord, please go inside.

LEAR

Please, go in yourself. Seek your own comfort. This storm keeps me from thinking thoughts that would hurt me even

On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.
 30 [to FOOL] In, boy. Go first. You houseless poverty—
 Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

Exit FOOL

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 35 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp.
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
 40 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!

KENT

Give me thy hand. Who's there?

FOOL

45 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 disguised

EDGAR

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

LEAR

Didst thou give all to thy two daughters, and art thou
 come to this?

EDGAR

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

Storm still

LEAR

What, has his daughters brought him to this pass?—
 65 Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em all?

more. But I'll go in.

[To the FOOL] Go in, boy. You go first. Oh, you poor
 homeless people . . . No, you go in. I'll pray, and then I'll
 sleep.

The FOOL exits.

Poor homeless wretches, wherever you are, suffering
 through this pitiless storm—with no roof over your heads,
 no fat on your ribs, and only rags for clothing: how will you
 defend yourselves against such weather? Oh, when I was
 king I should have done more for you! Cure yourself, men
 who live in luxury. Expose yourself to feel what the poor
 and homeless feel, so you can give them the surplus wealth
 you don't need, and make the world a more just place.

EDGAR

[From inside the cow shed] The water's nine feet deep, nine
 feet deep! Poor Tom!

The FOOL enters.

FOOL

Don't come in here, uncle—there's a ghost in here. Help me,
 help me!

KENT

Give me your hand. Who's there?

FOOL

A ghost, a ghost. He says his name's Poor Tom.

KENT

Who are you, grumbling in the straw in there? Come out.

EDGAR (in disguise) enters.

EDGAR

Keep away! The devil follows me! The cold wind blows
 through the sharp hawthorn trees. Hum! Go to your cold
 beds and warm yourselves up.

LEAR

Did you give everything to your two daughters, and end up
 like this?

EDGAR

Who gives anything to Poor Tom? The devil has led him
 through fire and through flame, through rivers and
 whirlpools, over bogs and swamps. The devil's put knives
 under his pillow and nooses in his church pew, set rat
 poison near his soup and made him race his horse over
 narrow bridges to hunt his shadow like a traitor—all in an
 effort to get Poor Tom to kill himself. Bless your five senses.
 Tom's cold. Oh, do-de, do-de, do-de. May God protect you
 from whirlwinds, evil fates, and bewitchment! Be kind to
 Poor Tom, who is tormented by the devil. I could catch him
 there now—and there—and there again—and there!

The storm continues.

LEAR

What, have his daughters reduced him to this miserable
 state?

[To EDGAR] Could you keep nothing for yourself? Did you
 give them everything?

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

70 He hath no daughters, sir.

LEAR

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

EDGAR

80 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?

EDGAR

85 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—one that slept in the
contriving of lust and waked to do it. Wine loved I
90 deeply, dice dearly, and in woman outparamoured the
Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand—hog
in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in
madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor
the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman.
95 Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets,
thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.
Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind, says,
"Suum, mun, nonny." Dauphin my boy, my boy, cessez. Let
him trot by.

Storm still

LEAR

100 Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with
thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.—Is man
no more than this? Consider him well.—Thou owest the
worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the
cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on 's are
105 sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated
man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as
thou art.—Off, off, you lendings! Come. Unbutton here.
[tears at his clothes]

FOOL

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

FOOL

No, he kept a blanket for himself, or else he'd be naked and
we'd be ashamed to look at him.

LEAR

Then may your daughters be struck by all the plagues that
hover in the air, controlling the fates of sinners!

KENT


He doesn't have any daughters, sir.

LEAR

Death to you—you're a traitor for saying that! Nothing could
have degraded him like this except for unkind daughters. Is
this the current style, that the bodies of neglected fathers
should get so little pity? That's a fitting punishment!
Because it was from my body that I fathered those
bloodsucking daughters.

EDGAR

Pillicock  sat on Pillicock hill. Alow, alow, loo, loo!

 This is a quote from an old rhyme.
"Pillicock" is both a term of
endearment and baby talk for penis.

FOOL

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

EDGAR

Beware the devil. Obey your parents; keep your word; don't
use God's name in vain; don't commit adultery; and don't
covet luxurious clothing. Tom's cold.

LEAR

What were you before you became like this?

EDGAR

I was a servant, proud in my heart and my mind. I curled my
hair; carried tokens of my lovers; served my mistress's lust
and slept with her; swore as many oaths as I spoke words;
and broke them all without shame. I went to sleep planning
lustful acts and woke up to do them. I loved wine deeply
and gambling dearly, and I had more lovers than a sultan
has in his harem. My heart was false, my ears were quick to
hear gossip, and my hands were violent. I was as lazy as a
hog, as stealthy as a fox, as greedy as a wolf, as crazy as a
dog, and as violent as a lion. Don't ever let your heart be
seduced by a woman. Keep your feet out of brothels and
your hands away from skirts, stay out of debt, and defy the
devil. The cold wind still blows through the hawthorne
trees, saying "Suum, mun, nonny." The devil my boy, my
boy, stop that. Let him trot on by.

The storm continues.

LEAR

Why, you'd be better off dead than to face this violent storm
with only your naked body. Is this all a man is? Look at him.

[To EDGAR] You don't owe the silkworm for silk, the cow for
leather, the sheep for wool, or the civet cat for perfume. Ha!
The three of us are fake and shallow compared to you. You
are the thing itself. A man without the trappings of
civilization is just a poor, naked, two-legged animal like you.
Off, off with my clothing. Come, let me unbutton this. *[He
tears at his own clothes]*

FOOL

Please, uncle, calm down. It's a bad night for swimming. On
a night like this a little fire in a barren field would be like the
heart of a lustful old man—a small spark in a cold body.
[GLOUCESTER enters with a torch] Look, here comes a
walking fire.

EDGAR

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet. He begins at curfew and walks till the first cock. He gives the web
 115 and the pin, squints the eye and makes the harelip, mildews the white wheat and hurts the poor creature of earth.
 St. Withold footed thrice the 'old.
 He met the nightmare and her ninefold,
 120 Bid her alight,
 And her troth plight.
 And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT

How fares your grace?

LEAR

[indicating GLOUCESTER] What's he?

KENT

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

GLOUCESTER

What are you there? Your names?

EDGAR

Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall newt, and the water; that in the fury
 130 of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow dung for salads, swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog, drinks the green mantle of 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,
 135 Horse to ride and weapon to wear.
 But mice and rats and such small deer
 Have been Tom's food for seven long year.
 Beware my follower. Peace, Smulkin. Peace, thou fiend!

GLOUCESTER

[to LEAR] What, hath your grace no better company?

EDGAR

140 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

145 Poor Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

Go in with me. My duty cannot suffer
 To obey in all your daughters' hard commands.
 Though their injunction be to bar my doors
 And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,
 150 Yet have I ventured to come seek you out
 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

155 *[to LEAR]* Good my lord, take his offer. Go into the house.

EDGAR

That is the devil Flibbertigibbet. He wakes up at nightfall and walks around until midnight. He makes eyes squint from cataracts, makes cleft lips, rots the ripe wheat, and hurts the poor creatures of the earth. Saint Withold walked the field three times. He met a demon and her nine offspring, told her to fly away, and made her swear to never return. And begone, witch, begone!

KENT

How are you feeling, your Grace?

LEAR

[Pointing to GLOUCESTER] Who's he?

KENT

Who's there? What is it you want?

GLOUCESTER

Who are you? What are your names?

EDGAR

Poor Tom, who eats frogs, toads, tadpoles, lizards, and newts. When his heart is furious and the devil rages, Tom eats cow dung for salads, swallows old rats and dead dogs, and drinks the green pond scum. Tom is whipped in every town and put in the stocks, punished and imprisoned, but Tom once was a servant with three suits and six shirts. And a horse to ride and a sword to wear. But mice and rats and deer have been Tom's food for seven long years. Beware the devil who follows me. Quiet, Smulkin. Quiet, you devil!

GLOUCESTER

[To LEAR] What, don't you have any better companions than this, your Grace?

EDGAR

The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman. He's called Modo and Mahu.

GLOUCESTER

[To LEAR] My lord, our children have grown so wicked that they hate the parents who made them.

EDGAR

Poor Tom is cold.

GLOUCESTER

Come back to my house with me. My duty to you wouldn't allow me to obey all your daughters' harsh commands. They ordered me to shut my doors and let this brutal night have its way with you. But instead I've come here to find you and bring you to a place where there's both food and fire.


LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher.

[To EDGAR] What is the cause of thunder?

KENT

155 *[To LEAR]* My good lord, take his offer and go back to the house with him.

 Flibbertigibbet—like Smulkin, Modo, and Mahu in the next few lines—is the name of a devil. These names were derived from Samuel Harsnett's book, *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, published in 1603.

LEAR

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

EDGAR

How to prevent the fiend and to kill vermin.

LEAR

Let me ask you one word in private.

LEAR and EDGAR talk aside

KENT

160 *[aside to GLOUCESTER]* Importune him once more to go, my lord.
His wits begin t' unsettle.

GLOUCESTER

Canst thou blame him?

Storm still

His daughters seek his death. Ah, that good Kent—
165 He said it would be thus, poor banished man.
Thou say'st the king grows mad. I'll tell thee, friend,
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—
170 No father his son dearer. Truth to tell thee,
The grief hath crazed my wits. What a night's this!
[to LEAR] I do beseech your grace—

LEAR

O, cry your mercy, sir.—
[to EDGAR] Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR

175 Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

In, fellow. There, into th' hovel. Keep thee warm.

LEAR

Come let's in all.

KENT

This way, my lord.

LEAR

[indicating EDGAR]
180 With him!
I will keep still with my philosopher.

KENT

[to GLOUCESTER] Good my lord, soothe him. Let him take the fellow.

GLOUCESTER

Take him you on.

KENT

185 *[to EDGAR]* Sirrah, come on. Go along with us.

LEAR

Come, good Athenian.

GLOUCESTER

No words, no words. Hush.

LEAR

First I'll talk with this Greek scholar here.

[To EDGAR] What is your field of study?

EDGAR

How to resist the devil and kill rats.

LEAR

Let me ask you something in private.

LEAR and EDGAR talk privately.

KENT

[To GLOUCESTER so that only he can hear] Ask him again to go with you, my lord. He's beginning to go crazy.

GLOUCESTER

Can you blame him?

The storm continues.

His daughters want him dead. Ah, that good Kent—he predicted that it would be like this, the poor banished man. You say the king is going crazy. I'll tell you, friend, I have almost gone crazy myself. I had a son, but I've now disowned him. He tried to kill me just recently, very recently. I loved him, friend. No father ever loved his son more than I did. To tell you the truth, the grief has almost made me crazy. What a night this is!

[To LEAR] Please, your Grace—

LEAR

Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

[To EDGAR] Noble philosopher, speak with me.

EDGAR

Tom's cold.

GLOUCESTER

Then go in, man. There, into the cow shed. Keep yourself warm.

LEAR

Let's all go in.

KENT

No, come this way, my lord.

LEAR

[Pointing to EDGAR] I'll go with him! I want to stay with my philosopher.

KENT

[To GLOUCESTER] My good lord, let's humor him. Let him take that man with him.

GLOUCESTER

Bring him with you, then.

KENT

[To EDGAR] Sir, come on. Come along with us.

LEAR

Come, good philosopher.


GLOUCESTER


Quiet, quiet. Hush.

EDGAR

Child Roland to the dark tower came,
His word was still "Fie, foh, and fum,
190 I smell the blood of a British man."

*Exeunt***EDGAR**

The young knight Roland  came to the dark tower. His motto was always "Fee, fie, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman."

 *Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, mixes the characters of Roland (hero of the Charlemagne legends) with that of the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk.*

They all exit.

Act 3, Scene 5

Shakespeare*Enter CORNWALL and EDMUND***CORNWALL**

I will have my revenge ere I depart his house.

EDMUND

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

CORNWALL

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

EDMUND

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

CORNWALL

Go with me to the duchess.

EDMUND

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

CORNWALL

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

EDMUND

[aside] If I find him comforting the king, it will
20 stuff his suspicion more fully. *[to CORNWALL]* 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.

*Exeunt***Shakescleare Translation***CORNWALL and EDMUND enter.***CORNWALL**

I'll have my revenge on Gloucester before I leave his house.

EDMUND

My lord, I'm somewhat afraid of how I might be criticized for letting my loyalty to you overcome my natural bond to my father.

CORNWALL

I now realize that it wasn't just your brother's evil nature that made him try to kill your father. Even though killing one's father is evil, Gloucester would be getting what he deserved.

EDMUND

How evil is my fate, that I must apologize for doing the right thing! *[Giving CORNWALL a letter]* This is the letter he was talking about, which confirms that he was a spy and informer for France. Oh God, I wish that this treason had never happened, or that I hadn't been the one to discover it!

CORNWALL

Come with me to see the duchess.

EDMUND

If the contents of this letter are true, then you have a lot to deal with.

CORNWALL

True or false, this letter has made you the Earl of Gloucester. Find out where your father is, so we can be ready to arrest him.

EDMUND

[To himself] If I find my father helping the king, it will confirm his guilt even more.

[To CORNWALL] I'll remain loyal to you, even though it conflicts with my duty to my father.

CORNWALL

I'll put my trust in you, and you'll find me a better father than Gloucester was.

They exit.

Act 3, Scene 6

Shakespeare**Shakescleare Translation**

Enter GLOUCESTER, LEAR, KENT disguised, FOOL, and EDGAR disguised

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

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

Exit GLOUCESTER

EDGAR

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

FOOL

10 Prithce, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?

LEAR

A king, a king!

FOOL

15 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.

LEAR

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

EDGAR

The foul fiend bites my back.

FOOL

20 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.
[*to EDGAR*] Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer.
[*to FOOL*] Thou, sapient sir, sit here.—Now, you she-foxes—

EDGAR

25 Look, where he stands and glares!—Want'st thou eyes at trial, madam?
[*sings*]
Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me—

FOOL

30 [*sings*]
Her boat hath a leak,
And she must not speak
Why she dares not come over to thee.

EDGAR

35 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.

GLOUCESTER, LEAR, KENT (*in disguise*), the FOOL, and EDGAR (*in disguise*) enter.

GLOUCESTER

It's better in this shed than out in the open air. Be grateful for the shelter. I'll make you more comfortable in whatever way I can. I won't be gone long.

KENT

His passionate rage is driving him crazy. May the gods reward your kindness!

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDGAR

The devil Frateretto calls out to me. He says that the Roman emperor Nero is a fisherman in Hell's lake of darkness. Pray, innocent Fool, and beware the devil.

FOOL

Please, uncle, tell me whether this madman is a gentleman or an average man?

LEAR

He's a king, a king!

FOOL

No, he must be an average man with a gentleman for a son—since an average man would be crazy to let his son become a gentleman before he became a gentleman himself.

LEAR

May a thousand hissing devils strike those daughters of mine with their red burning pitchforks!

EDGAR

The devil bites my back.

FOOL

A man would be crazy to trust a wolf's tameness, a horse's health, a boy's love, or a whore's promise.

LEAR

I will do it. I'll put my daughters on trial right away.
[*To EDGAR*] Come, sit here, our excellent judge.

[*To the FOOL*] And you, wise sir, sit here. Now, you she-foxes—

EDGAR

Look, see the devil standing and glaring at me! Do you want spectators at your trial, madam?
[*Singing*]
Come over the brook, Bessy, to me—

FOOL

[*Singing*]
Her boat has a leak,
And she must not speak
About why she can't come over to see you.

EDGAR

The devil haunts Poor Tom by singing like a nightingale. That devil Hoppedance grumbles in Tom's belly, crying for two fish to eat. Stop rumbling, you black angel. I don't have any food for you.

KENT

[to LEAR] How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed.
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?

LEAR

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

40 [to EDGAR] Thou robèd man of justice, take thy place.
[to FOOL] And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
Bench by his side. [to KENT] You are o' th'
commission.
Sit you too.

EDGAR

45 Let us deal justly.
[sings]
*Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep be in the corn.
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,
50 Thy sheep shall take no harm.
Purr! The cat is gray.*

LEAR

Arraign her first. 'Tis Goneril. I here take my oath
before this honorable assembly, she kicked the poor king
her father.

FOOL

55 Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR

She cannot deny it.

FOOL

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

LEAR

And here's another, whose warped looks proclaim
What store her heart is made on. Stop her there!
60 Arms, arms, sword, fire, corruption in the place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?

EDGAR

Bless thy five wits.

KENT

[to LEAR] O pity! Sir, where is the patience now,
That thou so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR

65 [aside] My tears begin to take his part so much,
They'll mar my counterfeiting.

LEAR

The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart—see, they bark at me.

EDGAR

Tom will throw his head at them.—Avaunt, you curs!
70 Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite,
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound or spaniel, brach or him,
Bobtail tyke or trundle-tail—
75 Tom will make them weep and wail.
For with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled.
Do-de, de-de. Cessez! Come, march to wakes and fairs

KENT

[To LEAR] How are you, sir? Don't look so bewildered. Will
you lie down and rest on the pillows?

LEAR

I want to see their trial first. Bring in the witnesses against
them.

[To EDGAR] Take your place, you judge in your robe.

[To the FOOL] And you, his partner in justice, sit by his side.

[To KENT] You are allowed to be a judge as well. Sit down,
too.

EDGAR

Let's deliver a fair trial.
[Singing]
*Are you asleep or awake, happy shepherd?
Your sheep are in the cornfield.
And if you blow your horn with your sweet little mouth
Your sheep will come to no harm.
Purr the Cat is a gray devil.*

LEAR

Let's put Goneril on trial first. Here she is. I swear before this
honorable assembly that she kicked her father, the poor
king.


FOOL


Come here, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR

She cannot deny it.

FOOL

Forgive me, madam, I thought you were a stool .

 The Fool is making fun of the fact that Goneril isn't actually there, and depending on the staging Lear may in fact be addressing a stool.

LEAR

And here's Regan, whose twisted face shows what her heart
is made of. Stop her there! Guards, catch her! Swords, fire,
bribery in the courtroom! You false judge, why did you let
her escape?

EDGAR

God bless your five senses.

KENT

[To LEAR] How tragic! Sir, where is the self-control now,
which you used to boast so much about?

EDGAR

[To himself] I feel so sorry for him that I'm afraid I'll cry and
ruin my disguise.

LEAR

Even the little dogs, Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart—see,
they're barking at me.

EDGAR

Tom will threaten them. Begone, you mangy dogs!
Whether your mouth is black or white, with teeth that
poison when they bite; whether mastiff, greyhound, or
mean mutt, hound or spaniel, bitch or bloodhound, short-
tail mutt or long-tail dog—Tom will make you weep and
wail. When I threaten like this, dogs run out the door, and
all are gone. Do-de, de-de. Stop! Come, run off to festivals
and fairs and market towns. Poor Tom, your begging bowl is
empty.

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

LEAR

80 Then let them anatomize Regan. See what breeds about
her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these
hard hearts? [to EDGAR] You, sir, I entertain you for
one of my hundred. Only I do not like the fashion of
your garments. You will say they are Persian attire, but
85 let them be changed.

KENT

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

LEAR

Make no noise, make no noise. Draw the curtains—so, so,
so. We'll go to supper i' th' morning. So, so, so.
[sleeps]

FOOL

90 And I'll go to bed at noon.

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

Oppressèd nature sleeps.—
105 This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken sinews,
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure.
[to FOOL]
Come, help to bear thy master.
110 Thou must not stay behind.

GLOUCESTER

Come, come, away.

Exeunt all but EDGAR

EDGAR

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers, suffers most i' th' mind,
115 Leaving free things and happy shows behind.
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'erskip
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.
120 He childed as I fathered. Tom, away!
Mark the high noises and thyself bewray
When false opinion, whose wrong thought defiles thee,
In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.
What will hap more tonight, safe 'scape the king!
125

LEAR

Now let them dissect Regan. Study her heart well. Is there
any natural reason for such a hard heart?

[To EDGAR] You, sir, I'll keep you as one of my hundred
knights. Only I don't like the style of your clothes. You'll
probably say that they're elegant and exotic, but change
them anyway.

KENT

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

LEAR

Make no noise, make no noise. Close the bed curtains—like
that, like that, like that. We'll have dinner in the morning.
So, so, so. [He falls asleep]

FOOL

And I'll go to bed at noon.

GLOUCESTER enters.

GLOUCESTER

[To KENT] Come here, friend. Where is the king, my master?

KENT

He's here, sir, but don't disturb him. He's lost his mind.

GLOUCESTER

Good friend, please pick him up. I've overheard that there
are people plotting to kill him. I have a carriage ready for
him. Put him in it and drive towards Dover, friend. There
you'll find hospitality and protection. Pick up your master. If
you delay even half an hour he'll surely be killed, along with
you and anyone else who offers to defend him. Get him, get
him and follow me, and I'll quickly lead you to get some
supplies.

KENT

His suffering drives him to sleep.

[To the sleeping LEAR] This rest might have been able to
soothe your shattered nerves. But, if there's no other
convenient chance to sleep, your nerves aren't likely to be
cured.

[To the FOOL] Come, help to carry your master. You mustn't
stay behind.

GLOUCESTER

Come on, come on, let's go.

Everyone except EDGAR exits.

EDGAR

When we see our superiors suffering the same woes that we
suffer, we can almost forget our own misery. Whoever
suffers alone suffers the most, and loses his carefree nature
and happy memories. But when grief is shared with friends
and companions, the mind can rise above suffering. My
pain seems light and easy to endure now that I can see the
king bearing my same sorrow. He found the same cruelty in
his children that I found in my father. Tom, let's go! We'll
keep an eye on the situation, and you can reveal your true
identity once you are proven innocent to the public. That
will reconcile you with those who accuse you. Whatever
else might happen tonight, may the king escape safely!
Now, lurk out of sight, Tom, lurk.

Lurk, lurk.

Exit

He exits.

Act 3, Scene 7

Shakespeare

Enter CORNWALL, and REGAN, and GONERIL, and EDMUND the bastard, and servants

CORNWALL

[to GONERIL] Post speedily to my lord your husband. Show him this letter. The army of France is landed. —Seek out the traitor Gloucester.

Exeunt some servants

REGAN

Hang him instantly.

GONERIL

5 Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL

10 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. *[to EDMUND]* Farewell, my lord of Gloucester.

Enter OSWALD the steward

How now? Where's the king?

OSWALD

15 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 dependants Are gone with him towards Dover, where they boast To have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL

20 Get horses for your mistress.

Exit OSWALD

GONERIL

Farewell, sweet lord, and sister.

CORNWALL

Edmund, farewell.

Exeunt GONERIL and EDMUND the bastard

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

Exeunt some servants

Shakescleare Translation

CORNWALL, REGAN, GONERIL, EDMUND, and servants enter.

CORNWALL

[To GONERIL] Ride quickly to your husband. Show him this letter. The French army has landed.

[To servants] Find the traitor Gloucester.

Some servants exit.

REGAN

Hang him at once.

GONERIL

Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL

Leave him to my displeasure.

[To EDMUND] Edmund, you go with my sister-in-law Goneril. The punishment I am obligated to inflict on your father isn't fit for you to see. Tell the Duke of Albany to prepare himself immediately for war. We are committed to doing the same. Our messengers will keep us both well-informed.

[To GONERIL] Farewell, dear sister-in-law.

[To EDMUND] Farewell, my lord of Gloucester.

OSWALD enters.

What's going on? Where's the king?

OSWALD

The lord of Gloucester has helped him escape. Thirty-five or thirty-six of his knights found him and met him at the gate. Along with some of Gloucester's servants, they've all gone with him to Dover, where they claim to have well-armed friends.

CORNWALL

Prepare the horses for your mistress.

OSWALD exits.

GONERIL

Farewell, sweet lord, and you, sister.

CORNWALL

Edmund, farewell.

GONERIL and EDMUND exit.

Go find the traitor Gloucester. Tie his arms like a thief and bring him to me.

Some servants exit.

25 Though well we may not pass upon his life
Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control.—Who's there? The traitor?

Enter GLOUCESTER, brought in by two or three servants

REGAN

Ingrateful fox, 'tis he.

CORNWALL

30 Bind fast his corky arms.

GLOUCESTER

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

CORNWALL

Bind him, I say.

Servants bind GLOUCESTER

REGAN

Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

35 Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

CORNWALL

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

REGAN plucks GLOUCESTER's beard

GLOUCESTER

By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN

So white, and such a traitor?

GLOUCESTER

40 Naughty lady,
These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin
Will quicken and accuse thee. I am your host.
With robbers' hands my hospitable favors
You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?

CORNWALL

45 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

50 You have sent the lunatic king. Speak.

GLOUCESTER

I have a letter guessingly set down,
Which came from one that's of a neutral heart,
And not from one opposed.

CORNWALL

Cunning.

Though I cannot condemn him to death without a trial, I
can still use my power to express my anger against him
somehow. Some men might blame me for this, but they
won't dare oppose me. Who's there? The traitor?

GLOUCESTER enters, brought in by two or three servants.

REGAN

The ungrateful fox! That's him.

CORNWALL

Tie up his withered arms.

GLOUCESTER

What do you mean by this, your Graces? My friends,
remember that you are my guests in this house. Don't
abuse your host, friends.

CORNWALL

Tie him up, I say.

Servants tie up GLOUCESTER.

REGAN

Bind him tighter, tighter. Oh, the filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

I'm no traitor, you merciless lady.

CORNWALL

Tie him to this chair. Villain, you'll see—

REGAN pulls GLOUCESTER's beard.

GLOUCESTER

By the kind gods, it's disgraceful for you to pull my beard.

REGAN

So old and venerable, and still such a traitor?

GLOUCESTER

Wicked lady, these white hairs you tear from my chin will
come to life and accuse you. I am your host. You should not
be grabbing at your host's face with your robbers' hands.
What are you doing?

CORNWALL

Come, sir, what letters have you gotten from France lately?

REGAN

Be honest, because we already know the truth.

CORNWALL

And what is your relationship with the traitors who have
landed in our kingdom recently?

REGAN

The ones to whom you've sent the insane king. Speak.

GLOUCESTER

I have a letter that only speculates about what's going on. It
came from a neutral person, not someone opposed to you.

CORNWALL

A cunning answer.

REGAN
55 And false.

CORNWALL
Where hast thou sent the king?

GLOUCESTER
To Dover.

REGAN
Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril—

CORNWALL
Wherefore to Dover?—Let him first answer that.

GLOUCESTER
60 I am tied to th' stake, and I must stand the course.

REGAN
Wherefore to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER
Because I would not see thy cruèl nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes, nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
65 The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up,
And quenched the stellèd fires.
Yet poor old heart, he help the heavens to rain.
If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time,
70 Thou shouldst have said, "Good porter, turn the key,"
All cruèls else subscribed. But I shall see
The wingèd vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL
"See" 't shalt thou never.—Fellows, hold the chair.—
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

GLOUCESTER
75 He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help!

CORNWALL plucks out one of GLOUCESTER's eyes and stamps on it

O cruel! O you gods!

REGAN
One side will mock another—th' other too.

CORNWALL
If you see vengeance—

FIRST SERVANT
80 Hold your hand, my lord!
I have served you ever since I was a child.
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.

REGAN
How now, you dog?

FIRST SERVANT
85 If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel.

REGAN
What do you mean?

CORNWALL
My villain!

REGAN
And a false one.

CORNWALL
Where have you sent the king?

GLOUCESTER
To Dover.

REGAN
Why to Dover? Weren't you commanded, under penalty of death—

CORNWALL
Why to Dover?—Let him answer first.

GLOUCESTER
I'm backed into a corner now, but I must go on.

REGAN
Why to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER
Because I didn't want to watch your cruel fingernails pluck out his poor old eyes, or see your vicious sister sink her fangs into his kingly flesh. You made him endure a storm so terrible that if it had occurred at sea, the waves would have risen up to extinguish the stars' fires. But the poor old man just added to the rain with his tears. If wolves had been howling at your gate during that storm, you would have said, "Good doorman, let them in." Even the cruelest being would have given in to pity in such a situation, but you did not. I will see vengeance swoop down on you from heaven, you cruel children.

CORNWALL
No, you won't "see" anything. Servants, hold his chair. I'm going to put my foot on his eyes.

GLOUCESTER
If any man hopes to grow old someday, let him help me!

CORNWALL plucks out one of GLOUCESTER's eyes and stamps on it.

Oh, cruel! Oh, you gods!

REGAN
Now his face is crooked—do the other eye too.

CORNWALL
If you ever "see" vengeance—

FIRST SERVANT
Stop this, my lord! I've served you ever since I was a child. But I've never done you a better service than by now telling you to stop.

REGAN
What's this, you dog?

FIRST SERVANT
If you had a beard, lady, I'd pull it and spit in your face for this cause.

REGAN
What do you think you're doing?

CORNWALL
One of my own servants!

FIRST SERVANT

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

FIRST SERVANT and CORNWALL draw and fight. CORNWALL is wounded

REGAN

90 *[to another servant]*

Give me thy sword.—A peasant stand up thus?

[takes a sword, runs at FIRST SERVANT behind, and kills him]

FIRST SERVANT

Oh, I am slain!—My lord, you have one eye left

95 To see some mischief on him. Oh!

[dies]

CORNWALL

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

[plucks out GLOUCESTER's other eye]

Where is thy luster now?

GLOUCESTER

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

Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature

To quit this horrid act.

REGAN

Out, treacherous villain!

Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he

105 That made the overture of thy treasons to us,

Who is too good to pity thee.

GLOUCESTER

O my follies! Then Edgar was abused.

Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell

110 His way to Dover.

Exeunt some servants with GLOUCESTER

[to CORNWALL] How is 't, my lord? How look you?

CORNWALL

I have received a hurt. Follow me, lady.—

Turn out that eyeless villain. Throw this slave

Upon the dunghill.—Regan, I bleed apace.

115 Untimely comes this hurt. Give me your arm.

Exit CORNWALL with REGAN

SECOND SERVANT

I'll never care what wickedness I do,

If this man come to good.

THIRD SERVANT

If she live long,

And in the end meet the old course of death,

120 Women will all turn monsters.

SECOND SERVANT

Let's follow the old earl, and get the Bedlam

To lead him where he would. His roguish madness

Allows itself to any thing.

FIRST SERVANT

Come on then, let's fight—take your chances against me.

The FIRST SERVANT and CORNWALL draw their swords and fight. CORNWALL is wounded.

REGAN

[To another servant] Give me your sword. Is a peasant really

standing up like this? *[She takes a sword, runs at the FIRST*

SERVANT, and stabs him in the back, killing him]

FIRST SERVANT

Oh, I've been murdered!

[To GLOUCESTER] My lord, you still have one eye left to see that I've injured him at least. Oh! *[He dies]*

CORNWALL

Then we'll have to prevent it from seeing more. Come out,

you worthless jelly! *[He plucks out GLOUCESTER's other*

eye] Where is your sparkle now?

GLOUCESTER

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

Edmund, let your love for your father inspire you to avenge

this horrible act!

REGAN

Enough, you treacherous villain! You call for a son who

hates you. It was Edmund who revealed your treason to us.

He is too good to have any pity for you.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, my stupidity! Then Edgar has been slandered. Kind

gods, forgive me for that, and let him prosper!

REGAN

Go throw him out at the gates, and let him smell his way to

Dover.

Some servants exit with GLOUCESTER.

[To CORNWALL] What is it, my lord? How do you feel?

CORNWALL

I've been wounded. Follow me, lady.

[To servants] Throw out that eyeless villain. And throw this treacherous servant onto the manure pit.

[To REGAN] Regan, I'm bleeding badly. This is a bad time for such an injury. Give me your arm.

CORNWALL exits with REGAN.

SECOND SERVANT

If our wicked master escapes justice, I'll stop caring about

whether anything I do is wicked.

THIRD SERVANT

And if Regan lives a long life and dies a natural death, then

women might as well all become monsters.

SECOND SERVANT

Let's follow the old earl, and get that crazy Tom to lead him

where he wants to go. He's a homeless madman, so he can

get away with anything.

THIRD SERVANT

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

Exeunt severally

THIRD SERVANT

Go then. I'll get some cloth and egg whites to apply to his
bleeding face. Now heaven help him!

They exit in different directions.

Act 4, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter EDGAR disguised

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.
5 The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts.

Enter GLOUCESTER led by an OLD MAN

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

OLD MAN

[to GLOUCESTER] O my good lord,
15 I have been your tenant and your father's tenant these
fourscore years.

GLOUCESTER

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

OLD MAN

20 Alack, sir, you cannot see your way.

GLOUCESTER

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,
25 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!

OLD MAN

How now? Who's there?

EDGAR

[aside] O gods! Who is 't can say "I am at the worst?"
30 I am worse than e'er I was.

OLD MAN

[to GLOUCESTER]
'Tis poor mad Tom.

EDGAR

[aside] And worse I may be yet. The worst is not
So long as we can say "This is the worst."

Shakescleare Translation

EDGAR (in disguise) enters.

EDGAR

I'm still better off like this—as a beggar who is openly
hated—than when I was a nobleman who was flattered to
my face and hated in secret. Even the worst, lowliest, and
most dejected creatures still have a little hope for better
things, and live without fear of getting worse. The worst
kind of change is when good luck goes bad—but such a
change can make us laugh at fortune's tricks. I welcome,
then, these winds of change and freedom! I've hit the
bottom, so I have nothing more to fear from bad luck.

GLOUCESTER enters, led by an OLD MAN.

But who's that coming? My father, accompanied only by one
poor peasant? Oh world, world, world! If the strange twists
of fortune didn't make life hateful, we would never age and
die.

OLD MAN

[To GLOUCESTER] Oh, my good lord, I have been your
tenant and your father's tenant for these last eighty years.

GLOUCESTER

Away, go away. Leave me, good friend. Your help can't do
me any good, and it might put you in danger.

OLD MAN

But you cannot see where you're going, sir.

GLOUCESTER

I have nowhere to go, so I don't need eyes to see my path.
And even when I could see, I followed the wrong path. It's
often the case that when we are prosperous we get
overconfident. But being deprived of something teaches us
humility and is actually beneficial. Oh my dear son Edgar,
the object of your deceived father's anger, if I might live to
touch your face again, that would be as good as getting my
eyes back!

OLD MAN

What's that? Who's there?

EDGAR

[To himself] Oh gods! Who can ever say, "It can't get any
worse?" I'm worse off now than I ever was before.

OLD MAN

[To GLOUCESTER] It's poor crazy Tom.

EDGAR

[To himself] And things might get worse still. As long as we
are able to say "this is the worst," then it's not the worst yet.

OLD MAN
35 [to EDGAR] Fellow, where goest?

GLOUCESTER
Is it a beggarman?

OLD MAN
Madman and beggar too.

GLOUCESTER
He has some reason, else he could not beg.
I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
40 Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more
since.
As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods.
45 They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR
[aside]
How should this be?
Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Angering itself and others.—Bless thee, master!

GLOUCESTER
50 Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN
Ay, my lord.

GLOUCESTER
Then prithee, get thee gone. If for my sake
Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain
I' th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love.
55 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.
60 Above the rest, be gone.

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

Exit OLD MAN

GLOUCESTER
Sirrah, naked fellow—

EDGAR
Poor Tom's a-cold.
65 [aside] I cannot daub it further.

GLOUCESTER
Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR
[aside] And yet I must.—Bless thy sweet eyes, they
bleed.

GLOUCESTER
Know'st thou the way to Dover?

OLD MAN
[To EDGAR] Where are you going, fellow?

GLOUCESTER
Is it a beggar?

OLD MAN
He's both a madman and a beggar.

GLOUCESTER
He must still have some sanity, or else he couldn't beg. I
saw a man like that in last night's storm, and he made me
think of how insignificant humans are. He reminded me of
my son, though at the time my son was my enemy. Now I
know better. To the gods, we are like flies killed for fun by
undisciplined boys.

EDGAR
[To himself] How can this be? It's a bad business to have to
keep playing the fool in the face of my father's sorrow. I'm
only distressing myself and him.

[To GLOUCESTER] Bless you, master!

GLOUCESTER
Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN
Yes, my lord.

GLOUCESTER
Then please go. If you're willing to do me a favor—for the
sake of our long and loyal relationship—then catch up with
us a mile or two down the road towards Dover. And bring
some clothes for this naked beggar. I'll ask him to lead me.

OLD MAN
But alas, sir, he's crazy.

GLOUCESTER
It's the sickness of our times that madmen must lead the
blind. Do as I tell you. Or rather, do whatever you want. But
above all, leave this place.

OLD MAN
I'll bring him the best clothes that I have, come what may.

The OLD MAN exits.

GLOUCESTER
Sir, naked fellow—

EDGAR
Poor Tom's cold.

[To himself] I can't continue this charade.

GLOUCESTER
Come here, man.

EDGAR
[To himself] And yet I must.

[To GLOUCESTER] Bless your sweet eyes. They're bleeding.

GLOUCESTER
Do you know the way to Dover?

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

[Giving EDGAR a purse]

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues

- 80 Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched Makes thee the happier. Heavens, deal so still. Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man, That slaves your ordinance, that will not see Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly.
- 85 So distribution should undo excess, And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR

Ay, master.

GLOUCESTER

There is a cliff, whose high and bending head Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.

- 90 Bring me but to the very brim of it, And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear With something rich about me. From that place I shall no leading need.

EDGAR

Give me thy arm.

- 95 Poor Tom shall lead thee.

Exeunt

EDGAR

I know every step of the way—post and gate, horse path and footpath. Poor Tom has been scared out of his wits. Bless you, friend, and avoid the devil! Five devils have possessed poor Tom all at once: Obidicut, the devil of lust; Hobbididence, the devil of muteness; Mahu, the devil of stealing; Modo, the devil of murder; and Flibbertigibbet, the devil of making mocking faces, who possesses many chambermaids and serving ladies lately. So bless you, master.

GLOUCESTER

[Giving EDGAR a purse] Here, take this purse, you who have

been humbled by all the plagues of heaven. My misery makes yours seem less wretched. God, let it always be this way. Let the spoiled and gluttonous man—who makes the laws serve his own desires, and won't see the misery around him because he doesn't feel it himself—let him feel your anger, you gods. The even distribution of wealth should rid us of excess luxuries, and then each man might have enough to live. Do you know Dover?

EDGAR

Yes, master.

GLOUCESTER

There is a cliff there, whose high and bending head leans precariously over the deep sea. Bring me to the very edge of it, and I'll repay you for your troubles with something valuable on my person. Once I'm there I won't need to be led anymore.

EDGAR

Give me your arm. Poor Tom will lead you.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter GONERIL and EDMUND the bastard

GONERIL

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

Enter OSWALD

Now, where's your master?

OSWALD

Madam, within—but never man so changed. I told him of the army that was landed. He smiled at it. I told him you were coming. His answer was "The worse." Of Gloucester's treachery And of the loyal service of his son, When I 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.

Shakescleare Translation

GONERIL and EDMUND enter.

GONERIL

Welcome, my lord. I'm surprised that my bland husband hasn't met us on the way.

OSWALD enters.

[To OSWALD] Now, where's your master?

OSWALD

He's inside, madam. But you've never seen a man so changed. I told him that the French army had landed, and he smiled at the news. I told him that you were coming, and he answered with "too bad." When I told him about Gloucester's treachery and his son Edmund's loyal service, he called me "fool," and told me I had it backwards. The things he ought to dislike seem pleasant to him, and what should be good news offends him.

GONERIL*[to EDMUND]*

Then shall you go no further.

- 15 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.
- 20 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 Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air.
[kisses EDMUND] Conceive, and fare thee well.

EDMUND

Yours in the ranks of death.

GONERIL

My most dear Gloucester!

Exit EDMUND

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

OSWALD

Madam, here comes my lord.

*Exit OSWALD**Enter ALBANY***GONERIL**

I have been worth the whistle.

ALBANY

- 35 O Goneril,
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition.
That nature, which contemns its origin
Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
- 40 She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap perforce must wither
And come to deadly use.

GONERIL

No more. The text is foolish.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.

- 45 Filths savor but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?
A father, and a gracious agèd man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you maddèd.
- 50 Could my good brother suffer you to do it—
A man, a prince by him so benefited?
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come:
- 55 Humanity must perforce prey on itself
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

- 60 Thine honor from thy suffering; that not know'st
Fools do those villains pity who are punished
Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy drum?

GONERIL*[To EDMUND]*

Then you shouldn't come any further. It's my husband's cowardly terror that keeps him from taking risks. He'll ignore insults that should require him to retaliate. But what you and I talked about on the way here—our desire for each other—may soon be realized. Edmund, go back to my brother-in-law Cornwall. Help gather his troops and lead his armies. When I get home I will change roles with Albany, and thus make my husband play the housewife. This trusty servant Oswald can carry messages between us. If you trust yourself to ask, you will soon be likely to hear my command as both Duchess and as your lover. Wear this for me. *[She gives him a favor]* Don't speak. Bend down to me. If this kiss could speak, it would encourage you to do great things. *[She kisses EDMUND]* I hope you understand. Farewell.

EDMUND

I'm your servant until death.

GONERIL

My dearest Gloucester!

EDMUND exits.

Oh, how different two men can be! You deserve my services as a woman, Edmund. My foolish husband still thinks he possesses me.

OSWALD

Madam, here comes my lord.

*OSWALD exits.**ALBANY enters.***GONERIL**

So I'm finally worth your time.

ALBANY

Oh Goneril, you aren't worth the dust that the rude wind blows in your face. I fear your nature. I can't trust anyone who condemns her own father. A woman who cuts herself off from her family is like a branch that tries to break away from the tree that gave it life—she must wither and come to ruin.

GONERIL


No more of that. Your sermon is stupid.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness seem vile to vile people. To the filthy everything seems filthy. What have you done? You two tigers—not daughters—what wicked deeds have you done? You barbarous degenerates, you've driven your father crazy. He once was a gracious old man whom even an angry bear would respect. How could my good brother-in-law allow you to do it, when he himself was given his power by the king? If the heavens don't send down avenging angels to punish these terrible crimes, then the end will come: humanity must turn on itself, all of us destroying each other like monsters from the deep.

GONERIL

You cowardly man, you always turn the other cheek and let abuse rain down on your head. You can't tell the difference between restraining yourself and being taken advantage of. You don't realize that only fools pity villains like Gloucester, whom we punish before they can commit their crimes. Where's your war drum? The King of France spreads his

 A favor was a small token—sometimes a scarf, badge, or ribbon—given to indicate support.

65 France spreads his banners in our noiseless land,
With plumèd helm thy state begins to threat,
Whiles 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.

GONERIL

70 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
75 Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood, mew!

Enter FIRST MESSENGER

ALBANY

What news?

FIRST MESSENGER

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

ALBANY

Gloucester's eyes?

FIRST MESSENGER

A servant that he bred, thrilled with remorse,
Opposed against the act, bending his sword
85 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,
90 You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge! But oh, poor Gloucester—
Lost he his other eye?

FIRST MESSENGER

Both, both, my lord.—
This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer.
95 '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
100 Upon my hateful life. Another way
The news is not so tart.— I'll read and answer.

Exit GONERIL

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

banners in our peaceful country and your kingdom is at risk
of war. But all you do is sit here, you moralizing fool, and
complain, "Alas, why is he doing that?"

ALBANY

Look at yourself, devil! Moral deformity is expected in
devils, so it doesn't seem as horrible in them as it does
when it appears in a woman.

GONERIL

Oh useless fool!

ALBANY

Shame on you, you warped and false creature! Don't make
faces at me and express your inner monstrous nature. If I
could allow my hands to do what my heart desires, I would
rip you in two. But even if you are a devil, I won't hurt a
woman.

GONERIL

What a man you are, meowing like a kitten!

The FIRST MESSENGER enters.

ALBANY

What's the news?

FIRST MESSENGER

Oh, my lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead. He was killed by
his servant as he was about to gouge out Gloucester's other
eye.

ALBANY

Gloucester's eyes?

FIRST MESSENGER

A servant of his own house was moved by pity to oppose
Cornwall's actions. He drew his sword against his great
master, who became enraged and attacked and killed the
servant—but not before he had received the wound that
killed him afterward.

ALBANY


This shows that there *is* justice in heaven. It's proved by the
fact that these earthly crimes are punished so quickly! But
oh, poor Gloucester. Did he lose his other eye?


FIRST MESSENGER

Both, both, my lord.

[To GONERIL] This letter, madam, demands an immediate
answer. It's from your sister.

GONERIL

[To herself] In a way I'm glad that Cornwall's dead. But now
that Regan is a widow, and my Edmund  is with her, then
Edmund might choose her over me. Then all my fantasies
will crumble and I'll have to continue this hateful life. But in
another way, the news is not so tragic.

 *In the original text, Goneril refers
to Edmund by his title as Gloucester's
heir.*

[To FIRST MESSENGER and ALBANY] I'll go read the letter
and answer it.

GONERIL exits.

ALBANY

Where was Gloucester's son Edmund when they took out
his father's eyes?

FIRST MESSENGER

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

FIRST MESSENGER

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

ALBANY

Knows he the wickedness?

FIRST 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

110 Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou showed'st the king,
And to revenge thine eyes.— Come hither, friend.
Tell me what more thou know'st.

Exeunt

FIRST MESSENGER

He was riding here with my lady.

ALBANY

But he's not here.

FIRST MESSENGER

No, my good lord. I met him on his way back.

ALBANY

Does he know about all this wickedness?

FIRST MESSENGER

Yes, my lord. He was the one who informed against his
father, and left the house so that they could punish
Gloucester fully without worrying about Edmund's feelings.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I will live to thank you for the love you showed
the king, and I'll avenge your eyes.

[*To FIRST MESSENGER*] Come here, friend. Tell me what else
you know.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter KENT disguised and GENTLEMAN

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

Who hath he left behind him general?

GENTLEMAN

The Marshal of France, Monsieur la Far.

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

15 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
Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

KENT

O, then it moved her?

GENTLEMAN

20 Not to a rage. Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once—her smiles and tears
Were like a better way. Those happy smilets
That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know

Shakescleare Translation

KENT (in disguise) and the GENTLEMAN enter.

KENT

Do you know why the King of France went back home so
suddenly?

GENTLEMAN

He left something unfinished in his kingdom, which he
remembered after arriving here. It was important and
dangerous enough that he had to return in person to deal
with it.

KENT

Who has he left behind as his general?

GENTLEMAN

The Marshal of France, Monsieur la Far.

KENT

Did the letters you delivered cause Queen Cordelia to show
any grief?

GENTLEMAN

Yes, sir. She took them and read them in my presence, and
now and then a large tear would trickle down her delicate
cheek. It seemed that she was able to control her deepest
emotions, even though they tried to overcome her.

KENT

Oh, then the news moved her?

GENTLEMAN

Not to any burst of passion. She seemed to struggle
between patience and sorrow, deciding which would best
express her feelings. You've seen how it can rain while the
sun is still shining—her smiles and tears were like that, but
even more beautiful. The little smiles on her lips seemed

What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved
25 If all could so become it.

KENT

Made she no verbal question?

GENTLEMAN

Faith, once or twice she heaved the name of "father"
Pantingly forth as if it pressed her heart,
Cried, "Sisters, sisters! Shame of ladies, sisters!
30 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,
And clamor moistened. Then away she started
35 To deal with grief alone.

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

40 No.

KENT

Was this before the king returned?

GENTLEMAN

No, since.

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

Why, good sir?

KENT

A sovereign shame so elbows him. His own unkindness
That stripped her from his benediction turned her
50 To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters. These things sting
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

'Tis so. They are afoot.

KENT

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

Exeunt

oblivious to her tears, which dropped like pearls from her
diamond eyes. In short, sorrow would be a precious thing if
everyone were as lovely in their sorrow as Cordelia was.

KENT

Did she ask anything out loud?

GENTLEMAN

Well, once or twice she sighed the name "father," as if the
word were pressing on her heart. And once she cried out,
"Sister, sisters! You most shameful of all ladies, sisters!
Kent, father, sisters! What, in a storm, in the middle of the
night? No false shows of pity can be trusted!" And then she
shook the holy tears from her heavenly eyes, and went off
to deal with her grief alone.

KENT

It's the stars, the stars above us who decide our fates.
Otherwise one couple couldn't have children so different
from each other as Cordelia and her sisters are. Have you
spoken to her since then?

GENTLEMAN

No.

KENT

Was this before the King of France returned home?

GENTLEMAN

No, after that.

KENT

Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear is in Dover. When he's in
his right mind, he remembers why we're here, and he
refuses to see his daughter Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Why, good sir?

KENT

He is pained by a powerful sense of shame. He remembers
how unkind he was to her; and how he stripped her of his
blessing and turned her out to take her chances in a foreign
land, and then gave her share of the kingdom to her two
hard-hearted sisters. These things sting his mind so
venomously that a burning shame keeps him from going to
see Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Alas, the poor gentleman!

KENT

Have you heard anything about Albany and Cornwall's
troops?

GENTLEMAN

Yes. They're on the march.

KENT

Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear, and leave you to
attend to him. I have some important business that will
force me to disguise myself again for a while. When my true
identity is revealed, you won't regret helping me like this.
Please, come along with me.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter, with drum and colors, CORDELIA, DOCTOR, 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 burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
5 Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn.—A century send forth.
Search every acre in the high-grown field,
And bring him to our eye.

Exit some soldiers

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

DOCTOR

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

CORDELIA

All blessed secrets,
All you unpublished virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears. Be aidant and remediate
20 In the good man's distress. Seek, seek for him,
Lest his ungoverned rage dissolve the life
That wants the means to lead it.

Enter SECOND MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

News, madam.
The British powers are marching hitherward.

CORDELIA

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

Exeunt

Shakescleare Translation

CORDELIA enters with a DOCTOR, along with soldiers carrying drums and banners.

CORDELIA

Alas, it's the king. Why, just recently he was seen acting as crazy as the stormy sea, singing out loud and wearing a crown of thick weeds--burdock, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo, and all the weeds that struggle against our life-sustaining wheat.

[To soldiers] Send out a hundred soldiers to find him. Search every acre of the overgrown fields, and bring him here for me to see.

Some soldiers exit.

What can human medical knowledge do to restore his sanity? Whoever helps him can have all my material wealth.

DOCTOR

It is possible, madam. Rest is the best thing to comfort human nature, and rest is the thing Lear hasn't had. But there are many medicinal herbs that will help him to forget his anguish and to sleep for a while.

CORDELIA

Then, you precious herbs--you secret healing plants of the earth--may you grow as fast as my tears fall, and heal the good old man's distress. Now go, go find those herbs for him, before his overwhelming anger uses up all his life and energy.

A SECOND MESSENGER enters.

SECOND MESSENGER

I have news, madam. The British troops are marching this way.

CORDELIA

We already knew this. Our troops are ready to receive them. Oh, dear father, I'm doing all this for you. This is why the great King of France listened to and pitied my persistent and pleading tears. It wasn't inflated ambition that made us invade England, but love—dear love!—and my old father's abused rights. Hopefully I will hear him and see him soon.

They all exit.

Act 4, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter REGAN and the steward OSWALD

REGAN

But are my brother's powers set forth?

Shakescleare Translation

REGAN and OSWALD enter.

REGAN

But have my brother-in-law Albany's troops been sent forward?

OSWALD

Ay, madam.

REGAN

Himself in person there?

OSWALD

Madam, with much ado.

5 Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN

Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

OSWALD

No, madam.

REGAN

What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD

I know not, lady.

REGAN

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

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

REGAN

Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word? Believe
Some things—I know not what. I'll love thee much.

25 Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD

Madam, I had rather—

REGAN

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

OSWALD

I, madam?

REGAN

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

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

REGAN

Is he there in person?

OSWALD

Yes, madam, and making a big fuss. Your sister Goneril is
the better soldier of the two.

REGAN

Did Lord Edmund speak with your lord at home?

OSWALD

No, madam.

REGAN

What did my sister's letter to him say?

OSWALD

I don't know, lady.

REGAN

Well, he hurried away on some serious business. It was
foolishness to let Gloucester live after plucking out his eyes.
Wherever he goes, everyone pities him and turns against us.
I think Edmund left to put his father out of his misery and
end his sightless life—and also to spy out the strength of
the enemy army.

OSWALD

I must go after him with my letter, madam.

REGAN

Our troops will set out tomorrow. Stay with us. The roads
are dangerous.

OSWALD

I can't, madam. My lady ordered me to carry out her
instructions.

REGAN

Why should she write to Edmund? Couldn't you just deliver
her message verbally? Perhaps it's . . . I don't know what. I'll
make it worth your while if you let me unseal that letter.

OSWALD

Madam, I'd rather—

REGAN

I know your lady Goneril does not love her husband Albany.
I'm sure of that. And when she was here recently she was
giving strange, loving glances and significant looks to the
noble Edmund. I know you're in her confidence.

OSWALD

I, madam?

REGAN

I'm sure about this. She trusts you, I know it. So I advise you
to take note of what I'm about to tell you. My husband is
dead. Edmund and I have talked, and it's more appropriate
for him to marry me than to marry Goneril. You can draw
your own conclusions from that. If you do find Edmund,
please give him this. *[She gives Oswald a favor]* And when
you talk to your mistress about all of this, please tell her to
come to her senses. So farewell. If you happen to hear
anything about that blind traitor Gloucester, there will be a
reward for anyone who cuts his life short.

OSWALD

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

REGAN

45 Fare thee well.

Exeunt severally

OSWALD

I wish I could meet him, madam. Then I would prove where
my loyalties lie.

REGAN

Farewell.

They exit in different directions.

Act 4, Scene 6

Shakespeare

Enter GLOUCESTER, and EDGAR disguised in peasant clothing

GLOUCESTER

When shall we 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.

5 Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

EDGAR

Why then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER

So may it be indeed.

10 Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

EDGAR

You're much deceived. In nothing am I changed
But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks you're better spoken.

EDGAR

15 Come on, sir. Here's the place. Stand still. How
fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
20 Hangs one that gathers samphire—dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice. And yon tall anchoring bark,
Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
25 Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
That on th' unnumbered idle pebbles chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more
Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER

30 Set me where you stand.

Shakescleare Translation

*GLOUCESTER and EDGAR (now disguised in peasant's
clothes) enter.*

GLOUCESTER

When will we come to the top of that cliff?

EDGAR

You're climbing up it now. See how we sweat and pant?

GLOUCESTER

The ground seems flat to me.

EDGAR

It's horribly steep. Listen, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, to be honest.

EDGAR

Well then, your other senses must have been injured by the
trauma of losing your eyes.

GLOUCESTER

It might be so. It seems that your voice has changed, and
you speak more eloquently than you did before.

EDGAR

You're mistaken. The only thing I've changed is my clothes.

GLOUCESTER

I think you're speak better now.

EDGAR

Come on, sir. Here's the place. Stand still. How terrifying
and dizzying it is to look down so far! The crows and
jackdaws flying below look smaller than beetles. Halfway
down there's someone clinging to the cliff and gathering
herbs—what a dreadful job! He looks tiny to me from up
here. The fishermen walking on the beach below look like
mice. And that tall ship anchored over there seems as small
as its lifeboat, and its lifeboat seems as small as a tiny buoy
that's almost too small to see. You can't even hear the
waves crashing against the rocks from up here. I can't look
anymore, or else my head will spin and I'll fall headfirst
from the edge.

GLOUCESTER

Lead me to where you stand.

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.

35 *[gives EDGAR another purse]*

Here, friend, 's another purse, in it a jewel
Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods
Prosper it with thee! Go thou farther off.
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

40 Now fare you well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR moves aside

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

O you mighty gods, *[kneels]*

45 This world I do renounce, and in your sights

Shake patiently my great affliction off.

If I could bear it longer and not fall

To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,

My snuff and loathed part of nature should

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

Now, fellow, fare thee well. *(falls)*

EDGAR

Gone, sir. Farewell.

[aside] And yet I know not how conceit may rob
The treasury of life when life itself

55 Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought,

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

Ho you, sir, friend! Hear you, sir? Speak.—

Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives.—

What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

60 Away, and let me die.

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?

EDGAR

70 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.

EDGAR

Give me your hand. You're now within a foot of the extreme
edge. I wouldn't jump up and down here for anything under
the sun.

GLOUCESTER

Let go of my hand. *[He gives EDGAR another purse]* Here,

friend, here's another purse, and in it there's a jewel any

poor man would be glad to have. May the fairies and gods

make your wealth increase! Go further away from here. Bid

me farewell, and let me hear you leaving.

EDGAR

Now farewell, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR moves aside.

EDGAR

[To himself] I'm toying with his despair to try and cure him
of it.

GLOUCESTER

Oh you mighty gods! *[He kneels]* I renounce this world, and

in your sight, I shake off my great troubles and afflictions. If

I could bear my troubles any longer--and not rebel against

your inevitable will--then my useless life would end up

burning itself out. If Edgar lives, then bless him!

[To EDGAR] Now, fellow, farewell. *[He falls]*

EDGAR

Gone, sir. Farewell.

[To himself] I don't know whether a man's imagination can

kill him, especially if he's so willing to die. If he had been

where he thought he was, he'd be dead by now. But is he

alive or dead?

[To GLOUCESTER, disguising his voice] Hey you, sir, friend!

Can you hear me, sir? Speak.

[To himself] Maybe he died after all. But he's waking up.

[To GLOUCESTER, disguising his voice] Who are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Go away, and let me die.

EDGAR

Even if you were made of only thread, feathers, and air, you

should've shattered like an egg after falling as far as you

did. But you're breathing; your flesh is solid; you're not

bleeding; you can speak. You are unbroken. Ten ship masts

laying end to end couldn't measure the height you just fell

from. Your life is a miracle. Speak again.

GLOUCESTER

But have I fallen or not?

EDGAR

You fell from the dreadful top of this chalky cliff. Look up at

the height. The shrill-sounding lark up there can't be seen

or heard. Just 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.

EDGAR

Give me your arm.

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

GLOUCESTER

80 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.

EDGAR

85 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 honors
90 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear

Affliction till it do cry out itself,

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

I took it for a man. Often 'twould say,

95 "The fiend, the fiend!" He led me to that place.

EDGAR

Bear free and patient thoughts.

Enter LEAR, mad

But who comes here?

The safer sense will ne'er accommodate

His master thus.

LEAR

100 No, they cannot touch me for coining. I am the king
himself.

EDGAR

[aside] O thou side-piercing sight!

LEAR

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your press-
money. That fellow handles his bow like a crowkeeper.

105 Draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse!
Peace, peace, this piece of toasted cheese will do 't.
There's my gauntlet. I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up
the brown bills. O, well flown, bird. I' th' clout, i'
th' clout. Hewgh! Give the word.

EDGAR

110 Sweet marjoram.

LEAR

Pass.

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

GLOUCESTER

Alas, I have no eyes. Are wretched men now not even

allowed to kill themselves? It used to be some small

comfort when someone in misery could cheat death's plan
and frustrate its proud will.

EDGAR

Give me your arm. Up—there you go. How do you feel? Can

you feel your legs? You're standing.

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR

This is stranger than strange. When you were up on the

edge of the cliff, what was that thing I saw leaving you?

GLOUCESTER

A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR

From down here it looked like his eyes were two full moons.

He had a thousand noses, and horns twisted and wavy like
a stormy sea. It was some devil. You fortunate old man, you

must realize that the purest gods have saved your life. They
perform miracles like this to win the respect and worship of
humans.

GLOUCESTER

I remember now. From now on, I'll bear my misery until the

misery itself cries out, "Enough, enough!" and dies. That

devil you speak of—I thought it was a man. He would often

say, "The devil, the devil!" He led me to that place.

EDGAR

Think carefree and peaceful thoughts.

LEAR--insane and wearing wild flowers--enters.

But who's that coming? A sane mind would never let its

master dress like this.

LEAR

No, they can't punish me for counterfeiting coins. I am the
king himself.

EDGAR

[To himself] Oh, what a heartbreaking sight!

LEAR

Nature is better than art in that respect. There's your
enlistment money, recruit. That fellow handles his bow like
a scarecrow. Draw the bowstring back farther, to the length

of a tailor's yard. Look, look, a mouse! Quiet, quiet, this
piece of toasted cheese will catch him. There's my
challenge. I'll prove my case by fighting a giant. Bring up
the foot soldiers. Oh, well shot, arrow. Right in the bull's
eye, in the bull's eye! Woosh! What's the password?

EDGAR

Sweet marjoram.

LEAR

That's it. You can pass.

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

LEAR

Ha! Goneril with a white beard? Ha, Regan? They flattered me like a dog and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say "Ay" and "No" to 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 thunder would not peace at my bidding—there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER

The trick of that voice I do well remember.
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.
The wren goes to 't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight.
Let copulation thrive, for Gloucester's bastard son
Was kinder to his father than my daughters
Got 'tween the lawful sheets. To 't, luxury, pell-mell!
For I lack soldiers. Behold yond simpering dame,
Whose face between her forks presages snow;
That minces virtue and does shake the head
To hear of pleasure's name.
The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to 't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are centaurs,
Though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit.
Beneath is all the fiends'; there's hell, there's darkness,
There's the sulphurous pit—burning, scalding,
Stench, consumption! Fie, fie, fie, pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary,
To sweeten my imagination.
There's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER

O, let me kiss that hand!

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?

LEAR

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squint 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 one.

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

Ha! Goneril with a white beard? Ha, Regan? They flattered me like a dog would, and told me that I had wisdom before I had old age. To say "yes" and "no" to everything that I said "yes" and "no" to was insincere and sinful. When the rain came to soak me, and the wind to make me shiver, and the thunder wouldn't stop at my command—then I realized the truth about them. Then I sniffed them out. They aren't honest. They told me I was everything—but I'm not immune to illness.

GLOUCESTER

Something about that voice is familiar to me. Is it the king?

LEAR

Yes, every inch a king! When I glare, see how my subjects tremble. I pardon that man's life. What was your crime? Adultery? You won't have to die. Die for adultery? No. The birds do it, and the flies copulate right in front of me. Let there be more copulation, in fact, for Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to him than my daughters—conceived on a marriage bed—have been to me. Go ahead, lust, rage on! For I need more soldiers. Look at that simpering woman over there—her stiff bonnet makes her look frigid and heartless. She coyly pretends to be virtuous and blushes at the word "sex," but really she's hornier than a stallion. From the waist down women are lecherous centaurs, though they're chaste up above. God only gets the woman down to her belt—below that belongs to the devil. That part is hell, darkness, the lake of fire—burning, scalding, stench, sickness! Shame, shame, shame, ah, ah! Give me a strong perfume to sweeten my imagination, good pharmacist. There's some money for you.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, let me kiss that hand!

LEAR

Let me wipe it first. It smells of death.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, you ruined masterpiece of nature! This great world will end up the same way, worn down to nothing. Do you know me?

LEAR

I remember your eyes well enough. Are you squinting at me? No, do your worst, blind Cupid. I'll never love again. Read this letter. Just notice the handwriting.

GLOUCESTER

Even if every word was a sun, I couldn't see a single one.

EDGAR

[To himself] I wouldn't believe this scene if I weren't seeing it myself. And my heart breaks at the sight of it.

LEAR

Read it.

GLOUCESTER

How, with my emptyeye sockets?

LEAR

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

GLOUCESTER

165 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 yon justice rails upon yon 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 mightst behold the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office.

175 Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand.
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back.
Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.

180 Through tattered clothes great vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks.
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend—none, I say, none. I'll able 'em.

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,
Pull off my boots. Harder, harder. So.

EDGAR

190 *[aside]* 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.
Thou must be patient. We came crying hither.

195 Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark me.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, alack the day!

LEAR

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. This a good block.

200 It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt. I'll put 't in proof.
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Enter GENTLEMAN with two others

GENTLEMAN

Oh, here he is. Lay hand upon him.—Sir,
205 Your most dear daughter—

LEAR

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

LEAR

Oh, ha, is that the way things are? You won't have eyes in your head until there's money in your purse? Your eyes are in a bad way and your purse is empty, but you see how this world works.

GLOUCESTER

I see by feeling.

LEAR

What, are you crazy? A man can see how this world works without needing eyes. Look with your ears. See how that judge condemns an ordinary thief. But listen: if you have them switch places, do you think you could tell the difference between the judge and the thief? Have you seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, sir.

LEAR

And the man run from the mutt? There you can see the great image of authority: even a dog is obeyed when it's in power. You rascally officer, restrain your bloody hands! Why are you whipping that whore? Whip your own back instead. You lust after her and long to use her for the same crime you're whipping her for. The loanshark hangs the cheater. It's easy to see sins through tattered clothes, but rich robes and gowns hide everything. Cover up a sin with gold, and the mighty sword of justice can't touch it. But dress a sin in rags, and even a piece of straw can pierce it. No one is a criminal—no one, I say, no one. I'll pardon them all. Take that from me, my friend. I have the power to stop the prosecutors' lips. Get yourself some glass eyes, and pretend to see things you can't—like a corrupt politician. Now, now, now, now, pull off my boots. Harder, harder. Like that.

EDGAR

[To himself] Oh sense and nonsense mixed! Reason in madness!

LEAR

If you're going to cry over my bad luck, then take my eyes too. I know you well enough. Your name is Gloucester. You must be patient. I came here crying. You know that when we first smell the air as newborns we wail and cry. I'll preach to you. Listen to me.

GLOUCESTER

Alas, how awful!

LEAR

When we're born, we cry because we've arrived at this great stage of fools. I like your hat. It's a clever strategy to make horseshoes out of felt. I'll put it to the test. And when I've sneaked up on those sons-in-law of mine, then I'll kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

The GENTLEMAN and two others enter.

GENTLEMAN

[To the other gentlemen] Oh, here's the king. Grab him.

[To LEAR] Sir, your most dear daughter—

LEAR

No rescue for me? What, I'm a prisoner? I was born to be the fool of fate. Treat me well. You'll get your ransom. Let me have a doctor. I'm wounded in the brain.

I am cut to th' brains.

GENTLEMAN

210 You shall have anything.

LEAR

No seconds? All myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

GENTLEMAN

215 Good sir—

LEAR

I will die bravely, like a smug bridegroom.
What, I will be jovial. Come, come.
I am a king, my masters, know you that?

GENTLEMAN

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR

220 Then there's life in 't. Come, an if you get it, you
shall get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.

Exit LEAR running, followed by two gentlemen

GENTLEMAN

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

EDGAR

Hail, gentle sir.

GENTLEMAN

Sir, speed you. What's your will?

EDGAR

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

GENTLEMAN

230 Most sure and vulgar. Everyone hears that
That can distinguish sound.

EDGAR

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

GENTLEMAN

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

EDGAR

235 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.

Exit GENTLEMAN

GLOUCESTER

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

GENTLEMAN

You'll have anything you want.

LEAR

No one will support me? I'm by myself? Why, this loneliness
could reduce a man to nothing but salty tears. He could use
his eyes to water his garden, yes, and to tamp down the
dust of autumn.

GENTLEMAN

Good sir—

LEAR

I'll die bravely, like a smug bridegroom 🗨️. Well, I'll be jolly.
Come, come. My gentlemen, I'm a king--did you know that?

🗨️ *Lear is punning here: "die" was a euphemism for "orgasm," and "bravely" could also mean "well-dressed."*

GENTLEMAN

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR

Then there's still hope left. Come on—if you're going to get
me, you'll have to catch me running! Sa, sa, sa, sa!

LEAR exits running, followed by two gentlemen.

GENTLEMAN

Such a sight would be pitiful even in the lowliest beggar,
but it's unbearable in a king. He still has one daughter good
enough to redeem the evil of the other two.

EDGAR

Hello, noble sir.

GENTLEMAN

God bless you, sir. What can I do for you?

EDGAR

Sir, do you know anything about an impending battle?

GENTLEMAN

Surely, it's common knowledge. Everyone who can hear has
heard about it.

EDGAR

But, please, how near is the enemy army?

GENTLEMAN

Near, and approaching quickly. The main force is expected
to arrive soon.

EDGAR

I thank you, sir. That's all.

GENTLEMAN

The queen is here for a special reason, but her army has
moved on.

EDGAR

I thank you, sir.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, you gentle gods: please take my life. Don't let me be
tempted to suicide again. I will die when it's your will.

EDGAR

Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER

Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

250 Hearty thanks.
The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot and boot.

Enter OSWALD the steward

OSWALD

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

GLOUCESTER

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

EDGAR interferes

OSWALD

260 Wherefore, bold peasant,
Darest 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!

EDGAR

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

OSWALD

270 Out, dunghill!

EDGAR

'Chill pick your teeth, zir. Come, no matter vor your
foins.


EDGAR and OSWALD fight

OSWALD

275 *[falling]* Slave, thou hast slain me. Villain, take my
purse.
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body.
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. Seek him out
Upon the British party. O untimely death! *[dies]*

EDGAR

You pray well, old man .

 In the original text, "father" is used as a term of address to indicate respect towards an older man. Edgar will use it later in this scene to address Lear.

GLOUCESTER

Now, good sir, who are you?

EDGAR

I'm a poor man who's been humbled by bad fortune. The profound sadness of my experience has made me more able to pity others. Give me your hand, and I'll lead you to a resting place.

GLOUCESTER

I thank you heartily. And in addition to my thanks, may heaven grant you blessings and prosperity.

OSWALD enters.

OSWALD

Look, a wanted man with a bounty on his life! What good luck for me! That eyeless head of yours was created just to make me rich. You old unlucky traitor, say your prayers and prepare to die. The sword that will destroy you is ready to strike.

GLOUCESTER

Then may your hand strike surely—I welcome the blow.

EDGAR steps in between GLOUCESTER and OSWALD.

OSWALD

How dare you support this well-known traitor, you bold peasant? Get away, before his bad luck infects you too. Let go of his arm.

EDGAR

[Speaking in a country accent] I won't let go sir, not without a better reason than that.

OSWALD

Let go, villain, or you die!

EDGAR

[Speaking in a country accent] Good gentleman, walk away and let us poor folks pass by. If bullying like yours could kill me, I would have died at just two weeks old. No, don't come near the old man. Keep away, I'm warning you, or I'll find out which is harder: your head or my club.

OSWALD

Out of my way, you pile of dung!

EDGAR

[In a country accent] I'll knock your teeth out, sir. Come on, I'm not afraid of your sword!

EDGAR and OSWALD fight.

OSWALD

[Falling] You scoundrel, you've killed me! Villain, take my purse. If you have any decency, then bury my body. And deliver the letters I'm carrying to Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. Find him in the British camp. Oh, untimely death! *[He dies]*

EDGAR

280 I know thee well—a serviceable villain,
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit you down, father. Rest you.
Let's see these pockets. The letters that he speaks of
285 May be my friends. He's dead. I am only sorry
He had no other death's-man. Let us see.
[takes letters out of OSWALD's pocket and opens them]
Leave, gentle wax, and, manners, blame us not.
To know our enemies' minds, we rip their hearts.
290 Their papers is more lawful.
[reads]
"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
295 nothing done if he return the conqueror. Then am I the
prisoner and his bed my gaol, from the loathed warmth
whereof deliver me, and supply the place for your labor.
Your—wife, so I would say—affectionate servant,
Goneril."
300 O indistinguished space of woman's will!
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life,
And the exchange my brother!— Here in the sands
Thee I'll rake up, the post unsanctified
Of murderous lechers. And in the mature time
305 With this ungracious paper strike the sight
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
310 Of my huge sorrows. Better I were distract—
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.
315 Far off methinks I hear the beaten drum.
Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

Exeunt

EDGAR

[In his normal voice] I know you well—a hardworking
villain, and always obedient to your mistress' evil desires.

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit down, old man. Rest. Let's see what's in these pockets.
The letters he spoke of might help me. He's dead. I'm just
sorry that I had to be the executioner. Let's see. *[He takes
letters out of OSWALD's pocket and opens them]* Off you go,
you wax seal. And, good manners--don't blame me for
opening these letters. We kill our enemies to learn their
secrets; reading their mail is a lesser evil. *[He reads]* "Don't
*forget the vows we made to each other. You have many
chances to cut off Albany's life. If your will is strong enough,
you'll have lots of opportunities to do it. Nothing will be
accomplished if he returns as the victor. Then I'll be his
prisoner again, and his bed will be my prison. Free me from
his hateful presence, and as a reward for your work you can
take his place. Signed, your—I wish I could say
'wife'—affectionate servant,
Goneril."*
Oh, there is no limit to a woman's appetite! To plot against
her virtuous husband's life, and replace him with my
brother!

[To OSWALD's body] I'll bury you here in a shallow grave,
you unholy messenger for lustful murderers. And when the
time is ripe, I'll show this wicked letter to the duke whose
life is being plotted against. It's a good thing for him that I
can tell him about your death and the business of your
letter.

GLOUCESTER

The king is insane, but my own unwanted sanity is too
stubborn—I still have the senses to perceive my own great
sorrow. It would be better if I went crazy. Then my thoughts
would be free from grief, and my hallucinations would
make me forget my suffering.

Drums are played offstage.

EDGAR

Give me your hand. I think I hear drums in the distance.
Come, old man, and I'll take you to stay with a friend.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Shakespeare

Enter CORDELIA, KENT disguised, GENTLEMAN, and DOCTOR

CORDELIA

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

KENT

To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid.
5 All my reports go with the modest truth,
Nor more, nor clipped, but so.

Shakescleare Translation

*CORDELIA, KENT (in disguise), the GENTLEMAN, and the
DOCTOR enter.*

CORDELIA

Oh, good Kent, what can I do that will ever live up to your
goodness? I won't live long enough to succeed, and all my
attempts will fail.

KENT

Madam, to be thanked by you is too much payment. All that
I've reported about the king is the truth--not exaggerated or
understated, but just as it happened.

CORDELIA

Be better suited.
These weeds are memories of those worse hours.
I prithee, put them off.

KENT

10 Pardon, dear madam.
Yet to be known shortens my made intent.
My boon I make it that you know me not
Till time and I think meet.

CORDELIA

Then be 't so, my good lord.—
15 How does the king?

DOCTOR

Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA

O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abusèd nature,
Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up,
20 Of this child-changèd father!

DOCTOR

So please your majesty
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 asleep in a chair carried by servants

GENTLEMAN

25 Ay, madam. In the heaviness of his sleep
We put fresh garments on him.

DOCTOR

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

CORDELIA

Very well.

DOCTOR

30 Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there!

CORDELIA

[kisses LEAR] O my dear father, restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT

35 Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

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

CORDELIA

Change into better clothes. These rags are memories of bad
times that are now in the past. Please, take them off.

KENT

I'm sorry, dear madam, but revealing myself now would
ruin my plans. The favor I beg of you is that you pretend not
to know me until the time is right.

CORDELIA

Then I'll do that, my good lord.


[To the DOCTOR] How is the king doing?

DOCTOR

Madam, he's still sleeping.

CORDELIA

Oh, you kind gods: heal the great wound in his suffering
mind, and re-tune his discordant senses! Heal this father
driven [crazy by his children](#)!

 Here, Cordelia could also mean that Lear, in his senility, has been changed, and now acts like a child.

DOCTOR

Would it please your Majesty if we woke up the king? He's
slept a long time.

CORDELIA

Do whatever your medical expertise tells you to, and go
ahead as you see fit. Is he dressed?

Servants carry in LEAR, who is asleep in a chair.

GENTLEMAN

Yes, madam. We put fresh clothes on him while he was
sleeping deeply.

DOCTOR

Good madam, stay close by when we wake him up. I'm sure
he'll stay calm.

CORDELIA

Very well.

DOCTOR

Please, come closer. Play the music louder!

CORDELIA

[She kisses LEAR] Oh, my dear father, may my lips heal and
restore you, and may this kiss repair those violent wounds
that my two sisters have inflicted on your revered spirit!

KENT

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

Even if you hadn't been their father, these white locks of
hair should have made them pity you. Is this a face that
ought to endure the violent winds, or stand against the
dreadful thunder and the terrible, zigzagged lightning? To
stand guard all night—poor lonely sentry!—with only your
thinning hair as a helmet? Even if my enemy's meanest dog
had bit me, I still would have let it stay inside by my
fireplace on that night. And, poor father, were you glad to
find shelter with pigs and beggars on a bed of musty straw?
Alas, alas! It's a wonder that your life and your sanity didn't
end all at once. He's waking up. Speak to him.

DOCTOR

Madam, do you. 'Tis fittest.

CORDELIA

50 How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

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

55 Sir, do you know me?

LEAR

You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA

[aside to DOCTOR] Still, still far wide!

DOCTOR

He's scarce awake. Let him alone awhile.

LEAR

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
60 I am mightily abused. I should ev'n die with pity
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see.
I feel this pinprick. Would I were assured
Of my condition.

CORDELIA

65 *[kneels]*
O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.
No, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR

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

CORDELIA

And so I am, I am.

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
85 Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause; they have not.

CORDELIA

No cause, no cause.

LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

In your own kingdom, sir.

DOCTOR

Madam, you speak first. That's most appropriate.

CORDELIA

How are you, my royal lord? How is your Majesty doing?

LEAR

You do me wrong to take me out of the grave. You are a soul
in heaven, but I am chained to a wheel of fire, tormented
endlessly, and even my tears burn me like molten lead.

CORDELIA

Sir, do you know me?

LEAR

You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA

[To the DOCTOR so that only he can hear] He's still far from
sanity!

DOCTOR

He's barely awake. Let's leave him alone for a while.

LEAR

Where have I been? Where am I? Is it daytime? I have been
greatly deceived. I would even die of pity to see someone
else in my situation. I don't know what to say. I can't even
promise that these are my hands. Let's see. I feel this
pinprick. I wish I could be sure of my condition.

CORDELIA

[Kneeling] Oh, look at me, sir. Hold your hands over me,
and give me your blessing. No, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR

Please do not mock me. I am a very foolish, silly old man,
more than eighty years old, not an hour more or less. And to
put it plainly, I fear that I'm not in my right mind. I think I
should recognize you, and this man too. *[He points at*
KENT] But I'm still doubtful, for I have no idea where I am,
and I can't remember where I got these clothes. I don't
know where I slept last night either. Do not laugh at me, but
I swear I think this lady is my child, Cordelia.

CORDELIA

And so I am, I am.

LEAR

Are your tears real? Yes, it's really happening. Please, don't
cry. If you have poison for me, I'll drink it. I know you don't
love me, for your sisters have done me wrong, if I remember
correctly. And they don't even have a good reason to hate
me, but you do.

CORDELIA

No reason, no reason.

LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

You're in your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR

90 Do not abuse me.

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.
Desire him to go in. Trouble him no more

95 Till further settling.

CORDELIA

Will 't please your highness walk?

LEAR

You must bear with me.
Pray you now, forget and forgive.
I am old and foolish.

Exeunt. Manent KENT and GENTLEMAN.

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

Most certain, sir.

GENTLEMAN

Who is conductor of his people?

KENT

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

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

Exit GENTLEMAN

KENT

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

Exit

LEAR

Don't trick me.

DOCTOR

Be comforted, good madam. You see how his great frenzy is
now over. But it's dangerous to make him try to fill in the
blank spaces of his memory. Ask him to go inside. Don't
trouble him further until his mind is more settled.

CORDELIA

Would it please your Highness to walk?

LEAR

You must bear with me. Please, forget and forgive. I am old
and foolish.

Everyone except KENT and the GENTLEMAN exits.

GENTLEMAN

Sir, is it true that the Duke of Cornwall was killed?

KENT

Very true, sir.

GENTLEMAN

Who is leading his men now?

KENT

They say it's Gloucester's bastard son.

GENTLEMAN

I've heard that Edgar, Gloucester's banished son, is with the
Earl of Kent in Germany.

KENT

Rumors are unreliable. It's time to be on our guard. The
British army is approaching.

GENTLEMAN

The battle will most likely be a bloody one. Farewell, sir.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

KENT

For better or for worse, my life and my plans completely
depend on how today's battle ends.

He exits.

Act 5, Scene 1

Shakespeare

*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

5 And self-reproving. Bring his constant pleasure.

Exit gentleman

Shakescleare Translation

*EDMUND, REGAN, gentlemen, and soldiers enter with
drums and banners.*

EDMUND

[To a gentleman] Find out if the Duke of Albany plans to
stick to his most recent plan, or if something has changed
his mind. He's very fickle and always second-guessing
himself. Bring me a report of his final decision.

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.
10 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

15 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.

REGAN

I never shall endure her. Dear my lord,
20 Be not familiar with her.

EDMUND

Fear me not.
She and the duke her husband!

Enter with drum and colors ALBANY and GONERIL, with troops

GONERIL

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

ALBANY

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

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN

Why is this reasoned?

GONERIL

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

ALBANY

Let's then determine with the ancient of war
On our proceedings.

EDMUND

40 I shall attend you presently at your tent.

REGAN

My sister's messenger Oswald must have had an accident.

EDMUND

That outcome is to be feared, madam.

REGAN

Now, sweet lord, you know that I intend to honor you with
my hand in marriage. But tell me truly—be honest
now—don't you love my sister Goneril?

EDMUND

With an honorable love.

REGAN

But have you never taken my brother-in-law's place in her
bed?

EDMUND

Such a question only insults yourself.

REGAN

I'm suspicious that you have been both her ally and her
lover, and are now hers.

EDMUND

No, madam. I swear by my honor.

REGAN

I won't be able to stand it if she takes you from me. My dear
lord, don't be intimate with her.

EDMUND

Don't worry about me. Now she and the duke her husband
are here!

ALBANY, GONERIL, and soldiers enter with drums and banners.

GONERIL

[To herself] I would rather lose this battle than let that sister
of mine come between Edmund and me.

ALBANY

Good to see you, Regan, my loving sister-in-law.

[To Edmund] Sir, I hear that the king has joined his daughter
Cordelia, along with others who have rebelled against the
harshness of our rule. I can't be brave if the cause I'm
fighting for isn't honorable. This business concerns me only
because the French have invaded our land. I don't care
whether the French support King Lear or others who I'm
afraid have good reason to oppose us.

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN

Why are we discussing this?

GONERIL

We must unite against the enemy. These domestic and
personal quarrels are not the issue here.

ALBANY

Then let's meet with our experienced officers and
determine how to proceed.

EDMUND

I'll meet you at your tent right away.

REGAN

Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

'Tis most convenient. Pray you, go with us.

GONERIL

[aside] Oh ho, I know the riddle.—I will go.

Enter EDGAR disguised

EDGAR

45 *[to ALBANY]* If e'er your grace had speech with man so poor,
Hear me one word.

ALBANY

[To EDMUND, REGAN, and GONERIL]
I'll overtake you.—

Exeunt all but ALBANY and EDGAR

50 Speak.

EDGAR

[Giving ALBANY a letter]

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,
55 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.

ALBANY

Stay till I have read the letter.

EDGAR

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

ALBANY

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

Exit EDGAR

Enter EDMUND

EDMUND

The enemy's in view. Draw up your powers.
65 *[gives ALBANY a document]*
Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery, but your haste
Is now urged on you.

ALBANY

We will greet the time.

Exit ALBANY

EDMUND

70 To both these sisters have I sworn my love,
Each jealous of the other as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed

REGAN

Sister, will you come with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

It would be best if you did. Please, come with us.

GONERIL

[To herself] Oh, ha! I know what she's doing: trying to keep me away from Edmund.

[To the others] All right, I'll go.

EDGAR (still disguised as a peasant) enters.

EDGAR

[To ALBANY] If your Grace would ever stoop to speak with a man as poor as I am, then hear what I have to say.

ALBANY

[To EDMUND, REGAN, and GONERIL] I'll catch up with you.

Everyone exits except for ALBANY and EDGAR.

[To EDGAR] Tell me.

EDGAR

[Giving ALBANY a letter] Before you fight the battle, open this letter. If you are victorious, then blow your trumpet to signal to me. I seem wretched now, but I can produce a champion who will defend my claims. If you die in battle, then your business in this world will be over, and the plot against your life will be over as well. Good luck to you.

ALBANY

Stay until I've read the letter.

EDGAR

I was ordered not to do that. When the time comes, all you have to do is blow a horn, and I'll appear again.

ALBANY

Well, farewell then. I'll read your letter.

EDGAR exits.

EDMUND enters.

EDMUND

The enemy's in sight. Prepare your troops. *[He gives ALBANY a document]* Here is an estimate of the enemy's true strength and weaponry, drawn up by our diligent scouts. But hurry now, please.

ALBANY

We will be ready for the occasion.

ALBANY exits.

EDMUND

I've pledged my love to both of these sisters now. And they're each suspicious of the other, as if they were both poisonous snakes. Which of them will I pick? Both? One? Or neither? I can't be happy with either one of them as long as

If both remain alive. To take the widow
 75 Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril,
 And hardly shall I carry out my side,
 Her husband being alive. Now, then, we'll use
 His countenance for the battle, which being done,
 Let her who would be rid of him devise
 80 His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
 Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,
 The battle done and they within our power,
 Shall never see his pardon, for my state
 Stands on me to defend, not to debate.

Exit

the other remains alive. If I married the widowed Regan, it would drive Goneril crazy. But it would be difficult to carry out my plan with Goneril while her husband's still alive. Now then, I'll use Albany's authority and power to win this battle. And when it's over, let Goneril figure out how to get rid of him. Albany intends to be merciful to Lear and Cordelia, but if I win the battle and they become my prisoners, they won't live long enough to see his pardon. My position requires actions, not words.

He exits.

Act 5, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Alarum within. Enter with drum and colors the powers of France over the stage, and CORDELIA with her father LEAR in her hand. And exeunt

Enter EDGAR disguised 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

5 Grace go with you, sir.

Exit EDGAR

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.

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.

Exeunt

Shakescleare Translation

Trumpets play to signal a call to arms. CORDELIA enters, leading LEAR by the hand and accompanied by drums, banners, and French troops. They cross the stage and exit.

EDGAR (in disguise) and GLOUCESTER enter.

EDGAR

Here, old man, use the shadow of this tree for shelter. Pray that the right side will win this battle. If I ever return to you again, I'll bring you good news.

GLOUCESTER

May God go with you, sir.

EDGAR exits.

Trumpets play to signal the army's retreat.

EDGAR enters.

EDGAR

Let's go, old man. Give me your hand. Now! King Lear has been defeated, and he and his daughter are captured. Give me your hand. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

I can't go any further, sir. I might as well die here as anywhere else.

EDGAR

What, are you feeling depressed again? We cannot choose our deaths any more than we can choose our births. We must ripen before we decay. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter in conquest with drum and colors EDMUND, with LEAR and CORDELIA as prisoners, and FIRST CAPTAIN with soldiers

Shakescleare Translation

EDMUND, victorious, enters with drums and banners. LEAR and CORDELIA enter as prisoners, led by the FIRST CAPTAIN and soldiers.

EDMUND

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

CORDELIA

[to LEAR]

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

LEAR

- 10 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
15 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
20 In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.

EDMUND

Take them away.

LEAR

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

Exeunt LEAR and CORDELIA, led by soldiers

EDMUND

- Come hither, captain. Hark.
[gives FIRST CAPTAIN a document]
Take thou this note. Go follow them to prison.
One step I have advanced thee. If thou dost
35 As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes. Know thou this: that men
Are as the time is. To be tender-minded
Does not become a sword. Thy great employment
Will not bear question. Either say thou'lt do 't,
40 Or thrive by other means.

FIRST CAPTAIN

I'll do 't, my lord.

EDMUND

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

FIRST CAPTAIN

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

Exit FIRST CAPTAIN

Flourish. Enter the Duke of ALBANY, the two ladies GONERIL and REGAN, a SECOND CAPTAIN, and soldiers

EDMUND

Have some officers take them away. Guard them carefully
until we know what punishment has been decided for
them.

CORDELIA

[To LEAR] We're not the first ones to have made things
worse with only the best of intentions. I'm unhappy for your
sake, poor, oppressed King. If it were me alone in this
situation, I could be defiant in the face of bad luck. Should
we see your daughters, my sisters?

LEAR

No, no, no, no! Come, let's go to prison. We two will sing like
birds in a cage. When you ask me for my blessing, I'll kneel
down and ask you for your forgiveness. So we'll live, and
pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh at trivial
matters, and listen to courtiers gossiping, and talk to them
too—we'll find out who's winning and who's losing, who's in
and who's out. And we'll ponder the mysteries of life as if
we were God's spies sent to observe the world. And in our
walled prison we'll outlast all the politicians and rulers
whose power comes and goes like the tide.

EDMUND

Take them away.

LEAR

Even the gods should celebrate the sacrifices you've made
for me, my Cordelia. Are we really together again? Now it
would take divine lightning bolt to separate us, like a fire to
drive foxes out of their den. Wipe your eyes. Our enemies
will waste away with age before they can make us cry again.
We'll watch them starve before that. Come.

LEAR and CORDELIA exit, led by soldiers.

EDMUND

Come here, captain. Listen. *[He gives the FIRST CAPTAIN a document]* Take this note. Follow them to prison. I've
already gotten you promoted once. If you follow these
instructions, you'll be well rewarded. Know this: we must
adapt ourselves to these harsh times. A soldier can't afford
to be tender-hearted. There can be no discussion about this
assignment. Say you'll do it, or else you can find a different
job.

FIRST CAPTAIN

I'll do it, my lord.

EDMUND

Then go to it, and feel fortunate that you've been given
such a high-paying task. Go immediately, I say, and do
exactly what I've written.

FIRST CAPTAIN

I can't do a horse's work, pulling a cart or eating dried oats.
But if it's man's work, then I'll do it.

The FIRST CAPTAIN exits.

Trumpets play. The Duke of ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, a SECOND CAPTAIN, and soldiers enter.

ALBANY

[to EDMUND] Sir, you have shown today your valiant strain,
And fortune led you well. You have the captives
50 That 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
May equally determine.

EDMUND

Sir, I thought it fit
55 To send the old and miserable king
To some retention and appointed guard—
Whose age has charms in it, whose title more—
To pluck the common bosom on his side,
An turn our impressed lances in our eyes
60 Which do command them. With him I sent the queen,
My reason all the same, and they are ready
Tomorrow or at further space t' appear
Where you shall hold your session. At this time
We sweat and bleed. The friend hath lost his friend,
65 And the best quarrels, in the heat, are cursed
By those that feel their sharpness.
The question of Cordelia and her father
Requires a fitter place.

ALBANY

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

REGAN

That's as we list to grace him.
Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded
Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers,
75 Bore the commission of my place and person—
The which immediacy may well stand up
And call itself your brother.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

ALBANY

That were the most if he should
husband you.

REGAN

85 Jesters do oft prove prophets.

GONERIL

Holla, holla!
That eye that told you so looked but asquint.

REGAN

Lady, I am not well, else I should answer
From a full-flowing stomach.
90 [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.

GONERIL

95 Mean you to enjoy him then?

ALBANY

[To EDMUND] Sir, today you've shown your courageous lineage, and luck has been on your side. You've captured the leaders of our opposition. I need to take custody of them now, to treat them according to their honor and do what is best for our kingdom's safety.

EDMUND

Sir, I thought it would be best if I sent the old, miserable king to a prison cell with a guard. Lear's old age and his title have the power to make common folk take his side, and he could even make our drafted soldiers turn against us. I sent his daughter Queen Cordelia along with him, for the same reason. They're ready to appear whenever you want to hold your trial for them, tomorrow or at some future point. Right now we are all sweating and bleeding. Friends have lost friends, and soldiers will curse even the best of causes in the heat of battle. We need to find a more appropriate place where we can make sure Cordelia and her father have a fair trial.

ALBANY

By your leave, sir: you are my subordinate in waging this war, not my equal.

REGAN

That's for me to decide. I think you should have asked for my opinion before speaking to him like that. He led our armies, and acted as my proxy in battle. His close connection to me means that he might as well consider himself your equal.

GONERIL

Not so fast. He has distinguished himself with his own merits more than any honors you've conferred upon him.

REGAN

I'm the one who invested my authority in him, and with it he proved his merit.

ALBANY

If he married you, that investment would be complete.

REGAN

You joke, but it might come true.

GONERIL

Hey, hey! You're squinting with jealousy and can't see straight.

REGAN

Lady, I'm not feeling well, or else I would answer you with my full temper.

[To EDMUND] General, take my soldiers, my prisoners, and my inheritance. Do whatever you want with them, and with me. You have conquered the fortress of my heart. Let the world be my witness that I hereby make you my lord and master.

GONERIL

Are you going to sleep with him right now?

ALBANY

The let-alone lies not in your good will.

EDMUND

Nor in thine, lord.

ALBANY

Half-blooded fellow, yes.

REGAN

100 *[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 attain
This gilded serpent. *[Indicates GONERIL]*
105 *[to REGAN]* For your claim, fair sister,
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,
My lady is bespoke.

GONERIL

110 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,
115 There is my pledge. *[throws down his glove]*
I'll make it on thy heart,
Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less
Than I have here proclaimed thee.

REGAN

Sick, oh, sick!

GONERIL

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

EDMUND

120 *[throwing down his glove]*
There's my exchange. What in the world he is
That names me traitor, villainlike he lies.
Call by thy trumpet. He that dares approach,
On him—on you, who not?—I will maintain
125 My truth and honor firmly.

ALBANY

A herald, ho!

EDMUND

A herald, ho, a herald!

Enter a HERALD

ALBANY

130 *[to EDMUND]* Trust to thy single virtue, for thy
soldiers,
All levied in my name, have in my name
Took their discharge.

REGAN

My sickness grows upon me.

ALBANY

She is not well. Convey her to my tent.

Exit REGAN, led

ALBANY

[To GONERIL] It's not in your power to prevent it.

EDMUND

Nor is it in yours, lord.

ALBANY

Yes it is, you illegitimate fellow.

REGAN

[To EDMUND] Let the drums beat, and fight anyone who
challenges your right to me.

ALBANY


Wait, and listen to reason.—Edmund, I now arrest you for
capital treason, and as an accessory to your treason I arrest
this snake of a woman. *[He points to GONERIL]*


[To REGAN] But, my fair sister-in-law, as for your claim to
him, I veto your engagement on my wife's behalf. She's the
one who is already engaged to Edmund. If you want to get
married, then start wooing me. My lady is already spoken
for.

GONERIL

What a ridiculous story!

ALBANY

You have a sword, Gloucester . Let the trumpets sound. If
no one appears to challenge you and prove that you are a
hideous traitor, then I'll do it myself. *[He throws down his
glove as a challenge]* I make this promise on your life: I
won't eat again until I prove that you're just as guilty as I
say you are.

 *As Goneril did in Act 4, Scene 2,
Albany here uses Edmund's title as
heir to Gloucester to address him, in
place of his first name.*

REGAN

Oh, I feel sick, sick!


GONERIL


[To herself] If she's not sick, I'll never trust poison again.

EDMUND

[Throwing down his glove] I accept your challenge.
Whoever calls me a traitor is a villainous liar. Blow your
trumpet. I'll fight to firmly prove my truth and honor to
anyone who dares approach—you, or anyone else.

ALBANY

Hey, a herald !

 *A herald was a person who read
official announcements aloud.*

EDMUND

A herald, hey, a herald!

A HERALD enters.

ALBANY

[To EDMUND] Trust in your own unaided strength now, for
your soldiers were all drafted in my name. And in my name
they have been discharged.

REGAN

I can feel my sickness growing.

ALBANY

She is not well. Take her to my tent.

Soldiers help REGAN exit.

135 Come hither, herald.—Let the trumpet sound,—
And read out this. [*gives the HERALD a document*]

SECOND CAPTAIN

Sound, trumpet!

A trumpet sounds

HERALD

[*reads*]

140 "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."

First trumpet

HERALD

Again!

Second trumpet

HERALD

Again!

*Third trumpet Trumpet answers within Enter EDGAR, at the third
sound, armed, a trumpet before him*

ALBANY

145 [*to HERALD*] Ask him his purposes, why he appears
Upon this call o' th' trumpet.

HERALD

What are you?

Your name, your quality, and why you answer
This present summons?

EDGAR

150 O, know, my name is lost.
By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit.
Yet am I noble as the adversary
I come to cope withal.

ALBANY

Which is that adversary?

EDGAR

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

EDMUND

Himself. What sayst thou to him?

EDGAR

160 Draw thy sword,
That if my speech offend a noble heart
Thy arm may do thee justice. [*draws his sword*] Here is
mine.
Behold: it is the privilege of mine honors,
My oath, and my profession. I protest—
Maugre thy strength, youth, place, and eminence,
Despite thy victor sword and fire-new fortune,
165 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
170 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.

Come here, herald.—Let the trumpet sound!—Read this. [*He
gives the HERALD a document*]

SECOND CAPTAIN

Blow the trumpet!

A trumpet sounds.

HERALD

[*Reading*] "If any honorable man of the army will accuse
Edmund, the supposed Earl of Gloucester, of being a traitor,
then let him appear by the third sound of the trumpet.
Edmund is willing to fight in his own defense."

The first trumpet sounds.

HERALD

Again!

The second trumpet sounds.

HERALD

Again!

*The third trumpet sounds. Another trumpet answers
offstage. EDGAR enters at the third trumpet's sound, in
armor and wearing a sword.*

ALBANY

[*To the HERALD*] Ask him what he wants, and why he's
stepping forward at this call of the trumpet.

HERALD

Who are you? What is your name and your rank? And why
do you step forward now?

EDGAR

Know this: my name has been lost to a traitorous worm. But
I am as noble as the opponent I've come to fight.

ALBANY

And which opponent is that?

EDGAR

Who speaks for Edmund, Earl of Gloucester?

EDMUND

I speak for myself. What do you have to say to me?

EDGAR

Draw your sword. If I offend your noble heart with my
words, then you can take your revenge with your sword.
Here is mine. [*He draws his sword*] Look: it is the symbol of
my honor, my vows, and my privilege as a knight. I now
solemnly declare that—despite your strength, youth, rank,
and power; and despite your recent victory, newly-minted
fortune, courage, and bravery—you are a traitor. You have
betrayed your gods, your brother, and your father, and
you've conspired against this noble, glorious duke. From
the top of your head to the soles of your feet you are a
filthy, tainted traitor. If you disagree with me, then I'm
ready to use my sword, my arm, and my courage to prove
that you are a liar.

EDMUND

In wisdom I should ask thy name.

- 175 But since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,
And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely I might well delay
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn.
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head,
180 With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart—
Which, for they yet glance by and scarcely bruise,
This sword of mine shall give them instant way,
Where they shall rest for ever.—Trumpets, speak!

Alarums EDMUND and EDGAR fight EDMUND falls

ALBANY

Save him, save him!

GONERIL

- 185 This is practice, Gloucester.
By th' law of arms thou wast not bound to answer
An unknown opposite. Thou art not vanquished,
But cozened and beguiled.

ALBANY

- 190 Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper shall I stop it.—Hold, sir,
[gives the letter to EDMUND]
Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil.—
[to GONERIL] Nay, no tearing, lady. I perceive you know
it.

GONERIL

- 195 Say, if I do? The laws are mine, not thine.
Who can arraign me for 't?

ALBANY

Most monstrous, oh!
[to EDMUND] Know'st thou this paper?

EDMUND

Ask me not what I know.

Exit GONERIL

ALBANY

- 200 Go after her. She's desperate. Govern her.

Exit a soldier

EDMUND

What you have charged me with, that have I done—
And more, much more. The time will bring it out.
'Tis past, and so am I.
[to EDGAR]

- 205 But what art thou
That hast this fortune on me? If thou'rt noble,
I do forgive thee.

EDGAR

Let's exchange charity.
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund.

- 210 If more, the more thou'st 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.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
215 Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND

Thou'st spoken right. 'Tis true.
The wheel is come full circle. I am here.

EDMUND

Prudence would suggest that I ask your name first. But since you look so noble and knightly—and since your speech implies that you are of a high rank—I will disdain the rules of knighthood that say I can refuse to fight a man I don't know. I toss your accusations of treason back at your own head, and your hateful lies back at your heart. They hardly hurt you now, but I'll follow them with my sword and embed the word "traitor" in your heart forever. Trumpets, blow!

Trumpets play. EDMUND and EDGAR fight. EDMUND falls.

ALBANY

Save him, save him!

GONERIL

This was trickery, Gloucester. By the laws of dueling you didn't have to fight an unknown opponent. You haven't been conquered—only cheated and deceived.

ALBANY

Shut your mouth, woman, or I'll plug it up with this paper. Look, sir. *[He gives the letter to EDMUND]* Read your own evil, you who are worse than any words could describe.

[To GONERIL] No, don't tear it, lady. I think you know what it says.

GONERIL

And what if I do? I make the laws, not you. Who can prosecute me for it?

ALBANY

Oh, how monstrous!

[To EDMUND] Do you know what this letter is?

EDMUND

Do not ask me what I know.

GONERIL exits.

ALBANY

Go after her. She's desperate. Restrain her.

A soldier exits.

EDMUND

I have done all the things you've accused me of—and more, much more. You'll find out the rest in due time. But now it's over, and so am I.

[To EDGAR] But who are you who defeated me? If you're a nobleman, I forgive you.

EDGAR

Let's exchange forgiveness. I am no less noble than you are, Edmund. And if I'm more noble, then you've wronged me all the more. My name is Edgar, and I'm your father's son. The gods are just, and use the sins we commit in giving ourselves pleasure as a means of making instruments to torment us. The adultery he committed created you, and cost him his eyes.

EDMUND

You've spoken rightly. It's true. The wheel of fortune has come full circle. Here I am on the bottom again.

ALBANY

Methought thy very gait did prophesy
A royal nobleness. I must embrace thee.

220 Let sorrow split my heart if ever I
Did hate thee or thy father.

EDGAR

Worthy prince, I know 't.

ALBANY

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

EDGAR

225 By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale,
And when 'tis told, oh, that my heart would burst!
The bloody proclamation to escape,
That followed me so near— O our lives' sweetness,
That we the pain of death would hourly die
230 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,
Their precious stones new lost, became his guide,
235 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,
I asked his blessing, and from first to last
240 Told him my pilgrimage. But his flawed heart—
Alack, too weak the conflict to support—
'Twith two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.

EDMUND

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

ALBANY

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

EDGAR

250 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 was big in clamor came there in a man
255 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
As he'd burst heaven, threw him on my father,
260 Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received— which in recounting
His grief grew puissant and the strings of life
Began to crack. Twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him tranced.

ALBANY

265 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.

Enter SECOND KNIGHT with a bloody knife

SECOND KNIGHT

Help, help, O, help!

ALBANY

I could tell that you were noble even by the way you
walked. Let me hug you. I swear that I never hated you or
your father.

EDGAR

Worthy prince, I know.

ALBANY

Where have you been hiding yourself? How do you know
about your father's suffering?

EDGAR

By nursing him through it, my lord. Listen to my brief tale,
and when it's over, oh, may my heart burst! To escape the
proclamation condemning me to death, I disguised myself
in the rags of a crazy beggar, making myself a creature
scorned even by dogs. Oh, how sweet life must be, that we
prefer the pain of slowly dying to death itself! In this
disguise I met my father with his bloody eye sockets--his
precious eyes recently lost--and I became his guide. I led
him, begged for him, and saved him from despair. I
never--oh, what a mistake!--revealed myself to him until
just half an hour ago, when I was in my armor. I hoped for a
successful outcome to the battle, but I still decided to ask
for my father's blessing, and I told him the whole story of
my journey. But his cracked heart was too weak to support
such extremes of joy and grief at once, and it gave out.

EDMUND

Your words have moved me, and may end up doing some
good. But continue. You look like you have something more
to say.

ALBANY

If there's anything more sorrowful to add, then keep it to
yourself. I'm already about to lose myself to tears from
hearing this much.

EDGAR

This might have seemed like a fitting end for a sad story.
But if I go on I must add to what is already too much, and
reach a new extremity of sorrow. While I was crying loudly
over my father, a man came in. He had seen me in my
beggar's clothes and shunned me earlier, but when he
found out who I was, he wrapped his strong arms around
my neck and cried as if he was trying to burst heaven. He
then threw himself on my father and told the saddest story
that was ever heard about Lear and him. And as he told the
story his grief overcame him and his heart-strings began to
break. Then I heard the trumpets blow twice, and I left him
in a trance.

ALBANY

But who was this man?

EDGAR

Kent, sir. It was the banished Kent, who disguised himself
and followed his hostile king--serving him with tasks too
menial for even a slave.

The SECOND KNIGHT enters with a bloody knife.

SECOND KNIGHT

Help, help, oh, help!

EDGAR

270 What kind of help?

ALBANY

Speak, man.

EDGAR

What means that bloody knife?

SECOND KNIGHT

'Tis hot, it smokes.
It came even from the heart of—oh, she's dead!

ALBANY

275 Who dead? Speak, man.

SECOND KNIGHT

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.

EDGAR

280 Here comes Kent.

ALBANY

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

Exit SECOND KNIGHT

Enter KENT

Oh, is this he?

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

KENT

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

ALBANY

290 Great thing of us forgot!—
Speak, Edmund, where's the king? And where's Cordelia?—

REGAN's and GONERIL's corpses are brought out

Seest thou this object, Kent?

KENT

Alack, why thus?

EDMUND

295 Yet Edmund was beloved.
The one the other poisoned for my sake,
And after slew herself.

ALBANY

Even so.—Cover their faces.

EDMUND

300 I pant for life. Some good I mean to do
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!

EDGAR

What kind of help?

ALBANY

Speak, man!

EDGAR

What does that bloody knife mean?

SECOND KNIGHT

It's hot, it's still smoking with life blood. It was just removed
from the heart of—oh, she's dead!

ALBANY

Who's dead? Speak, man.

SECOND KNIGHT

Your wife Goneril, sir, your wife. And she poisoned her sister
Regan, who's now dead too. She confessed it.

EDMUND

I was engaged to them both. We three will now be united in
death.

EDGAR

Here comes Kent.

ALBANY

Bring the bodies here, whether they're alive or dead. The
judgment of the gods makes us tremble, but it doesn't
make us pity these deaths.

The SECOND KNIGHT exits.

KENT enters.

Oh, is this him? There's no time for the greetings that good
manners require.

KENT

I am here to say goodnight forever to my king and master. Is
he not here?

ALBANY

What a thing for us to forget! Speak, Edmund, where's the
king? And where's Cordelia?

REGAN and GONERIL's corpses are brought out.

Do you see this spectacle, Kent?

KENT

Alas, why has this happened?

EDMUND

Despite everything, Edmund was beloved. One sister
poisoned the other for my sake, and then killed herself.

ALBANY

It seems so. Cover their faces.

EDMUND

These are my last breaths. I want to do a little good despite
my nature. Go quickly—be speedy about it—to the castle.
For I've ordered the executions of Lear and Cordelia. Hurry,
send someone now!

ALBANY

Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR

305 To who, my lord?—Who hath the office? Send
Thy token of reprieve.

Edmund

Well thought on. Take my sword. The captain—
Give it the captain.

ALBANY

Haste thee for thy life.

Exit a soldier

EDMU

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

ALBANY

The gods defend her!—bear him hence awhile.

Exit soldiers with EDMUND

Enter LEAR with CORDELIA in his arms, a THIRD KNIGHT following

LEAR

315 Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, 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.
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,
320 Why then, she lives.

KENT

Is this the promised end?

EDGAR

Or image of that horror?

ALBANY

Fall and cease.

LEAR

325 This feather stirs. She lives. If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

KENT

O my good master!

LEAR

Prithce, away.

EDGAR

'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR

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

ALBANY

Run, run, oh, run!

EDGAR

Where should we run, my lord? Who has the orders to kill
them? Send something to prove that you've changed your
commands.

Edmund

Good idea. Take my sword. The captain—give it to the
captain.

ALBANY

Run as if your life depended on it.

A soldier exits.

EDMUND

Your wife and I ordered the captain to hang Cordelia in the
prison and lay the blame on her own despair, making it look
like she killed herself.

ALBANY

May the gods protect her!

[To soldiers] Carry him away for now.

Soldiers exit with EDMUND.

*LEAR enters with CORDELIA in his arms, followed by a
THIRD KNIGHT.*

LEAR

Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men of stone! If I had
your eyes to weep and your tongues to cry out, I'd use them
until the sky itself cracked. She's gone forever. But I know
how to tell when someone is dead and when they're alive.
She's as dead as the senseless ground. Bring me a mirror. If
her breath makes a mist on the glass, then she's still alive.

KENT

Is this the end of the world?

EDGAR

Or a reflection of that final horror?

ALBANY

Let the world collapse and end!

LEAR

This feather moved with her breath. She lives. If it's true,
then it will make up for all the sorrows I've ever felt.

KENT

Oh my good master!

LEAR

Please, go away.

EDGAR

It's noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR

A plague on you, you're all murderers and traitors! I could
have saved her. Now she's gone forever.

*[To CORDELIA's body] Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little while.
What? What are you saying?*

THIRD KNIGHT

'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 them skip. I am old now,

340 And these same crosses spoil me. *[to KENT]* Who 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 a dull sight.

345 Are you not Kent?

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

350 No, my good lord. I am the very man—

LEAR

I'll see that straight.

KENT

That from your first of difference and decay

Have followed your sad steps.

LEAR

You're welcome hither.

KENT

355 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 it is

360 That we present us to him.

Enter THIRD MESSENGER

EDGAR

Very bootless.

THIRD MESSENGER

Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY

That's but a trifle here.—

You lords and noble friends, know our intent.

365 What comfort to this great decay may come

[To the others] Her voice was always so soft, gentle, and low—an excellent thing in a woman.

[To CORDELIA's body] I killed the scum who was hanging you.

THIRD KNIGHT

It's true, my lords, he did.

LEAR

Didn't I, man? In the old days I would've made them all

dance with my sword. But I am old now, and my trials have

worn me down.

[To KENT] Who are you? My eyesight's not the best. I'll recognize you soon.

KENT

This man was the luckiest and then the unluckiest that ever


lived.

LEAR

My vision is failing. Are you not Kent?

KENT

I am. Your servant Kent. Where is your servant Caius ?

 Though not mentioned before in the play, Caius was the name Kent used when he was serving Lear in disguise.

LEAR

He's a good fellow, I can tell you that. He'll strike when in a

fight, and quickly too. But now he's dead and rotting.

KENT

No, my good lord. I am Caius, the man—

LEAR

I'll deal with this soon.

KENT

—who followed you from the very beginning of your

suffering and decline.

LEAR

You're welcome here.

KENT

No, I'm not welcome. No one is welcome. Everything is

cheerless, dark, and dreadful. Your eldest daughters have

killed themselves and died in despair.

LEAR

Yes, I think that's true.

ALBANY

He doesn't know what he's saying. It's useless to try to

explain it to him.

A THIRD MESSENGER enters.

EDGAR

It's pointless.

THIRD MESSENGER

Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY

That's just a drop in this ocean of sorrow. You lords and

noble friends, hear what I intend to do. We must try to bring

as much comfort as we can amid this great destruction. And

Shall be applied. For us, we will resign
 During the life of this old majesty
 To him our absolute power.
 [to EDGAR and KENT] You, to your rights
 370 With boot, and such addition as your honors
 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?
 375 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Oh, 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.
 380 Look there, look there. O, O, O, O.
 [dies]

EDGAR

He faints!—My lord, my lord!

KENT

Break, heart. I prithee, break!

EDGAR

[to LEAR] Look up, my lord.

KENT

385 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

Oh, he is gone indeed.

KENT

The wonder is he hath endured so long.
 390 He but usurped his life.

ALBANY

Bear them from hence. Our present business
 Is to general woe.
 [to KENT and EDGAR] Friends of my soul, you twain
 Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain.

KENT

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

EDGAR

The weight of this sad time we must obey.
 Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
 The oldest hath borne most. We that are young
 400 Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

Exeunt with a dead march

as for me, I will surrender my power to the old king, that he
 should have absolute authority for the rest of his life.

[To EDGAR and KENT] And you will get back your rightful
 property and titles, along with rewards and distinctions
 that you have more than earned. All my friends will taste
 the rewards of their virtue, and all my enemies will drink
 from the cup of punishment that they deserve. Oh, look,
 look!

LEAR

And my poor child was hanged.

[To CORDELIA's body] No, no, no life left in you? Why should
 a dog, a horse, or a rat have life, but you have none at all?
 Oh, you'll never come to me again, never, never, never,
 never, never.

[To the others] Please, undo this button. Thank you, sir. Do
 you see this? Look at her. Look, her lips. Look there, look
 there. Oh, oh, oh, oh. [He dies]

EDGAR

He faints!

[To LEAR] My lord, my lord!

KENT

Break, heart. Please, break!

EDGAR

[To LEAR] Look up, my lord.

KENT

Don't disturb his departing spirit. Oh, let him pass on. He
 would hate anyone who made him linger in this torturous
 world any longer.

EDGAR

Oh, he is dead indeed.

KENT

It's a wonder that he endured for so long. He was only living
 on borrowed time.

ALBANY

Carry them away from here. Our business is now to grieve.

[To KENT and EDGAR] My dear friends, you two should rule
 this kingdom and keep the wounded country alive.

KENT

I have a journey to make soon, sir. My master calls me on to
 following him to the next life, and I cannot say no.

EDGAR

We must bear the weight of this sad day, and say what we
 feel, not what we ought to say. The oldest has suffered the
 most. We who are young will never see as much as he has
 seen, or live so long.

They exit in a funeral march.

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