

Act 1 Scene 1

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

KENT

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

GLOUCESTER

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

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

KENT

I thought the king preferred the Duke of Albany to the Duke of Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER

We used to think so too. But the way he's divided the kingdom recently, nobody can tell which of the dukes he favors more. He's split the kingdom so evenly that it's impossible to see any indication of favoritism.

KENT

(*pointing to EDMUND*) Isn't this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, I've been responsible for his upbringing. I've had to acknowledge that he's my son so many times that now I can do it without embarrassment.

KENT

I can't conceive of what you mean.

GLOUCESTER

You can't conceive? Well, this guy's mother could conceive him all to well. She grew a big belly and had a baby for her crib

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

25 (*to EDMUND*) 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

before she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell something naughty?

KENT

Well, I wouldn't want to undo the naughtiness, since the boy turned out so well.

GLOUCESTER

But I have a legitimate son a few years older than this one, and I don't love him any more than I love my bastard. Edmund may have snuck into the world a little before his time, but his mother was pretty, we had a fun time making him, and now I have to acknowledge the guy as my son.—Do you know this gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND

No, I don't, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

(*to EDMUND*) This is Lord Kent. Remember him as my friend and an honorable man.

EDMUND

Very pleased to meet you, my lord.

KENT

I look forward to getting to know you better.

EDMUND

Sir, I shall study deserving.

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,

I'll try to make myself worth your knowledge.

GLOUCESTER

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

Trumpets announce the arrival of King LEAR.

The king is coming.

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

LEAR

Go escort the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

Yes, my lord.

GLOUCESTER exits.

LEAR

In the meantime I'll get down to my real business.—Hand me that map over there.—I hereby announce that I've divided my kingdom into three parts, which I'm handing over to the younger generation so I can enjoy a little rest and peace of mind in my old age.—Cornwall and Albany, my loving sons-in-law, I now want to announce publicly what each of my daughters will inherit, to avoid hostilities after I die. The two

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 matter,
55 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—
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.
60 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA

(aside) What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

great princes of France and Burgundy, vying for the hand of my youngest Cordelia, have been at my court a long time and will soon have their answers.—My daughters, since I'm about to give up my throne and the worries that go along with it, tell me which one of you loves me most, so that I can give my largest gift to the one who deserves it most.—Goneril, my oldest daughter, you speak first.

GONERIL

Sir, I love you more than words can say. I love you more than eyesight, space, and freedom, beyond wealth or anything of value. I love you as much as life itself, and as much as status, health, beauty, or honor. I love you as much as any child has ever loved her father, with a love too deep to be spoken of. I love you more than any answer to the question "How much?"

CORDELIA

(to herself) What will I say? I can only love and be silent.

LEAR

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains riched,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
65 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

Sir, I am made of that self mettle as my sister,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart,
70 I find she names my very deed of love—
Only she comes too short, that I profess

Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses.
And find I am alone felicitate
75 In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA

(aside) Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
More ponderous than my tongue.

LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
80 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,
No less in space, validity, and pleasure

LEAR

I give you all this land, from this line to that one—dense forests, fertile fields, rivers rich with fish, wide meadows. This land will belong to your and Albany's children forever.—And now what does my second daughter Regan, the wife of Cornwall, have to say? Tell me.

REGAN

Sir, I'm made of the same stuff as my sister and consider myself just as good as she is. She's described my feelings of love for you precisely, but her description falls a little short of the truth. I reject completely any

joy except my love for you, and I find that only your majesty's love makes me happy.

CORDELIA

(to herself) Poor me, what am I going to say now? But I'm not poor in love—my love is bigger than my words are.

LEAR

You and your heirs hereby receive this large third of our lovely kingdom, no smaller in area or value than what I gave Goneril.
—Now, you, my youngest daughter, my joy, courted by the rich

Than that conferred on Goneril.—But now, our joy,
Although our last and least, to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
85 Strive to be interested. What can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing?

CORDELIA

Nothing.

LEAR

90 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
According to my bond, no more nor less.

LEAR

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

CORDELIA

Good my lord,

rulers of France and Burgundy, what can you tell me that will make me give you a bigger part of my kingdom than I gave your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing?

CORDELIA

Nothing.

LEAR

Come on, "nothing" will get you nothing. Try again.

CORDELIA

I'm unlucky. I don't have a talent for putting my heart's feelings into words. I love you as a child should love her father, neither more nor less.

LEAR

What are you saying, Cordelia? Revise your statement, or you may damage your inheritance.

CORDELIA

You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
Return those duties back as are right fit—

Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
Why have my sisters husbands if they say
100 They love you all? Happily when I shall wed
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

LEAR

105 But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, good my lord.

LEAR

So young and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

LEAR

Let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower.
110 For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs

My lord, you brought me up and loved me, and I'm giving back
just as I should: I obey you, love you, and

honor you. How can my sisters speak the truth when they say
they love only you? Don't they love their husbands too?
Hopefully when I get married, I'll give my husband half my love
and half my sense of duty. I'm sure I'll never get married in the
way my sisters say they're married, loving their father only.

LEAR

But do you mean what you're saying?

CORDELIA

Yes, my lord.

LEAR

So young and so cruel?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and honest.

LEAR

Then that's the way it'll be. The truth will be all the inheritance
you get. I swear by the sacred sun, by the mysterious moon,
and by all the planets that rule our lives, that I disown you now
as my daughter. As of now, there are no family ties between us,

From whom we do exist and cease to be—
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
115 Propinquity, and property of blood.

And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
120 Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved
As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT

Good my liege—

LEAR

Peace, Kent.
Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
I loved her most and thought to set my rest
125 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,

and I consider you a stranger to me. Foreign savages who eat their own children for dinner will be as close to my heart as you, ex-daughter of mine.

KENT

But sir—

LEAR

Be quiet, Kent. Don't get in my way when I'm angry. I loved Cordelia most of all and planned to spend my old age with her taking care of me. (to CORDELIA) Go

away! Get out of my sight!—I guess if she doesn't love her father, then I'll only have peace when I'm dead.—Call the King of France. Why is nobody doing anything? Call the Duke of Burgundy.

Several attendants exit.

Cornwall and Albany, you and your wives can divide this last

130 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,
135 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,
140 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,
Loved as my father, as my master followed,
145 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

third of my kingdom between you. If she wants to be proud, or "honest," as she calls it, she can just marry her own pride. I hereby grant to you two my crown and all the privileges that kingship brings. I'll live one month with one of you, the next month with the other one. All I ask is that you provide me with a hundred knights for my own entourage. I'll keep only the title of king, but you'll have everything else: all the authority and income that come with kingship. To confirm all this, take this crown to share between yourselves. (*he gives CORNWALL and ALBANY the crown*)

KENT

King Lear, I've always honored you as king, loved you as my father, obeyed you as my master, and thanked you in my prayers—

LEAR

I'm furious and ready to snap. Stay away or else I'll take my anger out on you.

KENT

Let your anger fall on me then, even if its sharpness pierces my heart. Kent can speak rudely when Lear goes mad. What

When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?

150 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
This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment,

155 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

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

LEAR

Out of my sight!

KENT

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

LEAR

Now, by Apollo—

are you doing, old man? When powerful kings cave in to flatterers, do you think loyal men will be afraid to speak out against it? When a majestic king starts acting silly, then it's my duty to be blunt.

Hold on to your crown and use your better judgment to rethink this rash decision. On my life I swear to you that your youngest daughter doesn't love you least. A loud mouth often points to an empty heart, and just because she's quiet doesn't mean she's unloving.

LEAR

Kent, if you want to stay alive, stop talking.

KENT

I never considered my life as anything more than a chess pawn for you to play off against your enemies. I'm not afraid to lose it if it helps protect you.

LEAR

Get out of my sight!

KENT

Learn to see better, Lear, and let me stay here where you can look to me for good advice.

LEAR

Now, I swear by Apollo...

KENT

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

LEAR

165 O vassal! Miscreant!

ALBANY, CORNWALL

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

170 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,

175 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

KENT

By Apollo, King, you're taking the names of the gods in vain.

LEAR

Oh, you lowlife! Scum!

ALBANY, CORNWALL

Please stop, sir.

KENT

Sure, kill the doctor who's trying to cure you and pay your disease. Take back your gift to Albany and Cornwall. If you don't, then as long as I'm able to speak I'll keep telling you you've done a bad, bad thing.

LEAR

Listen to me, you traitor. You'll pay the price for trying to make me go back on the vow I made when I bequeathed my kingdom to them. I've never broken a vow yet. You tried to make me revise my judgment on my youngest daughter, disrespecting my power as

king—which I can't put up with either as a ruler or as a person. This is your punishment: I'll give you five days to gather together what you need to survive, then on the sixth day you'll leave this kingdom that hates you. If the day after that you're

180 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.

185 (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,

190 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.

195 We first address towards you, who with this king
Hath rivaled for our daughter. What in the least

found in my kingdom, you die. Now get out of here! I swear by Jupiter I'll never revoke this punishment.

KENT

Farewell, King. If this is how you act, it's clear that freedom has been banished from this kingdom.(to CORDELIA) I hope the gods will protect you, my dear girl, for thinking fairly and speaking correctly. (to REGAN and GONERIL) And you two, I hope your actions carry out your grand promises of love, so that big words can bring big results. Farewell to all of you. I'll carry on my old life in a new land.

KENT exits.

Trumpets play. GLOUCESTER enters with the King of FRANCE, the Duke of BURGUNDY, and attendants.

GLOUCESTER

Here are the rulers of France and Burgundy, my lord.

LEAR

My lord the ruler of Burgundy, I'll speak to you first. You've been competing with this king for my daughter. What's the least that you will settle for as a *dowry*?

Will you require in present dower with her

Or cease your quest of love?

BURGUNDY

Most royal majesty,

I crave no more than hath your highness offered.

200 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.

If aught within that little seeming substance,

Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced

205 And nothing more, may fitly like your grace,

She's there, and she is yours.

BURGUNDY

I know no answer.

LEAR

Sir, will you, with those infirmities she owes—

Unfriended, new adopted to our hate,

Dowered with our curse and strangered with our oath—

210 Take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY

Pardon me, royal sir.

BURGUNDY

Your highness, I want nothing more than what you've already offered. I know you'll offer nothing less than that.

LEAR

Burgundy, I valued her highly when I cared about her. But now her price has fallen. There she is, over there. If there's anything you like about that worthless little thing, then go for it. She's all yours. But what you see is what you get—her only dowry is my disapproval. There she is.

BURGUNDY

I don't know what to say.

LEAR

She's got big flaws. She has no friends or protectors. I no longer love her. Her only dowry is my curse and banishment. So do you take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY

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,
215 I would not from your love make such a stray
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,
220 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
225 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.

I'm sorry, sir, but nobody can make a choice like this in such circumstances.

LEAR

Then leave her, sir. I swear to God she's not worth anything more than what I told you. (to FRANCE) And as for you, great King of France, I'd never insult our friendship by encouraging you to marry a girl I hate. So I beg you to look around for a better match than this wretched creature that you can barely call human.

FRANCE

This is very odd. Until very recently she was your favorite, the object of all your praise and the delight of your old age. It's strange that someone so dear to you could do anything so horrible as to warrant this sudden

hatred. Her crime must be extreme and monstrous, or else your earlier love for her wasn't as true as it seemed. But it'd take a miracle to make me believe she could do anything that horrible.

CORDELIA

230 (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,
235 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
240 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
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do?—My lord of Burgundy,
245 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?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY

CORDELIA

(to LEAR) Please, your majesty, I don't have a glib way with words and I only say what I mean. If I decide to do something, then I do it instead of talking about it. So I beg your majesty to let people know that it wasn't because I did something atrocious
that I fell from your favor. I didn't murder or commit any immoral or lustful act. I'm out of favor simply because I'm not a fortune-hunter and I don't have a smooth way with words—and I'm a better person because of it, even though it has cost me your love.

LEAR

Enough. It would've been better for you not to have been born at all than to displease me as you did.

FRANCE

You mean this is the whole problem, that she is shy and hasn't said everything she means to say and do?—My lord of Burgundy, what do you have to say to this lady? Love's not love when it gets mixed up with irrelevant outside matters. Will you marry her? She herself is as valuable as any dowry could ever be.

BURGUNDY

(to LEAR) Royal King,

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

LEAR

Nothing. I have sworn. I am firm.

BURGUNDY

(to CORDELIA) I am sorry then. You have so lost a father
255 That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA

Peace be with Burgundy.
Since that respects and fortunes are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
260 Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect.—
265 Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
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.—

(to LEAR) King, just give me the dowry you promised me, and I'll make Cordelia the Duchess of Burgundy right away.

LEAR

No, I'll give nothing. I won't budge on that.

BURGUNDY

(to CORDELIA) In that case, I'm sorry you have to lose me as a husband because you lost the king as a father.

CORDELIA

Peace to you, my lord of Burgundy. Since you love money and power so much, I won't be your wife.

FRANCE

Beautiful Cordelia, you're all the richer now that you're poor. You're more valuable now that you're rejected and more loved now that you're hated.
I'll take you and your wonderful virtues here and now, if it's okay that I'm picking up what others have thrown away. It's so strange that in neglecting you so cruelly, the gods have made me love you so dearly.—King, the daughter you've rejected is now mine, as Queen of France. No Duke of spineless Burgundy can take this treasure of a girl from me now.—Say goodbye to them, Cordelia, even though they've been unkind to you. You'll

Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.

270 Thou losest here, a better where to find.

LEAR

Thou hast her, France. Let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. (*to CORDELIA*) Therefore be gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.—

275 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
280 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.

find a much better place in France than what you're giving up here.

LEAR

She's yours, King of France. Take her. She's no longer my daughter, and I'll never see her face again. (*to CORDELIA*) So get out of here. Leave without any blessing or love from me.—Come with me, Burgundy.

Trumpets play.

Everyone exits except FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA.

FRANCE

Say goodbye to your sisters.

CORDELIA

Sisters, you whom our father loves so dearly, I leave you now with tears in my eyes. I know you for what you really are, but as your sister I'm reluctant to criticize you. Take good care of our father and show him the love that you have professed. I leave him in your care—but oh, if only I were still in his favor I could arrange for better care for him. Goodbye to you both.

REGAN

285 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

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

FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

Exeunt FRANCE and CORDELIA

GONERIL

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

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

GONERIL**REGAN**

Don't tell us what our duty is.

GONERIL

You should focus instead on pleasing your husband, who's taken you in as an act of charity. You've failed to obey your father and you deserve to be deprived of everything that's been taken away from you.

CORDELIA

Time will tell what you've got up your sleeve. You can be deceitful in the short term, but eventually truth will come out. Have a good life.

FRANCE

Come with me, my dear Cordelia.

FRANCE and CORDELIA exit.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

Yes, I'm sure he will—to stay with you. Next month he'll stay with us.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

GONERIL

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash. Then must we look 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

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

We shall further think on 't.

He's so flighty in his old age, as we keep noticing. He has always loved Cordelia best, and his bad judgment in disowning her now is obvious.

REGAN

He's going senile. But then again he's never really understood his own feelings very well.

GONERIL

Yes, he was hotheaded even in the prime of his life. Now that he's old, we can expect to have to deal not only with his old character flaws, which have turned into deep-rooted habits, but also with the uncontrollable crabbiness that comes with old age.

REGAN

We'll probably witness many more outbursts from him, like banishing Kent.

GONERIL

There's still the King of France's farewell ceremony. Let's put our heads together. If our father continues to use his authority as usual, then his recent abdication of the kingdom will just hurt us.

REGAN

We'll have to think about it carefully.

GONERIL

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

Exeunt

Enter EDMUND the bastard, with a letter

EDMUND

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

GONERIL

We have to strike while the iron's hot.

They exit.

Act 1 Scene 2

EDMUND enters with a letter.

EDMUND

I only worship what's natural, not what's manmade. Why should I let myself be tortured by manmade social customs that deprive me of my rights simply because I was born twelve or fourteen months later than my older brother? Why do they call me "bastard" and "lowlife" when I'm just as gifted in mind and body as legitimate children? Why do they call us bastards "lowlifes"? Always "lowlife," "bastard," "lowlife," "lowlife." At least we bastards were conceived in a moment of passionate lust rather than in a dull, tired marriage bed, where half-sleeping parents monotonously churn out a bunch of sissy kids. All right then, legitimate brother Edgar, I have to have your lands. Our father loves me just as much as the legitimate Edgar. What a nice word that is, "legitimate"! Well, my legitimate Edgar, if this letter works and my plan succeeds, Edmund the lowlife will beat the legitimate. Look out, I'm on my way up. Three cheers for bastards!

Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
20 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

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

EDMUND

(pocketing the letter) So please your lordship, none.

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

30 What paper were you reading?

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER enters. EDMUND looks over his letter.

GLOUCESTER

Kent's been banished just like that? And the King of France
gone in a huff? And King Lear's abdicated his authority, making
his kingship a ceremonial title only? All this so suddenly?—
Edmund, what's going on? What's the news?

EDMUND

(pocketing the letter) No news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

Why are you hiding that letter?

EDMUND

I don't have any news to report, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What's that paper you were reading?

EDMUND

It's nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND

40 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

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

GLOUCESTER

45 *(reads)* "This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times, keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and

No? Then why did you have to stick it in your pocket in such a hurry? If it were nothing, you wouldn't need to hide it. Let's see it. Come on, if it's nothing, I won't need glasses to read it.

EDMUND

Please, sir, I beg you. It's a letter from my brother that I haven't finished reading yet. But judging from the bit I have read, it's not fit for you to see.

GLOUCESTER

Give me that letter, sir.

EDMUND

Now I'll offend you whether I give it to you or not. The problem is in what the letter says, as far as I can tell.

GLOUCESTER

(taking the letter) Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND

I hope for my brother's sake that he just wrote it to test my honor.

GLOUCESTER

(reads)

"The custom of respecting the elderly makes it hard for the young and healthy to live well, and keeps us without our

fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways not as it hath power but as it is suffered.

Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue forever, and live the beloved of your brother,

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.
60 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.

inheritance until we are so old we can't enjoy our happiness anyway. The power of the elderly is starting to feel like a silly and foolish slavery to me, and they only enjoy that power because we let them have it.

Come talk to me about this. If our father were dead you'd receive half of his revenue forever, and you'd have my undying love,

Edgar."

Hmm, what's this, a conspiracy? "If our father were dead, you'd receive half of his revenue forever"—my son Edgar? How did he bring himself to write such a thing? How could he have even entertained these thoughts in his heart? How did you get this letter? Who delivered it?

EDMUND

Nobody delivered it, my lord. That's what's clever about it. It was tossed into the window of my room.

GLOUCESTER

You're sure the handwriting is your brother's?

EDMUND

If he'd written nice things, I'd swear yes right away. But as it stands, I wish I could believe it wasn't.

GLOUCESTER

But it is his handwriting?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

Has he never before sounded you in this business?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain—worse than brutish! 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

EDMUND

It's his handwriting, my lord, but I hope he didn't mean what he wrote.

GLOUCESTER

Has he ever tested out these ideas on you before?

EDMUND

Never, my lord. But I've often heard him argue that when sons are at their prime and their fathers are declining, the sons should be their fathers' guardians and manage their fathers' money.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, what a villain! That's just what he said in the letter. Evil villain! Monstrous, hateful, bestial villain! Worse than a beast! Go look for him. I'll arrest him. Horrid villain! Where is he?

EDMUND

I'm not sure, my lord. But it may be a good idea to restrain your rage until you find out exactly what he meant. If you go after him and then find out that you made a mistake, it would damage your reputation and greatly undermine his loyalty to you. I'll bet my life that he only wrote this letter to gauge my love for you, and for no other reason.

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

85 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

90 He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND

Nor is not, sure.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

Do you think so?

EDMUND

If you agree, I'll hide you somewhere where you can eavesdrop on us talking about it, and hear how he feels with your own ears. You won't have to wait longer than until tonight.

GLOUCESTER

He can't possibly be such a monster—

EDMUND

And I'm sure he isn't.

GLOUCESTER

—toward his own father who loves him so completely. Oh, God! Edmund, go find him. Gain his confidence for me, please. Manage him however you think best. I'd give up my rank and fortune to be free from my doubts.

EDMUND

I'll find him right away, sir, and carry out the business as well as I can. Then I'll let you know what's happening.

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 traitors 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

These recent eclipses of the sun and moon don't bode well for us. Though science can explain them away, disasters still come after eclipses. Love cools off, friendships break up, and brothers become enemies. Riots

break out, civil war erupts, kings are betrayed, and the bond between father and son snaps. This wicked son of mine confirms the prediction —son against father. The king acts unnaturally—father against child. We've seen the best our age has to offer. Conspiracies, fakery, betrayal, and disorder are all that's left until we die. Find out what this villainous Edgar is thinking, Edmund. You won't lose any respect. Just do it carefully.—And to think that the noble and loyal Kent has been banished, for the crime of telling the truth! It's strange, strange.

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDMUND

This is a classic example of the idiocy of the world: when we're down and out—often because of our own excesses —we put all the blame on the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if they forced us to be bad, or the heavens compelled us to be villainous or stupid. As if we become thieves and traitors according to astrological signs or obey planetary influences to become drunks, liars, and adulterers! As if some universal power pushed us into evil deeds! What a sneaky trick it is for lustful mankind to blame our horniness on some star! My

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

130 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

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

father and mother coupled when the demonic moon was descending, and I was born under the Big Dipper, so it's inevitable that I'm rude and oversexed. Christ! I would have been what I am even if the most virginal star in the heavens had twinkled at my conception. Edgar—

EDGAR enters.

and, speak of the devil, here he comes, right on cue. I've got to play the role and sigh like a poor beggar.—Oh, these eclipses predict such disorder. Fa, sol, la, mi.

EDGAR

Hello, brother Edmund. What are you thinking about so seriously?

EDMUND

I was thinking about what an astrologer predicted the other day. He wrote about what these eclipses mean.

EDGAR

Are you spending your valuable time on that?

EDMUND

Oh, I assure you the things he writes about are wretched — things like divisions between parents and children, death, famine, broken friendships, political rebellion, treason against

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

EDGAR

How long have you been a sectary astronomical?

EDMUND

Come, come. When saw you my father last?

EDGAR

Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND

Spake you with him?

EDGAR

145 Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

None at all.

EDMUND

Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him. And at
my entreaty forbear his presence till some little time hath

the king and noblemen, exiled friends, dissolved armies,
adultery, and I don't know what else.

EDGAR

How long have you believed in astrology?

EDMUND

Come on. When was the last time you saw my father?

EDGAR

Why, last night.

EDMUND

Did you speak to him?

EDGAR

Yes, we talked for a couple of hours.

EDMUND

Did you leave on good terms? Did he express any
dissatisfaction with you, either in his words or his face?

EDGAR

No, none at all.

EDMUND

Try to remember how you might have offended him, and try to
avoid spending time with him until his anger has cooled a little.

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

155 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

160 Armed, brother?

EDMUND

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

EDGAR

165 Shall I hear from you anon?

EDMUND

Right now he's so angry that even if he harmed you physically, he'd still be raging.

EDGAR

Some villain has told lies about me.

EDMUND

That's what I'm afraid of. I suggest you lay low until his rage cools a little. In the meantime, come home with me, and when the time is right I'll take you to talk to him. Please go. Here's my key. If you go outside, arm yourself.

EDGAR

Arm myself?

EDMUND

Brother, I'm giving you good advice. Arm yourself. I'd be a liar if I told you nobody wanted to hurt you. I've told you what I've seen and heard, but I've toned it down a lot. I've spared you the full extent of the horror that threatens you. Now please go.

EDGAR

Will I hear from you soon?

EDMUND

I do serve you in this business.

Exit EDGAR

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

Exit

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
He flashes into one gross crime or other
5 That sets us all at odds. I'll not endure it.
His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us

I'll help you through this business.

EDGAR exits.

A gullible father and a brother who's so innocent that he can't suspect anyone else of wanting to hurt him—these are the two fools I need for my plan to work. I know exactly how to proceed. If I can't have an estate by birthright, then I'll get it by being clever. Any trick that works is good for me.

He exits.

Act 1 Scene 3

GONERIL enters with her steward, **OSWALD**.

GONERIL

Did my father hit one of my attendants for scolding his fool?

OSWALD

Yes, ma'am.

GONERIL

He constantly offends me. Every hour he comes out with some horrible new offense that puts us all on edge. I won't stand for it. His knights are getting out of control, and he himself reprimands us about every little detail. When he comes back

On every trifle. When he returns from hunting,
I will not speak with him. Say I am sick.
If you come slack of former services,
10 You shall do well. The fault of it I'll answer.

OSWALD

He's coming, madam. I hear him.

Hunting horns within

GONERIL

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

OSWALD

Very well, madam.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you.
What grows of it, no matter. Advise your fellows so.

from hunting, I'm not going to speak to him. Tell him I'm sick.
And if you're not as attentive in serving him as you used to be,
that'll be good. I'll take responsibility for it.

OSWALD

He's coming, ma'am. I hear him.

Hunting horns play offstage.

GONERIL

Be as lazy and neglectful as you like around him—you and the other servants. I want it to become an issue. If he doesn't like it, he can go live with my sister. I know she feels the same way about him that I do, and she'll stand her ground. That useless old man still thinks he can wield all the powers he's given away. I swear, old fools become like babies again. You can't just flatter them; you also have to discipline them when you see that they're misguided. Remember what I've told you.

OSWALD

Very well, ma'am.

GONERIL

And make sure the servants are less friendly to his knights.
Don't worry about the consequences. Tell your men as much. I

I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall,
25 That I may speak. I'll write straight to my sister
To hold my very course. Go, prepare for dinner.

Exeunt severally

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.

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?

want this to provoke confrontations, so I can give him a piece of my mind. I'll write to my sister and tell her my plans. Now go, set up for dinner.

They exit in opposite directions.

Act 1 Scene 4

KENT enters in disguise.

KENT

If I can disguise my voice as well as my appearance, then I'll be able to carry out my plan perfectly. I was banished, but hopefully I can serve the very king who condemned me. I love my master, and he'll find me very hard-working.

Trumpets play offstage. LEAR enters with his attendant knights.

LEAR

Don't make me wait for dinner even a moment. Get it ready immediately.

An attendant exits.

(to KENT) Well now, who are you?

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 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, thou'rt poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT

20 Service.

LEAR

Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT

KENT

A man, sir.

LEAR

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

KENT

I profess that I'm as good as I seem—I'll faithfully serve a master who trusts me, love those who are honest, talk with those who are wise and don't talk too much. I'm God-fearing, I fight if I must, and I don't eat fish.

LEAR

But who are you?

KENT

An honest guy who's as poor as the king.

LEAR

If you're as poor a subject as he is a king, you definitely are poor. What do you want?

KENT

To work as a servant.

LEAR

Who do you want to work for?

KENT

You.

LEAR

Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT

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

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

You.

LEAR

Do you know me?

KENT

No, sir, but there's something about your face that makes me want to serve you.

LEAR

What do you see in my face?

KENT

Authority.

LEAR

What work can you do?

KENT

I can be discreet in honorable matters, ride a horse, run, tell a good story badly, and deliver a plain message bluntly. I'm good at everything that ordinary men can do. The best thing about me is that I'm hardworking.

LEAR

How old are you?

KENT

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

LEAR

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

Exit 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

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

Enter FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

Follow me. You'll work for me. If I still like you after dinner, I won't send you away yet.—Hey, dinnertime! Dinner! Where's my fool?—Go call my fool and have him come here.

An attendant exits.

OSWALD enters.

You, sir, where's my daughter?

OSWALD

I beg your pardon, sir—

OSWALD exits.

LEAR

What did that guy say? Call the numbskull back in here.

The FIRST KNIGHT exits.

Where's my fool? You'd think everyone was asleep.

The FIRST KNIGHT enters again.

45 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

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

LEAR

He would not?

FIRST KNIGHT

50 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

55 Ha! Sayest thou so?

FIRST KNIGHT

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

LEAR

So what's going on? Where's that dog?

FIRST KNIGHT

He says your daughter's not feeling well, my lord.

LEAR

Why didn't the jerk come back to me when I called him?

FIRST KNIGHT

Sir, he told me quite bluntly that he didn't feel like it.

LEAR

Didn't feel like it?

FIRST KNIGHT

My lord, I don't know what's going on, but it seems to me that your highness isn't being treated as politely as before. The servants, the duke, and your daughter all seem to be treating you less kindly.

LEAR

Huh! Do you really mean that?

FIRST KNIGHT

Please forgive me if I'm mistaken, my lord—but I can't keep quiet when I think you're being insulted.

LEAR

Thou but rememberest me of mine own conception. I have perceived a most faint neglect of late, which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very 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

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

"My lady's father"? My lord's knave, your whoreson dog!

No, you're just reminding me of something I've also noticed. I've felt neglected recently, but I decided that it was more likely that I was being hypersensitive than that they were intentionally unkind. I'll look into it further. But where's my fool? I haven't seen him for two days.

FIRST KNIGHT

Ever since Cordelia left for France, sir, the fool has been depressed.

LEAR

Let's not talk about it. I've noticed it myself. Go and tell my daughter I want to speak with her.

An attendant exits.

And you, go call my fool.

Another attendant exits.

OSWALD enters.

You there, sir, come here please. Who am I, sir?

OSWALD

The father of the lady of the house, sir.

LEAR

70 You slave, you cur!

"The father of the lady of the house"? You scoundrel! You lowlife son-of-a-bitch! You dog, you peasant!

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

I'll not be stricken, my lord.

KENT

75 (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

(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

OSWALD

I'm sorry, sir, but I'm not any of those things.

LEAR

Are you making faces at me, you scoundrel? (*he hits OSWALD*)

OSWALD

I won't be hit, my lord.

KENT

(tripping OSWALD) Or tripped, you lowlife [football](#) player?

LEAR

(to KENT) Thank you, sir. You serve me well, and I'll love you for it.

KENT

(to OSWALD) Come on, sir, get up and get out of here! I'll teach you to respect your betters. If you want me to trip you again, then stick around. If not, get going. Go on. Do you know what's good for you? There you go.

OSWALD exits.

LEAR

Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee.

Enter FOOL

(gives KENT money) There's earnest of thy service.

FOOL

Let me hire him too.—Here's my coxcomb.

(offers KENT his cap)

LEAR

85 How now, my pretty knave? How dost thou?

FOOL

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

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'l 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**LEAR**

Now, my friendly servant, thank you.

The FOOL enters.

(giving KENT money) Here's a token of my gratitude.

FOOL

Wait, let me hire him too.—Here's my fool's cap, a token of my gratitude. (*he offers KENT his cap*)

LEAR

Well hello, my good boy. How are you doing?

FOOL

(to KENT) Guy, you'd better take my cap.

LEAR

Why, Fool?

FOOL

Why? For standing up for this unpopular king. No, if you can't adjust to political changes, you'll suffer for it. There, take my fool's cap. This guy here has banished two of his daughters and blessed the third one without intending to. If you work for him, you're a fool and should wear a fool's cap.—So how's it going, uncle? I wish I had two fool's caps and two daughters.

LEAR

95 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.

105 Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owe,
Ride more than thou goest,

Why, my boy?

FOOL

If I gave them all I own, I'd have two fool's caps for myself.

Here's mine. Ask your daughters for another one.

LEAR

Watch out, boy—remember I can whip you.

FOOL

I get whipped like a dog for telling the truth, while Lady Bitch
gets to stand around the fire and stink the place up with her
false words.

LEAR

A constant pain to me!

FOOL

I'll recite something for you, guy.

LEAR

Yes, do that.

FOOL

Listen up, uncle.

Have more than you show,
Speak less than you know,
Lend less than you owe,
Ride more than you walk,

Learn more than thou trowest,
110 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

115 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?

LEAR

Don't believe everything you hear.
Don't bet everything on one throw of the dice,
Leave behind your booze and your whore,
And stay indoors,
And you'll end up with more
Than two tens to a twenty.

KENT

That makes no sense, Fool. It's nothing.

FOOL

In that case it's like the words of an unpaid lawyer. You paid me
nothing for it. Can't you make any use of nothing, uncle?

LEAR

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

FOOL

(to KENT) Please tell him that his income is nothing, now that
he's given his lands away. He won't believe a fool.

LEAR

You're a bitter fool.

FOOL

Do you know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and
a sweet one?

LEAR

No, lad. Teach me.

FOOL

125 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
130 Will presently appear—
The one in motley here,
The other found out there.

LEAR

Dost thou call me fool, boy?

FOOL

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

KENT

This is not altogether fool, my lord.

FOOL

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

No, son. Tell me.

FOOL

Bring here
The gentleman who advised you
To give away your land.
You can stand in his place.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will appear right away.
The sweet fool in a fool's costume—that's me.
The bitter one is the other one—that's you.LEAR

LEAR

Are you calling me a fool, boy?

FOOL

Well, you've given away all your other rightful titles. The title of "fool" is the only one left.

Kent

This isn't entirely a joke, your highness.

FOOL

No. I wish I could be a complete joker—but so many lords and important men are also playing fools that I can't have a monopoly on it. Ladies too—they're always snatching away my role as the biggest fool.—Uncle, give me an egg, and I'll give you 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 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.

(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

155 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,

LEAR

Which two crowns would those be?

FOOL

Well, when I cut the egg in half and eat the whites, the yolk will be in two parts like two golden crowns. When you cut your own crown and kingdom in half and gave away both parts, you were as foolish as the old man in the old story who carries his donkey on his back instead of letting the donkey carry him. You didn't have much brains inside the bald crown of your head when you gave away the gold crown of your kingdom. If I'm telling the truth like a fool in saying all this, whip the first person who thinks I sound foolish.

(he sings)

*Fools have had a hard time this year.
They've been displaced by wise men who've grown foolish.
These men no longer know how to use their brains,
And they don't know how to behave except by foolishly imitating
others.*

LEAR

When did you become so fond of singing, boy?

FOOL

I've been singing ever since you made your daughters into your mothers by giving them all your power. That's when you gave them the spanking paddle and pulled your pants down,

(sings)

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 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'l have me whipped for lying,
and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. I had
rather be any kind o' thing than a fool. And yet I would not be
thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left
nothing i' th' middle. Here comes one o' the parings.

Enter GONERIL

LEAR

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

FOOL

(he sings)

Then your daughters wept for joy,
And I sang in sadness,
Seeing such a king become
A child and a fool.

Please, uncle, hire a teacher who can teach your fool to lie. I
want to learn how to lie.

LEAR

If you lie, boy, we'll have you whipped.

FOOL

I'm amazed how similar you and your daughters are. They want
to whip me for telling the truth, you want to whip me for lying,
and sometimes I'm even whipped for keeping quiet. I'd rather
be anything besides a fool. And yet I wouldn't want to be you,
uncle. When you gave away pieces of your kingdom, it's as if
you cut off pieces on both sides of your brain and left nothing
in the middle. Here comes the owner of one piece.

GONERIL enters.

LEAR

What's going on, daughter? Why are you frowning like that? I
think you've been frowning too much recently.

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.

(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.

(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,
190 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
195 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.

(to LEAR) You were better off when you didn't have to care whether she frowned or not. Now you're a big zero, with no digit in front of it to give it value. I'm better than you are—I'm a fool and you're nothing.

(to GONERIL) Yes, I promise I'll shut up. That's what you're telling me with that expression on your face, even though you don't say anything. Mum, mum,

The man who gives away his crust and his crumbs Will discover that he needs some crumbs back.

(pointing at LEAR) That guy is an empty pea pod.

GONERIL

(to LEAR) It's not just your fool here who can say whatever he wants, but your whole obnoxious entourage keeps whining and arguing, bursting out in intolerably vicious riots. Sir, I thought you could put an end to all this if I told you about it. But judging by what you've said and done recently, I'm worried that you don't mind this chaos, and even approve of it. If that's true, it's shameful. I realize that restraining your knights

will damage your reputation with them—and under ordinary circumstances it would be unfortunate to have them see you

FOOL

200 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

205 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

210 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
215 Are lethargied. Ha, sleeping or waking?

as an ogre. However, this is an extreme situation, and it's more important to control it than to worry about how you'll look.

FOOL

You know, uncle,
A sparrow once raised a cuckoo in its nest
Until the cuckoo grew up and bit the sparrow's head off.
So the candle went out and now we're all in the dark.

LEAR

Are you my daughter?

GONERIL

Come on, sir. I know you're very wise, and I wish you would use some of that wisdom to snap out of this mood you've been in lately and be your true self again.

FOOL

Even an idiot knows when the normal order has been inverted and the cart is pulling the horse. Whoo-hoo, honey, I love you!

LEAR

Does anyone here know who I am? I'm not Lear. Does Lear walk and talk like this? Where are his eyes? Either his mind is losing its grip or his judgment is screwy.—Hey, am I awake? I don't think so. Who can tell me who I am?

Sure, 'tis not so.

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL

Lear's shadow.

LEAR

I would learn that. For by the marks

220 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

225 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

230 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

FOOL

You're Lear's shadow.

LEAR

I'd like to find out who I am, since the obvious signs around me wrongly indicate that I've got daughters.

FOOL

Daughters who can make you obey them.

LEAR

(to GONERIL) What's your name, my dear lady?

GONERIL

This fake astonishment of yours is just like your other pranks.

I'm asking you to understand my point of view. Since you're old

and respected, you should be wise. But you're keeping a

hundred knights here who are so disorderly, vulgar, and

obnoxious that our noble court is starting to look like a noisy

cheap hotel. They're such oversexed gluttons that I feel like

we're living in a pub or a whorehouse rather than a respectable

palace. It's shameful, and we have to make some changes

right away. Please, as a favor to me—and if you don't do it for

For instant remedy. Be then desired

235 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

240 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
245 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,
250 More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child

me, I'll do it myself—reduce the number of your knights a little.
Keep the ones who are older, like you, and who act their age.

LEAR

Hell and damnation! Saddle up my horses. Call my knights together.
I won't bother you any more, you monstrous bastard. You're not really my daughter, but I still have one daughter left.

GONERIL

You hit my servants, and your disorderly mob of knights treat their superiors like servants.

ALBANY enters.

LEAR

You'll be sorry later, but it'll be too late. (to ALBANY) Oh, sir, are you here now? You decided to come? Answer me, sir. (to attendants) Get my horses ready.

An attendant exits.

Ingratitude is always hideous, but an ungrateful child is uglier than a sea monster!

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

255 That all particulars of duty know

And in the most exact regard support

The worships of their name. O most small fault,

How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,

Which like an engine wrenched my frame of nature

260 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.

ALBANY

265 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

270 To make this creature fruitful.

ALBANY

Please, sir, be patient.

LEAR

(to GONERIL) You disgusting vulture, you're a liar! My knights

are the finest men who can attend a king, and they

meticulously uphold their reputation. Oh, how ugly did

Cordelia's small flaw appear! And now Cordelia's small flaw

has bent me completely out of shape and sucked all the love

out of my heart. Oh, Lear, Lear, Lear! (he hits himself on the

head) Let me beat this portal that let my good sense out and

my foolishness in!— Go, go, people.

ALBANY

My lord, I have no idea what's upset you, but whatever it is, I

had nothing to do with it.

LEAR

That may be true, my lord. Ah, dear Nature, my goddess, listen

to me! Change your plans if you ever intended for this woman

to have children. Make her sterile and dry up her womb so that

no baby will ever come out of her body and honor her. If she

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,

275 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

280 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

285 Never afflict yourself to know more of it,

But let his disposition have that scope

That dotage gives it.

Enter LEAR and FOOL

must give birth, make her child a bad seed who will torment her, give her a forehead wrinkled with worry, make her cry until her cheeks are sunken.

Let it be a wicked child who mocks the mother who cares for it. Make my daughter feel—make her feel how an ungrateful child hurts worse than a snakebite.—Now let's leave. Go!

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

ALBANY

Dear gods in heaven, what's the reason for this?

GONERIL

Don't even bother to ask the reasons. Just let him rant and rave. He's senile.

LEAR enters with the FOOL.

LEAR

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

ALBANY

290 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
295 Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!

Th' untended 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 loose,
300 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 wolvish visage. Thou shalt find
305 That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever. Thou shalt, I warrant thee.

Exit LEAR

LEAR

What, fifty of my knights dismissed all at once? In only two weeks?

ALBANY

What are you talking about, sir?

LEAR

I'll tell you. (to GONERIL) I'm ashamed that you have the power to upset me like this, as though you're worth the tears you're making me shed. Damn you! May you feel every pain a father's curse can bring! If I cry again because of you, I'll rip my eyes out of their sockets and throw them and their wet tears down to moisten the earth. Has it come to this? Then so be it. I have one more daughter who I'm sure is kind. When

she hears what you've done to me, she'll tear up your wolflike face with her fingernails. And then you'll see that despite what you thought, I'll be as powerful as I was before. You'll see, I promise you.

LEAR exits.

GONERIL

Do you mark that, my lord?

ALBANY

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

GONERIL

Pray you, content.

310 Come, sire, no more.—What, Oswald, ho!

(to FOOL) You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

FOOL

Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry and take the fool with thee.
A fox when one has caught her
And such a daughter
315 Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter.
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
320 At point a hundred knights, yes, that on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers

GONERIL

Did you hear that?

ALBANY

Goneril, you know how much I love you, but still I have to say—

GONERIL

Shush, please. Come, sir, no more.—Oswald, come here! (*to FOOL*) And you, sir, you're more of a rascal than a fool. Go follow your master.

FOOL

Uncle Lear, uncle Lear, wait. Take your fool with you.
A fox you've trapped
And such a daughter
Should both be slaughtered,
If my fool's cap is worth a rope to bind them.
So the fool follows you.

The FOOL exits.

GONERIL

My father can't think straight—a hundred knights! Just imagine the risk we run in letting him keep a hundred knights around! He could use them to strong-arm us into bowing to every little whim of his, and keep us at his mercy.—Oswald, where are you?

And hold our lives in mercy?—Oswald, I say!

ALBANY

Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL

325 Safer than trust too far.

Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken. I know his heart.
What he hath uttered I have writ my sister.
If she sustain him and his hundred knights
330 When I have showed th' unfitness—

Enter OSWALD the steward

OSWALD

Here, madam.

GONERIL

How now, Oswald?
What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

OSWALD

Ay, madam.

GONERIL

335 Take you some company, and away to horse.
Inform her full of my particular fear,
And thereto add such reasons of your own

ALBANY

You may be exaggerating the risks.

GONERIL

That's better than exaggerating our trust. It's always better to get rid of what you're scared of than to be afraid. I know how his mind works. I've written to my sister telling her everything he's said. If she welcomes him and his hundred knights after I've shown how inappropriately he's behaved—

OSWALD enters.

OSWALD

Here, ma'am.

GONERIL

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

OSWALD

Yes, ma'am.

GONERIL

Take some men and horses and go to her. Tell her everything that worries me. Add details of your own to back up what I'm saying. Now go, and hurry back.

As may compact it more. Get you gone
And hasten your return.

Exit OSWALD

No, no, my lord,
340 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

345 Nay, then—

ALBANY

Well, well, th' event.

Exeunt

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

OSWALD exits.

No, no, my husband, I'm not angry that you urge me to deal
more gently with my father. But you're showing a lack of
wisdom that that is much more noticeable than your
tenderness toward him.

ALBANY

Maybe you know more than I do. But people often screw
things up trying to make them better.

GONERIL

No, not at all—

ALBANY

All right, all right. Time will tell.

They exit.

Act 1 Scene 5

LEAR enters with **KENT** in disguise, and the **FOOL**.

LEAR

(to KENT, giving him letters) Go ahead of us and deliver these
letters to the Earl of Gloucester. Answer my daughter's

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

Ay, boy.

FOOL

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

LEAR

Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL

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

questions about the letter, but don't tell her anything else you know. If you're not quick enough, I'll get there before you.

KENT

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

KENT exits.

FOOL

If a man's brain were in his feet, wouldn't it be susceptible to frostbite?

LEAR

Yes, boy.

FOOL

In that case, cheer up. Your brains won't need slippers to protect them from frostbite, since your brains aren't in your feet—if they were you wouldn't take this useless journey to see Regan.

LEAR

Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL

Your other daughter Regan will treat you kindly, you'll see. Even though she's as similar to Goneril as one crabapple is like another, still... I know what I know.

LEAR

15 Why, what canst thou tell, my boy?

FOOL

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

Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

LEAR

No.

FOOL

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

LEAR

25 Why?

LEAR

And what do you know, boy?

FOOL

I know that Regan will taste just like Goneril—both of them sour crabapples. Do you know why the nose is in the middle of a person's face?

LEAR

No.

FOOL

Why, to keep the eyes on the sides, so that you can see anything that you can't sniff out.

LEAR

I was wrong to her—

FOOL

Do you know how an oyster makes its shell?

LEAR

No.

FOOL

Me neither. But I know why a snail carries its house on its back.

LEAR

Why?

FOOL

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

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

LEAR

Because they are not eight?

FOOL

Yes indeed. Thou wouldest make a good fool.

LEAR

To take 't again perforce— Monster ingratitude!

FOOL

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

LEAR

How's that?

FOOL

So that he always has a roof over his head. He can't give his
house away to his daughters, leaving himself without shelter.

LEAR

I want to forget what I am. Such a kind father!—Are my horses
ready?

FOOL

Your attendant asses are getting the horses ready. There's a
nice reason why the constellation Pleiades has only seven
stars in it.

LEAR

Because it doesn't have eight?

FOOL

That's right. You'd make a good fool.

LEAR

I could take back my crown by force—What outrageous
ingratitude!

FOOL

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

LEAR

How's that?

FOOL

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

LEAR

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!

40 I would not be mad.

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

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

Exit

Enter EDMUND the bastard and CURAN, severally

FOOL

You're not supposed to get old until you're wise.

LEAR

Oh, dear God, don't let me go mad! Keep me balanced and sane. I don't want to go mad.

A GENTLEMAN enters.

So, are the horses ready?

GENTLEMAN

They're ready, my lord.

LEAR

Come on, boy.

LEAR and the GENTLEMAN exit.

FOOL

(speaking to the audience) Any girl who laughs because I'm going with the king is too foolish to remain a virgin very long.

He exits.

Act 2 Scene 1

EDMUND and CURAN enter from different directions.

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.

EDMUND

Hello, Curan.

CURAN

Hello, sir. I just saw your father the Lord Gloucester and notified him that the Duke of Cornwall and his wife Regan will stay with him here tonight.

EDMUND

Why is that?

CURAN

I don't know. Have you heard the latest news?—I mean the whispered rumors, since that's all they are at this point.

EDMUND

No, I haven't. What's going on?

CURAN

You haven't heard of the war brewing between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

EDMUND

Not a word.

CURAN

You may hear about it soon. Goodbye, sir.

Exit CURAN

EDMUND

The duke be here tonight? The better—best!
15 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.
In cunning I must draw my sword upon you.
30 Draw. Seem to defend yourself. Now quit you well.—

CURAN exits.

EDMUND

The duke will be here tonight? All the better—in fact it's the best that could happen. His arrival fits perfectly into my plan. My father's ready to arrest my brother, and I have one risky thing to do. Fast work and a little luck are all I need.—Brother, could I have a word with you? Come down, brother.

EDGAR enters.

Father is on the lookout. Get out of here quickly! It has leaked out that you're hiding here. If you leave now, you can take advantage of the darkness and sneak away. You haven't said anything against the Duke of Cornwall, have you? He's rushing on his way here right now, and Regan's with him. Have you said anything against Cornwall or Albany? Think about it.

EDGAR

I'm sure of it. I haven't said a word.

EDMUND

I hear my father coming. Forgive me. I have to pretend to threaten you with my sword. Draw your sword too, as if you're defending yourself. Be convincing. (*loudly*) Give up! Go see my

(loudly) Yield! Come before my father. Light, ho! Here!

(aside to Edgar) Fly, brother, fly.

(loudly)

Torches, torches!

(aside to Edgar) So, farewell.

Exit EDGAR

35 Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion.

Of my more fierce endeavor.

(cuts his own arm)

I have seen drunkards

Do more than this in sport.—Father, father!—

Stop, stop!—No help?

Enter GLOUCESTER and servants with torches

GLOUCESTER

40 Now Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

But where is he?

father.—Bring in some light!(speaking so that only EDGAR can hear) Run, brother. (loudly) Torches, bring in the torches!
(speaking so that only EDGAR can hear) Goodbye, then.

EDGAR exits.

If I had some blood on me it would look like I'd fought more fiercely. (*he cuts his own arm*) I've seen drunk men do worse than this just fooling around.—Father, father!—Stop, stop!—Won't anyone help me?

GLOUCESTER enters along with servants carrying torches.

GLOUCESTER

Edmund, where's your wicked brother?

EDMUND

He was standing here in the dark with his sword pointing at me.
He was mumbling some black magic spells, appealing to the moon to help him in his evil plans—

GLOUCESTER

But where is he?

EDMUND

45 Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

Pursue him, ho! Go after.

Exeunt some servants

"By no means" what?

EDMUND

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship,

But that I told him the revenging gods

50 '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,

55 With his prepared 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,

EDMUND

Look, sir, I'm bleeding.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND

He ran out that way, sir, when he couldn't—

GLOUCESTER

Follow him, now! Go.

Some servants exit.

When he couldn't what?

EDMUND

When he couldn't persuade me to kill you. I told him that the gods hate men who kill their fathers and unleash all their thunder on them, and that the bond between father and child was sacred. In short, when I told him how firmly opposed I was to his hideous plan, he pulled out his sword and lunged at my defenseless body, cutting my arm. Bolstered by righteousness, I prepared to fight, and when he saw my excitement—or perhaps because my shouting scared him—he ran away suddenly.

Or whether ghasted by the noise I made,

60 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.

By his authority I will proclaim it

65 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

70 I threatened to discover him. He replied,

"Thou unpossessing bastard! Dost thou think

If I would stand against thee, would the reposal

Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee

Make thy words faithed? No. What I should deny—

75 As this I would, ay, though thou didst produce

My very character—I'd turn it all

To thy suggestion, plot, and damnèd practice.

And thou must make a dullard of the world,

GLOUCESTER

Let him run far away. If he stays in this country he'll be found.

And if he's caught, he'll be executed. The Duke of Cornwall, my master and patron, is arriving tonight. On his authority I'll proclaim that whoever finds Edgar and helps bring the murderous coward to

justice will be rewarded. Whoever helps Edgar hide will die.

EDMUND

After I urged him not to kill you, I saw that he was still

determined to do it. Enraged, I threatened to expose him. He answered, "You penniless bastard! Do you really think that if it

came down to my word against yours, anyone would believe you? No. I'd deny whatever evidence you had against me—even if it were in my own handwriting—and turn it all into

evidence against you and your plans for treachery. And you

must think people are stupid if you believe they wouldn't realize all the motives you have for trying to kill me."

If they not thought the profits of my death
80 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.—
Hark, the duke's trumpets. I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar. The villain shall not 'scape.
85 The duke must grant me that. Besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have the due note of him.—And of my land,
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.

Enter the Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, and attendants

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

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

GLOUCESTER

Trumpets play offstage.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, how monstrously evil! He said he would deny that he
wrote his letter? He cannot truly be my son.—Listen. The
duke's trumpets. I don't know why he's come here. I'll forbid all
ships from leaving our harbors. The villain won't escape. The
duke will agree with me on that. And I'll send his picture
everywhere so that the whole kingdom will know what he
looks like.—And as for you, my loyal and true son, I'll find some
way to make you my heir.

The Duke of CORNWALL enters with REGAN and attendants.

CORNWALL

How are you, my friend? Ever since I arrived here, just now, I've
been hearing strange rumors.

REGAN

If they're true, no punishment is harsh enough for the criminal.
How are you, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN

95 What, did my father's godson seek your life?—
He whom my father named, your Edgar?

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN

Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tend upon my father?

GLOUCESTER

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

EDMUND

Yes, madam, he was of that consort.

REGAN

No marvel then, though he were ill affected.
'Tis they have put him on the old man's death,
To have th' expense and spoil of his revenues.
105 I have this present evening from my sister
Been well informed of them—and with such cautions
That if they come to sojourn at my house
I'll not be there.

Oh, madam, my old heart is broken, broken.

REGAN

Did my father's godson try to kill you? The one whom my
father named, your son Edgar?

GLOUCESTER

Oh, my lady, I'm ashamed to admit it.

REGAN

Wasn't he friends with all those brawling knights who serve my
father?

GLOUCESTER

I don't know, madam. Oh, it's too terrible.

EDMUND

To answer your question, ma'am—yes, he was friendly with
those knights.

REGAN

Then it's no surprise they had a bad influence on him. They
probably put him up to killing old man Gloucester to get his
money. Tonight I received a letter from my sister telling me all
about them—and warning me not be at home in case they
come to stay at my house.

CORNWALL

Nor I, assure thee, Regan.—
Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
110 A childlike office.

EDMUND

It was my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER

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

CORNWALL

Is he pursued?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

CORNWALL

If he be taken, he shall never more
115 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.
120 You we first seize on.

EDMUND**CORNWALL**

And I won't be there either.—Edmund, I'm told you've acted like
a true son to your father.

EDMUND

I just did my duty, sir.

GLOUCESTER

He exposed Edgar's murderous plot, and was wounded, as you
see there, when trying to apprehend him.

CORNWALL

Are your men searching for him?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, my lord.

CORNWALL

If he's caught, he'll never make trouble for anyone again. Feel
free to use my authority however you wish in order to
apprehend him.—As for you, Edmund, you've been so loyal
and virtuous throughout this whole business. I'd like you to
work for me. I need people as trustworthy as you.

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

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

GLOUCESTER

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

Flourish. Exeunt

I'll always be loyal to you, sir.

GLOUCESTER

(to cornwall) Thank you, my lord, for your kindness to Edmund.

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

Yes, and so unexpectedly, at night. There are some important matters we need your advice on, Gloucester. My father and my sister have both recently written to me about arguments between them. I realized it would be inconvenient to answer them from home, especially since the king may be on his way there. Their messengers are ready, waiting to deliver our response in these matters. So please, old friend, give us some good advice. We need it desperately and immediately.

GLOUCESTER

I'm at your service, madam. Both of you are very welcome here.

Trumpets play. They all exit.

Act 2 Scene 2

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.

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 enters in disguise. **OSWALD** enters from elsewhere.

OSWALD

Good morning to you, friend. Do you work in this house?

KENT

Yes, I do.

OSWALD

Where should we stable our horses?

KENT

In the mud.

OSWALD

Please, sir, be kind to me and tell me.

KENT

I won't be kind to you.

OSWALD

In that case, I don't much care for you either.

KENT

If I could get my hands on you, I'd make you care.

OSWALD

Why are you talking to me like this? I don't even know you.

KENT

Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD

What dost thou know me for?

KENT

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

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

KENT

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

KENT

Ah, but I know you.

OSWALD

Who am I then?

KENT

You're a lowlife, a rascal who eats leftover scraps. You're an ignoble, arrogant, shallow, vulgar, pretentious, conceited, filthy third-rate servant who thinks he's something special. You're a cowardly lawyer-loving bastard; a vain, brown-nosing, prissy scoundrel who'd pimp himself out to advance his career; a bag lady. You're nothing but a lowlife, a beggar, a coward, and a pimp, the son and heir of a mutt bitch. I'll beat you until you whine and cry if you deny the least bit of this.

OSWALD

What an ogre you are to slander someone you don't know, and who doesn't know you!

KENT

What a shameless jerk you are to pretend you don't know me! It was just two days ago that I tripped you and beat you up in front of the king. Draw your sword, scoundrel. It may be nighttime, but there's enough moonlight to fight by. I'll make ground beef out of you. (*he draws his sword*) Draw, you affected, preening son of a bitch! Draw your sword!

OSWALD

30 Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT

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

OSWALD

35 Help, ho! Murder! Help!

KENT

Strike, you slave. Stand, rogue. Stand, you neat slave, strike!
(*strikes OSWALD*)

OSWALD

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

40 (to EDMUND) With you, goodman boy, if you please. Come, I'll flesh ye. Come on, young master.

OSWALD

Get away from me! I've got nothing to do with you.

KENT

Draw your sword, you jerk! You come here with letters against the king, and you take his conceited daughter's side against his royal highness. Draw your sword, scoundrel, or I'll slice your thighs like flank steak. Draw your sword! Come on!

OSWALD

Help! Murderer! Help!

KENT

Fight, peasant. Don't run away, scoundrel. Stand and fight, you overdressed servant, fight! (*he hits OSWALD*)

OSWALD

Help! 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 here? Get away from each other.

KENT

(to EDMUND) Well, kid, let's see you fight. Come on, I'll show you how.

GLOUCESTER

Weapons, arms? What's the matter here?

CORNWALL

Keep peace, upon your lives.

He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?

REGAN

45 The messengers from our sister and the king.

CORNWALL

What is your difference? Speak.

OSWALD

I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT

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

CORNWALL

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL**GLOUCESTER**

You have weapons? What's going on here?

CORNWALL

Stop it, I order you. The next person to strike again dies. What's going on here?

REGAN

These are the messengers from my sister and the king.

CORNWALL

What are you fighting about? Tell me.

OSWALD

I'm out of breath, sir.

KENT

No wonder, with all your exertions, you cowardly rascal. You're not worth being called a man. The only thing manly about you are your clothes. A tailor made you.

CORNWALL

That's an odd thing to say. How can a tailor make a person?

KENT

Definitely a tailor, sir. A sculptor or a painter couldn't have screwed him up as bad as that, even as an apprentice.

CORNWALL

Speak yet. How grew your quarrel?

OSWALD

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL

Peace, sirrah!

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir, but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL

Why art thou angry?

KENT

65 That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords awtain
Which are too intrinse t' unloose, smooth every passion

But tell me what you're fighting about.

OSWALD

This old ruffian here, whom I didn't kill because he's so old—

KENT

You useless bastard—you're like the letter "z," a totally unnecessary addition to the alphabet.—My lord, please let me grind this lumpy lowlife into a powder and use it to plaster up the bathroom walls.—You didn't kill me because I'm so old, you fawning dog?

CORNWALL

Calm down. Don't you have any manners, you savage?

KENT

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

CORNWALL

Why are you enraged?

KENT

I'm angry that a dishonorable lowlife like this wears a sword like a gentleman. Smiling swindlers such as he undo the sacred bonds that unite people together, and only encourage the unreasonable passions of their masters. They foster both

That in the natures of their lords rebel,
70 Bring oil to fire, snow to the colder moods;
Reneg, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following.—
A plague upon your epileptic visage!
75 Smile you my speeches as I were a fool?
Goose, an I had you upon Sarum plain,
I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL

Why, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER

(to KENT) How fell you out?

80 Say that.

KENT

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

CORNWALL

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

KENT

His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

rage and apathy. They say "Yes" and "No," turning their noses whichever way the wind blows without taking a firm stance on anything. They blindly follow their masters' impulses, like dogs.
—Damn your ugly stinking face! Are you laughing at what I say, as if I were a fool? If I had my way with you right now, I'd send you to back to where you came from.

CORNWALL

Are you insane, old man?

GLOUCESTER

(to KENT) What did you start quarreling over? Just tell us.

KENT

I couldn't hate that jerk over there any more than I do.

CORNWALL

Why are you calling him a jerk? What did he do to you?

KENT

I don't like his face.

CORNWALL

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL

What mean'st by this?

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

KENT

I'm used to telling the truth, sir, and I have to say that I've seen
better faces than those I see here.

CORNWALL

This is a guy who's been praised for his honest bluntness, and
who now insolently pretends to be plainspoken and twists the
natural meanings of words. No flattery for him, no sir! He's
honest, he's got to speak the truth. If people take what he says,
fine. If not, he's got truth on his side! I know his type. He's
sneaky behind all his so-called bluntness, sneakier than
twenty brown-nosing bootlickers who only tell you what you
want to hear.

KENT

Dearest, kindest, most honorable sir, may I say, with your
esteemed approval, which is lit up by the illuminating radiance
of the sun-god Phoebus, that—

CORNWALL

What do you mean by that?

KENT

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

CORNWALL

(to OSWALD) What was th' offense you gave him?

OSWALD

I never gave him any.
It pleased the king his master very late
To strike at me upon his misconstruction
110 When he, conjunct and flattering his displeasure,
Tripped me behind; being down, insulted, railed,
And put upon him such a deal of man
That worthied him, got praises of the king
For him attempting who was self-subdued.
115 And in the fleshment of this dread exploit
Drew on me here again.

KENT

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

CORNWALL

Fetch forth the stocks, ho!—

KENT

I tried to stop speaking plainly, since you dislike plain speech so much. Sir, I know I'm not a flatterer. The guy who tricked you with plain language was just a plain crook—which I'm not, however much I may displease you by not being one.

CORNWALL

(to OSWALD) How did you offend him?

OSWALD

I never offended him at all. Recently, the king hit me because of a misunderstanding. This man took sides with the king and tripped me. When I was down on the ground he insulted me, and then started acting tough to seem courageous in front of the king. The king praised him, even though I had never offered any resistance at all. Now he pulled out his sword on me again, still riled up from our first encounter.

KENT

These cowards manage to make fools of brave men.

CORNWALL

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

KENT

Sir, I am too old to learn.
120 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

Fetch forth the stocks!
125 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

Sir, being his knave, I will.

Stocks brought out

CORNWALL

This is a fellow of the selfsame color

Bring out the [stocks](#)!—We'll teach you, you stubborn old bastard, you arrogant show-off.

KENT

Sir, I'm too old to be taught anything. Don't put me in the stocks. I serve the king, who sent me here. If you put me in the stocks you'll insult him both as a king and as a man.

CORNWALL

Bring out the stocks! I swear on my life and honor, he'll sit here in the stocks until noon.

REGAN

Only until noon, my lord? No, the whole day, and all night too.

KENT

Ma'am, you wouldn't treat me like this if I were your father's dog.

REGAN

But since you're his scoundrel servant, I will.

The stocks are brought out.

CORNWALL

130 Our sister speaks of.—Come, bring away the stocks!

GLOUCESTER

Let me beseech your grace not to do so.
His fault is much, and the good king his master
Will check him for 't. Your purposed low correction
Is such as basest and contemned'st wretches
135 For pilferings and most common trespasses
Are punished with.

The king his master needs must take it ill,
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,
Should have him thus restrained.

CORNWALL

I'll answer that.

REGAN

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

KENT is put in the stocks

CORNWALL

(to GLOUCESTER) Come, my good lord, away.

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

GLOUCESTER

I beg you not to do this, my lord. He's done wrong, and his master the king will punish him for it. But the kind

of punishment you propose is more suited to petty shoplifters than to royal attendants.

The king will be offended to find out that his messenger is so badly treated.

CORNWALL

I'll take responsibility for that.

REGAN

My sister would be much more offended to have her trusted messenger abused and assaulted just for carrying out her orders.—Put his legs in the stocks.

KENT is put in the stocks.

CORNWALL

(to GLOUCESTER) Let's go, my lord.

Exeunt all but GLOUCESTER and KENT

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

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.
150 Give you good morrow.

GLOUCESTER

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

Exit GLOUCESTER

KENT

Good King, that must approve the common saw,
Thou out of heaven's benediction comest
To the warm sun.
155 (*takes out a letter*)

Approach, thou beacon to this underglobe,
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles

Everyone exits except GLOUCESTER and KENT.

GLOUCESTER

I'm sorry, my friend. The duke always gets it his way, and everyone knows you can't budge him once he's made up his mind. I'll try talking to him again.

KENT

Please don't, sir. I've been up for a long time and have done a lot of traveling recently. This punishment will be a good chance to catch up on my sleep. The rest of the time I'll whistle to entertain myself. Even good men have bad luck. Have a good morning.

GLOUCESTER

It's wrong for the duke to do this. The king will be angry with him.

GLOUCESTER exits.

KENT

Oh, good King Lear, you're proving that, just as they say, everything goes from good to bad. (*he takes out a letter*) Rise and shine, sun, so I can read this letter. Only those who are truly miserable see miracles. I know this letter is from Cordelia, who knows that I'm serving the king in disguise. (*looking at the letter*) She says that she will have time, now that she's away from the monstrous conditions here, to find a way to fix things.

But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,

160 Who hath most fortunately been informed

Of my obscurèd course and (*reads the letter*) "shall find time
From this enormous state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies." All weary and o'erwatched,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold

165 This shameful lodging.

Fortune, good night. Smile once more. Turn thy wheel.

(*sleeps*)

I'm exhausted. I've been awake too long. This fatigue gives me an excuse to shut my eyes so I can't see myself humiliated in the stocks. Good night, Lady Luck. Smile and spin your wheel of fortune again. (*he sleeps*)

Act 2 Scene 3

Enter EDGAR

EDGAR

I heard myself proclaimed,

And by the happy hollow of a tree

Escaped the hunt. No port is free, no place

That guard and most unusual vigilance

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

EDGAR enters.

EDGAR

I heard myself declared an outlaw and escaped capture by hiding in the trunk of a hollow tree. Every town and port is crawling with henchmen on the lookout, waiting to capture me. But I'll survive while I can. I've decided to disguise myself as the lowliest and rattiest beggar that mankind has ever seen. I'll smear my face with filth, put on a loin cloth, make my hair matted and tangled, and face the bad weather wearing almost nothing. I've seen beggars out of insane asylums who stick pins and nails into their numb arms. They pray or roar lunatic curses, horrifying farmers and villagers into giving them alms. "Poor crazy Tom!" they call themselves. Well, at least that's something. As Edgar, I'm nothing at all.

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, shepcotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
20 Enforce their charity. "Poor Turlygod!" "Poor Tom!"—
That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.

Exit

He exits.

Act 2 Scene 4

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
Of this remove.

KENT

5 (to LEAR) Hail to thee, noble master!

LEAR

KENT is in the stocks. **LEAR** enters with the **FOOL** and the **GENTLEMAN**.

LEAR

It's strange that Regan and her husband left their house
without sending back my messenger.

GENTLEMAN

According to what I heard, they had no travel plans as of last
night.

KENT

(to LEAR) Hail, 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 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

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

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

LEAR

No, I say.

What's this? Are you sitting around in this humiliation to amuse yourself?

KENT

No, my lord.

FOOL

Ha, ha! That's a nasty garter belt. You tie up horses by their heads, dogs and bears by their necks, monkeys by their waists, and humans by their legs. When a person's prone to wanderlust, he has to wear wooden socks, like a chastity belt around his ankles.

LEAR

(to KENT) Who could have misunderstood your assignment so completely as to lock you up like this?

KENT

Your daughter and son-in-law.

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

LEAR

I'm telling you "No."

KENT

I say "Yea."

LEAR

No, no, they would not.

KENT

Yes, they have.

LEAR

15 By Jupiter, I swear "No."

KENT

By Juno, I swear "Ay."

LEAR

They durst not do 't.
They could not, would not do 't. 'Tis worse than murder
To do upon respect such violent outrage.
Resolve me with all modest haste which way
20 Thou mightst deserve or they impose this usage,
Coming from us.

KENT

My lord, when at their home
I did commend your highness' letters to them.
Ere I was risen from the place that showed
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,

KENT

And I'm telling you "Yes."

LEAR

No, no, they wouldn't.

KENT

Yes, they have.

LEAR

By the god Jupiter above, I swear "No."

KENT

By Jupiter's wife Juno, I swear "Yes."

LEAR

They wouldn't dare. They couldn't, they wouldn't. It's worse than murder to humiliate a king's messenger like this. Tell me as quickly and clearly as you can what you did to deserve this punishment, or what made them think they could inflict it on you.

KENT

My lord, when I arrived at their home I gave them your letter. Before I had a chance to get up from my respectful kneeling position, Goneril's messenger arrived, stinky, sweaty, and out of breath. He interrupted me, spouted out greetings from her, and

25 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,
30 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
35 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

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

delivered her letter, which they opened immediately. After reading it, they gathered their entourage together and got on their horses to go. They glared at me and ordered me to follow them and wait for their answer. After we arrived here, I ran into that other messenger who made them give me the cold shoulder—the very same guy who was so rude to you, King. I admit it was foolish to draw my sword on him, but I had to act like a man. He woke up the whole house with his loud and cowardly screams. That's why your daughter and son-in-law are punishing me shamefully.

FOOL

This story bodes more stormy weather.
Fathers who wear rags
Make their children neglect them.
But fathers who are rich
Make their children kind.
Lady Luck is a fickle whore
And never gives the poor a break.
But despite all this, your daughters will give you a lot of money
—or do I mean pain?—in the coming year.

LEAR

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
50 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

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

FOOL

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

KENT

Why, Fool?

FOOL**LEAR**

I'm getting hysterical. I feel my stomach squeezing up against my heart. Calm down, you belong lower down!—Where is this daughter of mine?

KENT

Inside, sir, with the earl.

LEAR

Don't follow me. Stay here.

He exits.

GENTLEMAN

You didn't do anything else to earn this punishment?

KENT

Nothing. Tell me, why did the king arrive with such a small entourage?

FOOL

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

KENT

Why, Fool?

FOOL

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

65 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.

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

KENT

Where learned you this, Fool?

FOOL

Not i' th' stocks, fool.

Enter LEAR and GLOUCESTER

You need to learn what ants know well about winter—there's no point in slaving away if there's no hope for profit. Serving the king will get you nowhere. Everyone can see that, and even blind men can smell the stench of his misery now. When you see a huge wheel rolling down a hill, you shouldn't try to hold on to it or it'll break your neck.

But if you see a wheel going uphill, latch on for the ride. And when a wise man gives you better advice than I just did, give me my advice back again. I only want idiots following my advice, the advice of a fool.

The gentleman who serves you only for profit
And is only superficially loyal to you
Will take off when it starts to rain
And leave you alone in the storm.
But I'll linger. The fool will stay.
And let the wise man run away.
The servant who runs away is a fool.
But this fool is no scoundrel, by God.

KENT

Where did you learn that song, Fool?

FOOL

Not in the stocks, fool.

LEAR and GLOUCESTER enter.

LEAR

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

80 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,

You know the fiery quality of the duke,

How unremoveable and fixed he is

85 In his own course.

LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!

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

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

GLOUCESTER

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

LEAR

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

GLOUCESTER

90 Ay, my good lord.

LEAR**LEAR**

How can they refuse to speak with me? How can they say that they're sick or exhausted or that they have traveled all night!? They're playing with me. These are tricks. This is rebellion. Go ask them again and make them see me this time.

GLOUCESTER

My dear lord, you know how passionately stubborn the duke is.

He never changes his mind.

LEAR

Hell! Damn it all to hell! "Passionately"? What "passion"?

Gloucester, Gloucester, I want to speak with the Duke of

Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER

My lord, I informed them as much.

LEAR

"Informed them"? Do you understand what I'm saying, man?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, my lord.

LEAR

The king would speak with Cornwall. The dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends service.
Are they "informed" of this? My breath and blood!
"Fiery"? The "fiery" duke? Tell the hot duke that Lear—
95 No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.

Infirmity doth still neglect all office
Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves
When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind
To suffer with the body, I'll forbear,

100 And am fallen out with my more headier will
To take the indisposed and sickly fit
For the sound man.

(notices KENT again)

Death on my state! Wherfore
Should he sit here? This act persuades me
105 That this remotion of the duke and her
Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.
Go tell the duke and 's wife I'd speak with them—
Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me,
Or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum
110 Till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

Exit GLOUCESTER

The king wants to speak with Cornwall. The father wants to
speak with his daughter. He orders them—he begs them. Did
you inform them of that? This is unbelievable! "Passionate"?
The "passionate" duke? Tell the hot-headed duke that I... But
no, not yet. Maybe he's not feeling well. When we're ill we can't
carry out our duties as well as when we're healthy. When our
bodies are out of order, our minds can't function properly. I'll
hold off, and subdue my impulsive temper, which makes me
judge a sick man as if he were well. (*he notices KENT again*) A
curse on my royal power! Why should he sit here like this? The
fact that they punished him convinces me that Regan and the
duke are avoiding me on purpose. I want my servant released.
Go tell the duke and his wife I'll speak to them right now, at
once. Tell them to come here and hear me out, or else I'll beat
a drum at their bedroom door until they can't sleep any more.

GLOUCESTER

I just want everything to be all right between you.

GLOUCESTER exits.

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!" '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

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

LEAR

Oh, my heart, my heart is rising into my throat! Stay down, heart.

FOOL

That's right, uncle, talk to your heart, like the **housewife** who yelled at the eels she was putting in her pie. She hit 'em on the head with a stick and shouted, "Down, you naughty things, down!" That was the woman whose brother wanted to be nice to his **horse**, and buttered its hay.

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

LEAR

Good morning to you both.

CORNWALL

Hail to your majesty.

KENT is set free.

REGAN

I'm glad to see your highness.

LEAR

I believe you are, Regan. You know why I think so? Because if you weren't glad, I'd divorce your dead mother, because I'd know she cheated on me. Any true daughter of mine would

Sepulchring an adulteress.

(to KENT) Oh, are you free?

Some other time for that.

Exit KENT

Belovèd Regan,

125 Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture, here.
(*indicates his heart*)
I can scarce speak to thee. Thou'l not believe
With how depraved a quality— O Regan!

REGAN

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

LEAR

Say, how is that?

REGAN

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

definitely be glad to see me. (to KENT) Oh, are you free? We'll talk about it later.

KENT exits.

My dear Regan, your sister's not worth anything. Oh, Regan, she's torn me apart with unkindness, like a vulture, right here. (*points to his heart*) I can hardly speak. You'll never believe how monstrously—oh, Regan!

REGAN

Calm down, sir, please. I hope there's been a misunderstanding. It's more likely that you don't know how to appreciate her than that she'd ever fail in her duties as a daughter.

LEAR

How do you mean?

REGAN

I can't believe my sister would neglect her obligations in any way. If she restrained your rowdy knights, she had such a good reason that you can't blame her for it.

LEAR

My curses on her!

REGAN

O sir, you are old.

140 Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of his confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return.

145 Say you have wronged her, sir.

LEAR

Ask her forgiveness?

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

150 Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks.
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,

LEAR

I curse her.

REGAN

Sir, you're old. Your life is stretched to its limit. You should let others take care of you and submit to people who know better than you do what's good for you. Please go back to Goneril's house. Admit you were wrong.

LEAR

Apologize? Do you think this kind of thing is appropriate for the royal family? *(he kneels)* "Dear daughter, I admit I'm old. Old people are useless. I'm begging you, on my knees, to give me food, clothes, and a bed."

REGAN

No more, please. These are ugly antics. Go back to my sister's.

LEAR

(getting up) Never, Regan. She's sent away half my knights, glared at me, and aimed her venomous insults straight at my

155 Most serpentlike, upon the very heart.
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
160 Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the powerful sun,
To fall and blister!

REGAN

O the blessed gods!
So will you wish on me when the rash mood is on.

LEAR

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.
165 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,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
170 And in conclusion to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in. Thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,

heart. She and her ingratitude can go to hell! I hope she gets sick and becomes lame!

CORNWALL

Shush, sir, please!

LEAR

I hope lightning strikes her in the eyes! I hope poisonous swampy fog covers her face and ruins her complexion!

REGAN

Oh, dear gods! That's how you'll talk about me when you're in this mood.

LEAR

No, Regan. I'll never curse you. You're so gentle, you'd never be harsh like her. Her eyes are vicious, but yours are comforting. You'd never deny me my pleasures, downsize my entourage, insult me thoughtlessly, reduce my allowance, or lock me out of the house. You know better than she does how important the duties of a child to a parent are, and the responsibilities that come from gratitude. You haven't forgotten the half of a kingdom I gave you.

Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
175 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

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

LEAR

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

CORNWALL

What means your grace?

REGAN

Sir, let's get to the point.

LEAR

Who put my messenger in the stocks?

Trumpets play offstage.

CORNWALL

What's that trumpet?

OSWALD enters.

REGAN

I know it. It's my sister's. She'll be here soon, just like her letter
said. (*to OSWALD*) Has my sister arrived?

LEAR

This is a lowlife who basks in the reflection of the fading glory
of the woman he works for.—Get out of my sight, scoundrel!

CORNWALL

What do you mean, your highness?

Enter GONERIL

LEAR

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

GONERIL

190 Why not by th' hand, sir? How have I offended?
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
195 Deserved much less advancement.

LEAR

You! Did you?

REGAN

GONERIL enters.

LEAR

Who put my servant in the stocks? Regan, I hope you didn't
know anything about that.—Ah, who's this? Dear gods, if you
love old men like me, if you believe in obedience, if you
yourselves are old, then please send me down some help! (to
GONERIL) Aren't you ashamed to look at me after the way
you've treated me in my old age?—Oh, Regan, are you taking
her by the hand?

GONERIL

Why shouldn't she take my hand, father? How exactly have I
offended you? Just because a senile man with poor judgment
calls something an insult doesn't necessarily mean it is one.

LEAR

Oh, how can the sides of my body hold in my grieving heart?—
How did my messenger wind up in the stocks?

CORNWALL

I sent him there, sir, but his crimes deserved a worse
punishment.

LEAR

You! You did it?

REGAN

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If till the expiration of your month,
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me.
200 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
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl—
205 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
To knee his throne, and, squirelike, pension beg
210 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

Now, I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad.
I will not trouble thee, my child. Farewell.
215 We'll no more meet, no more see one another.

Please, father, since you're weak, act like it. Get rid of half your knights and go back to spend the rest of your month with my sister. Afterward, you can stay with me. Right now I'm away from home and I can't provide you with proper care.

LEAR

Go back with her? Send away fifty of my knights? No. I'd rather renounce living in a house, and wander in the open air in the hardships of poverty, as a friend of the wolf and the owl. Go back with her? I might as well go before the King of France, who took my youngest daughter without a dowry, kneel before his throne, and beg him to give me a tiny pension to stay alive. Go back with her? I'd rather be a slave or a packhorse for this hateful stablehand here. (*he points to OSWALD*)

GONERIL

As you wish, sir.

LEAR

I beg you, daughter, don't make me crazy. I won't bother you. We'll never see each other again. But you're still my child, my flesh and blood—or rather you're a disease in my flesh, a

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter—
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore or embossèd carbuncle
220 In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee.
Let shame come when it will. I do not call it.

I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.
Mend when thou canst. Be better at thy leisure.
225 I can be patient. I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN

Not altogether so, sir.
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
230 Must be content to think you old, and so—
But she knows what she does.

LEAR

Is this well spoken now?

REGAN

I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more—

disease I still have to call my own. You're a pustule, a sore, a tumor digesting my bloodline. But I'll stop rebuking you. You'll feel shame when the time is right, and I don't urge you to be ashamed now. I won't beg the gods to punish you, or caution you to fear their judgment. Become a better

person when you're ready, if you're inclined. I'll wait patiently. Meanwhile I'll stay with Regan with my hundred knights.

REGAN

It's not quite that simple. I wasn't expecting you, and I'm not ready to receive you. Please hear what Goneril is saying. We're trying to be reasonable while you're so upset, and we understand that you're old, and... But Goneril knows what she's doing.

LEAR

Do you mean what you've just said?

REGAN

Yes, I do. Isn't fifty knights enough for you? Why would you need more than that? Or even that many. Fifty knights are

Yea, or so many—sith that both charge and danger
235 Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
Should many people under two commands
Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible.

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

LEAR

245 I gave you all—

REGAN

And in good time you gave it.

LEAR

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

expensive to maintain, and there's always a risk they'll rebel.
How could so many people, under two masters, get along
under one roof? It would be hard, almost impossible.

GONERIL

Why couldn't you be attended by my servants, or by Regan's?

REGAN

Yes, why not, my lord? Then if they're negligent, we could
control them. Now that I think about the danger of these
knights, if you come to stay with me, please bring no more
than twenty-five of them with you. I won't lodge any more than
that under my roof.

LEAR

I gave you everything—

REGAN

And it was about time too.

LEAR

I made you de facto rulers of my kingdom on condition that I
could keep a hundred knights of my own. Why should I now
have to make do with only twenty-five? Regan, is that what you
said?

REGAN

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

LEAR

Those wicked creatures yet do look well favored
When others are more wicked. Not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise.

255 (to GONERIL) I'll go with thee.

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
260 Have a command to tend you?

REGAN

What need one?

LEAR

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.
265 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—

REGAN

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

LEAR

Bad people start to look better in comparison with worse
people. Not being the worst daughter deserves some praise, I
guess. (to GONERIL) I'll go stay with you, then. Your fifty is twice
her twenty-five, so you must love me twice as much as she
does.

GONERIL

Hear me out, my lord. Why do you need twenty-five knights, or
ten, or even five, when you're staying in a house with a staff of
double that at your service?

REGAN

Why do you need even one?

LEAR

Oh, don't ask me why I "need" them! Even the poorest beggars
have some meager possessions they don't really "need." If you
allow people no more than what they absolutely need to
survive, then a human life is no better than an animal's. You're a
well-dressed lady. If you dressed only to stay warm, you
wouldn't need these gorgeous clothes you're wearing—which
don't keep you warm at all. If you want to talk about true

You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need.
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
270 As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger.
And let not women's weapons, water drops,
275 Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,

I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall—I will do such things—
What they are yet I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep?
280 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

Let us withdraw. 'Twill be a storm.

REGAN

needs, what I really need is patience. Oh, gods, give me patience! You see me here, gods, a grieving old man, as wretched in his grief as he is in his old age. If you're the ones setting my daughters against me, don't let me be foolish enough to take it lying down. Give me noble anger, and don't let any womanly tears fall down my

man's cheeks. No, you monstrous hags, I'll get revenge on you both that will make the whole world... I will do such things—I don't know what I'll do exactly, but it'll be devastating. You expect me to cry? Well, I won't.

A storm breaks out.

I have a good reason to cry, but my heart will splinter into a hundred thousand pieces before I let myself cry.—Oh, Fool, I'll go mad!

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

CORNWALL

Let's go inside. There's going to be a storm.

REGAN

285 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

For his particular I'll receive him gladly,
290 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

The king is in high rage.

CORNWALL

Whither is he going?

GLOUCESTER

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

This is a small house. There's no room for the old man and his followers.

GONERIL

It's his fault that he's all worked up like this. He has to pay the price for his foolish actions.

REGAN

I'll be happy to keep him in my house, but not a single knight.

GONERIL

That's what I intend to do too. Where is Gloucester?

CORNWALL

He followed the old man. Here he comes back.

GLOUCESTER returns.

GLOUCESTER

The king is enraged.

CORNWALL

Where's he going?

GLOUCESTER

He has called for his horse, but I don't know where he's headed.

CORNWALL

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

GONERIL

(to GLOUCESTER) My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN

O sir, to wilful men,
300 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

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

Exeunt

CORNWALL

It's best just to let him go. He won't listen to anyone's advice.

GONERIL

(to GLOUCESTER) My lord, don't try to persuade him to stay.

GLOUCESTER

Ah, but it's getting dark, and the winds are strong and stormy.
There's hardly a bush for miles around. He'll have no shelter.

REGAN

Oh, sir, impetuous people learn their lessons from the
consequences of their foolish actions. Lock the doors. His
attendants are desperate, violent men. I'm afraid of what they
might encourage him to do, considering the state he's in.

CORNWALL

Lock the doors, my lord. It's a wild night. Regan gives good
advice. Come in out of the storm.

They all exit.

Act 3 Scene 1

Storm still Enter KENT disguised and GENTLEMAN, severally

*The storm continues to rage. KENT enters in disguise. The
GENTLEMAN enters from a different direction.*

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,

Catch in their fury and make nothing of.

10 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-pinchèd wolf

Keep their fur dry—unbonneted he runs,

15 And bids what will take all.

KENT

But who is with him?

GENTLEMAN

None but the fool, who labors to outjest

KENT

Who's there, aside from this foul weather?

GENTLEMAN

Someone whose mood is as foul as the weather, very troubled.

KENT

I know you. Where's the king?

GENTLEMAN

Struggling with the wind and rain. He's shouting at the wind to blow the earth into the sea, or make the sea flood the earth—he wants to see the world return to primal chaos. He keeps tearing out his white hair, which the blindly raging winds catch up and blow away into nothingness. Small but brave in his surroundings, he's trying to stand up against the wind and rain blowing back and forth. He's running bareheaded, calling for the end of the world, out there on a night like this, when even savage animals ravenous with hunger crawl under cover and hide.

KENT

But who's with him?

GENTLEMAN

His heart-struck injuries.

KENT

Sir, I do know you,
And dare upon the warrant of my note
Commend a dear thing to you. There is division,
20 Although as yet the face of it be covered
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall,
Who have—as who have not that their great stars
Throned and set high?—servants, who seem no less,
Which are to France the spies and speculations
25 Intelligent of our state. What hath been seen,
Either in snuffs and packings of the dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them hath borne
Against the old kind king, or something deeper,
Whereof perchance these are but furnishings—
30 But true it is. From France there comes a power
Into this scattered kingdom, who already,
Wise in our negligence, have secret feet
In some of our best ports and are at point
To show their open banner. Now to you.
35 If on my credit you dare build so far
To make your speed to Dover, you shall find
Some that will thank you, making just report
Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow

Nobody but the fool, who's trying to soothe the wounds in the king's heart with jokes.

KENT

Sir, I know you, and I trust you enough to share something very important with you. There's a feud between Albany and Cornwall, although they've been clever enough to hide it thus far. Like other powerful rulers, they have servants who are actually French spies in disguise. These spies have noticed something, perhaps in the squabbles between Albany and Cornwall, or in the tough line both of them have taken against the good old king, or perhaps in some deeper matter at the root of both of these problems—The point is that the King of France has sent troops into our divided kingdom. Some French agents are already at work in our main ports and are on the verge of declaring open war. Now this is where you come in. If you trust me enough to hurry to Dover, you'll earn the gratitude of many people when you fairly report the monstrous and maddening extent of the king's suffering. I'm a nobleman, and I know what I'm doing in assigning this job to you.

The king hath cause to plain.

40 I am a gentleman of blood and breeding,
And from some knowledge and assurance offer
This office to you.

GENTLEMAN

I will talk further with you.

KENT

(giving GENTLEMAN a purse and a ring)

No, do not.

45 For confirmation that I am much more
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
50 That yet you do not know. Fie on this storm!
I will go seek the king.

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

Let's discuss it some more.

KENT

(giving the GENTLEMAN a purse and a ring) No, there's no
need. To assure you that I am a nobleman in disguise, here is
some money. If you see Cordelia—as I'm sure you will—show
her this ring. She'll tell you who I am. Damn this storm! I'll go
find the king.

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

Only a few more words, but they're the most important. Let me
go this way, and you go that way. When one of us finds the
king, he'll call out to the other one.

Exeunt severally

They exit in opposite directions.

Act 3 Scene 2

Storm still Enter LEAR and FOOL

LEAR

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You 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 germens 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.
I never gave you kingdom, called you children.

The storm continues. LEAR and the FOOL enter.

LEAR

Blow, winds! Blow until your cheeks crack! Rage on, blow! Let tornadoes spew water until the steeples of our churches and the weathervanes are all drowned. Let quick sulfurous lightning, strong enough to split enormous trees, singe the white hair on my head. Let thunder flatten the spherical world, crack open all the molds from which nature forms human beings, and spill all the seeds from which ungrateful humans grow!

FOOL

Oh, uncle, it's better to smile and flatter indoors where it's dry than get soaked out here. Please, uncle, let's go in and ask your daughters to forgive you. This storm has no pity for either wise men or fools.

LEAR

Let thunder rumble! Let lightning spit fire! Let the rain spray! The rain, the wind, the thunder and lightning are not my daughters. Nature, I don't accuse your weather of unkindness. I never gave you a kingdom or raised you as my child, and you

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.
So beggars marry many.
30 The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.
For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths
in a glass.

Enter KENT disguised

don't owe me any obedience. So go ahead and have your terrifying fun. Here I am, your slave—a poor, sick, weak, hated old man. But I can still accuse you of kowtowing, taking my daughters' side against me, ancient as I am. Oh, it's foul!

FOOL

Anyone who has a house to cover his head has a good head on his shoulders.
The guy who finds a place to put his penis
Before he has a house of his own
Will wind up dirt poor and covered with lice

With a crowd of slut daughters to add to the slut wife.
The man who kicks away
The person he should love
Will bring himself pain
And sleepless nights.
For there never was a pretty woman who didn't like to preen in
the mirror.

KENT enters in disguise.

LEAR

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

KENT

Who's there?

FOOL

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

KENT

40 (to LEAR) Alas, sir, are you here? Things that love night
Love not such nights as these. The wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark
And make them keep their caves. Since I was man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
45 Such groans of roaring wind and rain I never
Remember to have heard. Man's nature cannot carry
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
50 That hast within thee undivulgèd crimes
Unwhipped of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
Thou perjured, and thou simular man of virtue

LEAR

No, I'll be patient. I won't say a word.

KENT

Who's there?

FOOL

A wise man and a fool.

KENT

(to LEAR) Ah, sir, you're here? Even creatures of the night aren't out tonight in this storm. The angry skies terrify the animals that usually prowl in the dark, making them stay in their caves. Never in my life have I heard such horrible blasts of thunder, such a roaring downpour, such groaning winds. It's too trying and terrifying for humans to bear.

LEAR

Let the gods who stirred up this dreadful storm bring their enemies to light. Any wretched person who has committed secret crimes and escaped justice should tremble in fear now. Better hide now, you murderers, you perjurors, you incest-practicing people who pretend to be virtuous. Tremble and shake, villain, for secretly plotting against human lives. Let all

That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
55 Hast practiced on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
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.
60 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
65 Their scanted courtesy.

LEAR

My wits begin to turn.—
(to FOOL)
Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself.
(to KENT)
Where is this straw, my fellow?

your bottled-up crimes come flooding out at last, as you beg
for

mercy from the gods who summon these terrifying winds and
thunderbolts. Other people have sinned against me more than
I have sinned against them.

KENT

Why, you're not even wearing a hat? My lord, there's a hut
nearby. It will give you some protection from this storm. Rest
there while I go back to the unfriendly house where your
sisters are staying, and ask them for help. They are harder than
the stones the house is made of. Just now, when I asked them
if they knew where you were, they wouldn't let me in. But I'll go
back and force them to be polite.

LEAR

I'm starting to lose my mind. (to the FOOL) Come on, my boy.
How are you? Are you cold? I'm cold myself. (to KENT) Where's
this hut, man? Odd how when you're desperate, even shoddy
things like this hut can seem precious. Show me where that hut
is. Poor fool, part of me still feels sorry for you.

70 The art of our necessities is strange

That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee.

FOOL

(sings)

75 *He that has and a little tiny wit—*

*With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain—
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day.*

LEAR

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

Exeunt LEAR and KENT

FOOL

80 This is a brave night to cool a courtesan.

I'll speak a prophecy ere I go.

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

85 No heretics burned but wenches' suitors,

When every case in law is right,

No squire in debt nor no poor knight,

When slanders do not live in tongues,

FOOL

(singing)

The stupid man—

*Hey-hoy, the wind and the rain—
Must take what he can get,
Since the rain comes every day.*

LEAR

That's true, my good boy.—Come on, take us to that hut.

LEAR and KENT exit.

FOOL

This would be a great night to satisfy a whore's lust. I'll recite a prophecy before I go.

One day, when priests don't practice what they preach,

When brewers dilute their beer with water,

When noblemen teach their tailors how to sew,

When instead of heretics being burned at the stake, lovers are burned by syphilis,

When every law case is tried fairly,

When no gentleman is in debt,

Nor cutpurses come not to throngs,
90 When usurers tell their gold i' th' field,
And bawds and whores do churches build—
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion.
Then comes the time, who lives to see 't,
95 That going shall be used with feet.
This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time.

Exit

When no one slanders anyone else,
And thieves don't snatch wallets in crowds,
When moneylenders count their gold in the open air,
And pimps and whores build fine churches—
Then the kingdom of England
Will come to ruin.
And whoever lives to see that day
Will walk with his feet.
This is the prophecy that the wizard [Merlin](#) will make one day.
I'm a little ahead of my time in saying it now.

He exits.

Act 3 Scene 3

*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 neither to speak of him, entreat for him, nor any way sustain him.

EDMUND

Most savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

***GLOUCESTER** and **EDMUND** enter with torches.*

GLOUCESTER

Oh, oh, Edmund, I don't like this monstrous business. When I asked the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall if I could take pity on the king and shelter him from the storm, they took my house away from me and ordered me never to talk about him, lobby for him, or support him in any way.

EDMUND

That's uncivilized and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

Go to, say you nothing. There's a division betwixt the dukes. And a worse matter than that: I have received a letter this night. 'Tis dangerous to be spoken. I have locked the letter in my closet. These injuries the king now bears will be revenged home. There's part of a power already footed. We must incline to the king. I will look him and privily relieve him. Go you and maintain talk with the duke, that my charity be not of him perceived. If he ask for me, I am ill and gone to bed. 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

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke
Instantly know, and of that letter too.
20 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

Enter LEAR, KENT disguised, and FOOL

KENT

Here is the place, my lord. Good my lord, enter.

Oh, be quiet. There's a feud between the two dukes. And there's something even worse than that. I got a letter tonight. It's dangerous to talk about it. I've locked it up in my room. The humiliation that the king is suffering now will be revenged thoroughly. Armed forces have already landed. We have to take the king's side. I'll look for him and secretly help him. You go and talk to the duke so he won't notice I'm helping the king. If he asks to see me, tell him I'm sick and went to bed. Even if I have to die—as they threaten—I have to help the king. Strange things are about to happen, Edmund. Please be careful.

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDMUND

I'll tell the duke right away that you're going to see the king, which is forbidden. And I'll tell him about the letter too. You'll get what you deserve, and I'll be rewarded with everything you lose—in other words, all your lands. The young generation rises while the old one falls.

He exits.

Act 3 Scene 4

LEAR enters with KENT in disguise and the FOOL.

KENT

The tyranny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure.

Storm still

LEAR

Let me alone.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR

Wilt break my heart?

KENT

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

LEAR

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin. So 'tis to thee.
But where the greater malady is fixed
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'dst shun a bear,
10 But if thy flight lay toward the raging sea
Thou'dst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the mind's free,
The body's delicate. The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there—filial ingratitude.
15 Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand

Here's the hut, my lord. Please go inside. The night's too rough
for humans to bear.

The storm continues.

LEAR

Leave me for a bit.

KENT

My lord, here is the entrance.

LEAR

Will you break my heart?

KENT

I'd rather break my own heart. Now please go in.

LEAR

You think it's a big deal that this fierce storm is soaking me to
the skin. It's a big deal to you. But whenever you feel a larger
pain, the smaller one disappears. You would run away from a
bear, but if the only way to run was into the stormy ocean,
you'd turn around and confront the bear. When your mind is at
peace, your body is sensitive to the elements. But this storm in
my mind keeps me from feeling anything except what's
tormenting me—how ungrateful my children are! Isn't their
ingratitude like the mouth biting the hand that feeds it? But I'll
punish them thoroughly. No, I won't cry any more. Imagine

For lifting food to 't? But I will punish home.
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril,
20 Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all—
Oh, that way madness lies. Let me shun that.
No more of that.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR

Prithee, go in thyself. Seek thine own ease.
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
25 On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.
(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,
30 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
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,

them locking me out on a night like this! But let it rain; I'll survive. On a night like this! Oh, Regan, Goneril, your kind old father whose generous heart gave you everything—Oh, if I think about that I'll go mad. I want to avoid that. No more of these thoughts.

KENT

My lord, please go inside here.

LEAR

Go inside yourself. Make yourself comfortable. This storm protects me from thoughts that would hurt me more. But I'll go in. (to FOOL) You go in first, boy. Oh, you suffering homeless people—No, you go in. I'll pray first, then I'll sleep.

The FOOL exits.

Poor homeless creatures suffering this storm, wherever you are, how will you survive a night like this with no roof over your heads, no fat on your sides to keep you warm, and only rags for clothes? When I was king I didn't do enough to help you. Powerful men, take your medicine by learning about hardship. Go out and feel what the impoverished feel. Then you can give them your extra wealth and make the world more fair.

35 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them

And show the heavens more just.

EDGAR

(within) Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

Enter FOOL

FOOL

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

KENT

Give me thy hand. Who's there?

FOOL

40 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 and warm
thee.

EDGAR

(from inside) The water in here is nine feet deep! Poor Tom!

FOOL enters.

FOOL

Don't come in here, uncle! There's a spirit 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, moaning in the hut like that? Come out.

EDGAR enters disguised.

EDGAR

Go away! The devil's after me! The cold wind blows through
the hawthorn trees. Ha! Get into your cold beds and warm
yourselves up.

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 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 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?—
60 Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou give 'em all?

FOOL

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

LEAR

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

EDGAR

Whoever gave a thing to Poor Tom? The devil has chased him through fires, across rivers and whirlpools, and over swamps. The devil has put knives under Tom's pillow and hangman's ropes in his church pew, encouraging him to kill himself. The devil has put rat poison next to Poor Tom's oatmeal and made him gallop his horse over narrow bridges, chasing his own shadow as if it were a traitor. Bless your five senses! Tom's chilly. Oh do-de, do-de, do-de. God protect you from tornadoes, evil stars, and diseases! Take pity on Poor Tom, who is persecuted by the devil. I can almost catch him. There!... And over there!... And over there!

The storm continues.

LEAR

Have his daughters made him crazy like this?—Couldn't you have kept something for yourself? Did you have to give them everything?

FOOL

No, he kept a blanket to cover himself with. If he hadn't, we'd all be embarrassed to look at him.

LEAR

Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air
Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT

He hath no daughters, sir.

LEAR

65 Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'Twas this flesh begot
70 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

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?

LEAR

Then may your daughters be cursed with all the horrible fates that await sinners!

KENT

He doesn't have any daughters, sir.

LEAR

Like hell! Nothing but cruel daughters could have degraded him like this. Is it fashionable now for neglected fathers to get so little pity? That's a fair punishment! I'm the one who fathered those bloodsucking daughters.

EDGAR

[Pillicock](#) sat on Pillicock hill. La, la, la, la!

FOOL

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

EDGAR

Beware of the devil. Obey your parents, keep your word, don't swear, don't sleep with another man's wife, and don't covet flashy clothes. Tom's chilly.

LEAR

What were you before this?

EDGAR

A servingman, proud in heart and mind, that curled my hair,
wore gloves in my cap, served the lust of my mistress' heart
and did the act of darkness with her, swore as many oaths as
I spake words and broke them in the sweet face of heaven—
one that slept in the contriving of lust and waked to do it.

Wine loved I 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. 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

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

Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare,
forked animal as thou art.—

EDGAR

I used to be an honorable devoted servant who curled his hair,
wore his mistress's glove in his hat as a token of her affection,
and slept with his mistress whenever she wanted. I swore
oaths with every other word out of my mouth, and broke the
oaths shamelessly. I used to dream of having sex and wake up
to do it. I loved wine and gambling, and had more women than
a Turkish sultan keeps in his harem. I was disloyal and violent. I
eavesdropped. I was as lazy as a hog, as sneaky as a fox, as
greedy as a wolf, as mad as a dog, and as ruthless as a lion.
Don't ever let a woman know what you're thinking. Stay away
from whores, don't chase skirts, don't borrow money, and resist
the devil. The cold wind's still blowing through the hawthorn
tree. (*speaking to an imaginary horse*) Dauphin, my boy, stop
that.—Let the horse go by.

The storm continues.

LEAR

You'd be better off dead than facing the storm as naked as you
are. Is this all a human being is? Look at him. (*to EDGAR*) You
are not indebted to animals for your clothes since don't wear
silk, leather, or wool—not even [perfume](#). Ha! The three of us
are sophisticated compared to you. You're the real thing.
The human being unburdened by the trappings of civilization is
no more than a poor, naked, two-legged animal like you.

Off, off, you lendings! Come. Unbutton here. (*tears at his clothes*)

Enter **GLOUCESTER** with a torch

FOOL

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

EDGAR

This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet. He begins at curfew and walks till the first cock. He gives the web and the pin, squints the eye and makes the harelip, mildews the white wheat and hurts the poor creature of earth.

Swithold footed thrice the 'old.

He met the nightmare and her ninefold,
Bid her alight,
And her troth plight.
And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT

How fares your grace?

LEAR

(indicating GLOUCESTER) What's he?

Off with these clothes borrowed from animals! Let me unbutton this. (*he tears at his clothes*)

GLOUCESTER enters with a torch.

FOOL

Please calm down, uncle. This is a nasty night to go swimming. On a night like this a campfire in an empty field would be like the heart of a dirty old man—a tiny spark in a cold body. Look, here comes a walking fire.

EDGAR

This is the devil Flibbertigibbet. He gets up at nightfall and wanders around till dawn. He can make your eyes squint and film over and give you a harelip. He rots ripened wheat and hurts the poor creatures of the earth.

Saint Withold crossed the field three times,
He met a she-demon and her nine kids,
He told her to promise
To stop doing harm.
And go away, witch, go away.

KENT

How are you, your highness?

LEAR

(pointing at GLOUCESTER) Who's that?

KENT

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

GLOUCESTER

What are you there? Your names?

EDGAR

120 Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall newt, and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow dung for 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, 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

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

KENT

Who are you? What do you want?

GLOUCESTER

Who are you? What are your names?

EDGAR

Poor Tom, who eats frogs, toads, tadpoles, lizards, and newts. When the devil tells me to, I eat cow dung for salads, I swallow old rats and dead dogs, I drink pond scum. In every village I'm whipped and put in the stocks, punished and imprisoned. But I used to be a respectable servant, with three suits and six shirts. Once I had a horse to ride and a sword to wear, but now poor Tom's been eating rats and mice for seven long years. Beware of the devil who follows me around. Calm down, Smulkin, you fiend!

GLOUCESTER

(to LEAR) Don't you have anyone more respectable with you, your highness?

EDGAR

Oh, the devil is quite a gentleman. He's called Modo and Mahu.

GLOUCESTER

135 That it doth hate what gets it.

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

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

LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher.—

(to EDGAR) What is the cause of thunder?

KENT

145 (to LEAR) Good my lord, take his offer. Go into the house.

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.

(to LEAR) My lord, our children have become so beastly that they hate their own parents.

EDGAR

Poor Tom's chilly.

GLOUCESTER

Come back to my house with me. I couldn't bear to obey all of your daughters' harsh orders. They commanded me to lock my doors and leave you out in this merciless storm, but I've come out here to find you and take you where there's warmth and food.

LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher here.—(to EDGAR) What causes thunder?

KENT

(to LEAR) Sir, please take him up on his offer and go back with him.

LEAR

I want to chat a bit with this wise [Greek](#) man.—What kind of philosophy do you study?

EDGAR

How to keep the devil away and kill rats.

LEAR

Let me ask you one word in private.

LEAR and EDGAR talk aside

KENT

150 (*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—
He said it would be thus, poor banished man.

Thou say'st the king grows mad. I'll tell thee, friend,
155 I am almost mad myself. I had a son,

Now outlawed from my blood. He sought my life,
But lately, very late. I loved him, friend—
No father his son dearer. Truth to tell thee,

The grief hath crazed my wits. What a night's this!
160 (*to LEAR*) I do beseech your grace—

LEAR

O, cry your mercy, sir.—

LEAR

Let me ask you something in private.

LEAR and EDGAR talk privately.

KENT

(*speaking so that only GLOUCESTER can hear*) Ask him again to return with you, my lord. He's beginning to lose his mind.

GLOUCESTER

Can you blame him?

The storm continues.

His daughters want to kill him. Ah, good old Kent said this would happen—that poor, banished man. You say the king is losing his mind. Let me tell you, my friend, I'm almost insane myself. I had a son, whom I've legally disowned. He tried to kill me recently, very recently. I loved him, as much as any father ever loved his son. To tell you the truth, I'm crazed with grief.

What a storm! (*to LEAR*) Your highness, please, I'm begging you—

LEAR

(to EDGAR) Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR

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)

With him!

165 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

(to EDGAR) Sirrah, come on. Go along with us.

Excuse me, sir.—(to EDGAR) Noble philosopher, come talk to me.

EDGAR

Tom's chilly.

GLOUCESTER

Get into the hut, man. Stay warm.

LEAR

Come on, let's all go inside.

KENT

This way, my lord.

LEAR

(pointing to EDGAR) I'll go with him. I want to stay with my philosopher.

KENT

(to GLOUCESTER) My lord, calm him down. Let him take that guy inside too.

GLOUCESTER

All right, bring him along.

KENT

(to EDGAR) Boy, come along with us.

LEAR

170 Come, good Athenian.

GLOUCESTER

No words, no words. Hush.

EDGAR

Child Roland to the dark tower came,
His word was still "Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man."

Exeunt

Enter **CORNWALL** and **EDMUND**

CORNWALL

I will have my revenge ere I depart his house.

EDMUND

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

CORNWALL

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

EDMUND**LEAR**

Come on, my dear Greek philosopher.

GLOUCESTER

Hush, don't talk.

EDGAR

The young knight Roland came to the dark tower.
He said, "Fee, fie, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman."

They all exit.

Act 3 Scene 5

CORNWALL enters with **EDMUND**.

CORNWALL

I'll get my revenge before I leave this house.

EDMUND

I'm afraid to think how I'll be criticized for letting my natural
affection for my father give way to my loyalty to you.

CORNWALL

Now I realize your brother tried to kill your father not just
because your brother is an evil man, but because your father
deserved it by being wicked himself.

EDMUND

How malicious is my fortune, that I must repent to be just!
(giving CORNWALL a letter) This is the letter 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 business in hand.

CORNWALL

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

EDMUND

(aside) If I find him comforting the king, it will stuff his suspicion more fully.*(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.

How unlucky am I, having to apologize for doing the right thing! *(giving CORNWALL a letter)* This is the letter he was talking about, and it confirms he was a spy for France. Oh God, I wish he had never betrayed us, or that I hadn't been the one to discover his treason.

CORNWALL

Come with me to see the duchess.

EDMUND

If this letter's right, you've got a lot to deal with.

CORNWALL

Right or not, it's made you the Earl of Gloucester. Go find your father and let him know we're going to arrest him.

EDMUND

(to himself) If I catch my father helping the king, he'll seem even more guilty. *(to CORNWALL)* I'll do what I must loyally, even though it pains me to take action against my father.

CORNWALL

I put my trust in you. You'll see that I'm a better father to you than Gloucester.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 3 Scene 6

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

All the power of his wits have given way to his impatience.

5 The gods reward your kindness!

Exit GLOUCESTER

EDGAR

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

FOOL

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

LEAR

10 A king, a king!

GLOUCESTER enters with **LEAR**, the **FOOL**, and **KENT** and **EDGAR**, both in disguise.

GLOUCESTER

It's better here than outside. Be happy about it. I'll do what I can to make you even more comfortable. I won't be gone long.

KENT

He can't bear his grief and so he's losing his mind. May God reward you for your kindness!

GLOUCESTER exits.

EDGAR

The devil Frateretto is telling me that the diabolical Roman emperor **Nero** likes to go fishing in hell. Pray to the gods, you fool, and beware the foul devil.

FOOL

Here's a riddle, uncle. Is the lunatic a gentleman or an ordinary guy?

LEAR

He's a king, a king!

FOOL

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

LEAR

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

EDGAR

15 The foul fiend bites my back.

FOOL

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

LEAR

It shall be done. I will arraign them straight.

(to EDGAR) Come, sit thou here, most learnèd justicer.

20 (to FOOL)

Thou, sapient sir, sit here.—Now, you she-foxes—

EDGAR

Look, where he stands and glares!—Want'st thou eyes at trial, madam?

(sings)

Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me—

FOOL

No, he's an ordinary guy who 's got a gentleman for a son, since someone would have to be crazy to let his son become a gentleman before he's achieved that distinction himself.

LEAR

I see Regan and Goneril in hell—A thousand hissing devils with sizzling red pitchforks come up to them!

EDGAR

The nasty devil's biting my butt.

FOOL

You've got to be crazy to trust a wolf that pretends to be tame, a horse that seems healthy, a teenager in love, or a whore who swears she'll be faithful.

LEAR

I'll do it. I'll put them on [trial](#) right now. (to EDGAR) Come sit here, our able judge. (to FOOL) And you sit here, wise sir.—Now, you she-foxes—

EDGAR

There he is, standing and glaring at me!—Hey, lady, can't you see how the judge is?

(sings)

Come over the stream to me, dear Bessy—

FOOL

(sings)

*Her boat hath a leak,
And she must not speak
Why she dares not come over to thee.*

EDGAR

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

KENT

(to LEAR) How do you, sir? Stand you not so amazed.
Will you lie down and rest upon the cushions?

LEAR

35 I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.
(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.
40 Sit you too.

EDGAR

Let us deal justly.

(sings)

FOOL

(sings)

*She's getting her period,
And she won't tell you
Why she won't come see you.*

EDGAR

The devil sings like a nightingale to haunt Poor Tom. The
demon Hoppedance is in Tom's belly, crying for some fish to
eat. Stop whining, devil. I've got no food to give you.

KENT

(to LEAR) How are you, sir? Please don't stand there in a daze.
Wouldn't you like to lie down on the pillows?

LEAR

No, I want to see their trial first. Let's have the evidence. (to
EDGAR) Take your place, honorable judge. (to FOOL) And you,
his fellow justice of the peace, sit next to him. (to KENT) You
can also be a judge. Sit down as well.

EDGAR

Let's give a fair verdict.

(sings)

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?

Thy sheep be in the corn.

45 *And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,*

Thy sheep shall take no harm.

Purr! The cat is gray.

LEAR

Arraign her first. 'Tis Goneril. I here take my oath before this honorable assembly, she kicked the poor king her father.

FOOL

Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR

She cannot deny it.

FOOL

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

LEAR

And here's another, whose warped looks proclaim

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

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

False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?

EDGAR

Are you asleep or awake, happy shepherd?

Your sheep are running around the cornfield.

But if you blow your cute little horn,

Your sheep will be fine.

Purr! The devil-cat is gray.

LEAR

Let's put Goneril on trial first. There she is. I hereby swear before this honored assembly that she kicked her father when he was down.

FOOL

Come here, ma'am. Is your name Goneril?

LEAR

She can't deny it.

FOOL

I'm so sorry, ma'am, I thought you were a good person, a well-made chair instead of a crude stool.

LEAR

And here's Regan, whose grotesque face betrays her twisted heart. Stop her! Guards, guards, use your weapons. Fire! The courtroom is in chaos. You corrupt judge, why did you let her escape?

EDGAR

Bless thy five wits.

KENT

(to LEAR) O pity! Sir, where is the patience now,
60 That thou so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR

(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!
65 Tooth that poisons if it bite,
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,

Hound or spaniel, brach or him,
Bobtail tyke or trundle-tail—
Tom will make them weep and wail.
For with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled.
Be thy mouth or black or white,
Do-de, de-de. Cessez! Come, march to wakes and fairs and
market towns. Poor Tom, thy horn is dry.

Bless your heart.

KENT

(to LEAR) How sorrowful! Sir, where's the self-control you used
to be so proud of?

EDGAR

(to himself) I feel so sorry for him that my tears are starting to
ruin my disguise.

LEAR

Look at the three little dogs, Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart—all
barking at me.

EDGAR

Tom will chase them off.—Go away, you mongrels!
Whether you bite to kill,
Mastiff, greyhound, or ugly mutt,

Hound or spaniel, bitch or dog,
Whether your tail is short or curly—
Tom will make you cry and wail.
With one little toss of his head,
He can scare you off for good.
Whether your mouth is black or white,
Do-dee, dee-dee da. Stop! Run off, go visit fairs and festivals!
Poor Tom, your cup is empty.

LEAR

75 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 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

And I'll go to bed at noon.

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER

85 (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.

LEAR

Now let them dissect Regan and her hard heart. Is there any natural cause for hardening of the heart? (to EDGAR) Sir, you can serve me as one of my hundred knights. But I don't like your style of clothes. I'm sure you'll tell me they're fabulous, but I think you should change them anyway.

KENT

Please lie down and rest a while, my lord.

LEAR

Be quiet, be quiet. Draw the curtains, just like that. We'll have supper in the morning. That's right.

(he falls asleep)

FOOL

And I'll go to bed at noon.

GLOUCESTER enters.

GLOUCESTER

(to KENT) Come here, my friend. Where's my master the king?

KENT

He's here, sir, but please don't bother him. He's out of his right mind.

GLOUCESTER

I have o'erheard a plot of death upon him.

90 There is a litter ready. Lay him in 't
And drive towards Dover, friend, where thou shalt meet
Both welcome and protection. Take up thy master.
If thou shouldst dally half an hour, his life,
With thine and all that offer to defend him,
95 Stand in assurèd loss. Take up, take up,
And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

KENT

Oppressèd nature sleeps.—
This rest might yet have balmed thy broken sinews,
Which, if convenience will not allow,
100 Stand in hard cure.

(to FOOL)

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

GLOUCESTER

Come, come, away.

Exeunt all but EDGAR

EDGAR

When we our betters see bearing our woes,

Please get him, my friend, I beg you. I've overheard people plotting to kill him. I have a carriage ready. Put

him inside and take him to Dover, where you'll find people who'll welcome and protect him. Carry your master out. If you waste even half an hour, he'll be killed, along with you and everyone else helping him. Bring him here, carry him and follow me. I'll quickly take you to where you can find supplies.

KENT

Lear's suffering has finally put him to sleep. (*to the sleeping LEAR*) This rest might have calmed your shattered nerves. It will be difficult for you to get better now that rest is impossible. (*to FOOL*) Come on, help me carry your master. You can't stay here.

GLOUCESTER

Come on, come on.

Everyone exits except EDGAR.

EDGAR

We scarcely think our miseries our foes.

105 Who alone suffers, suffers most i' th' mind,

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

110 When that which makes me bend makes the king bow.

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.

115 What will hap more tonight, safe 'scape the king!

Lurk, lurk.

Exit

*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

When we see that our betters have the same problems we do, we can almost forget our own misery. The person who suffers alone suffers the most. Companions in sorrow alleviate our grief. My troubles seem so easy to bear now that I see the king collapsing under a similar sorrow. His children have done the same to him as my father has to me. Let's go, Tom. We'll pay attention to the political situation, and you'll be able to reveal your true identity when you're proven innocent. Whatever else happens tonight, I hope the king escapes safely! Lurk out of sight.

He exits.

Act 3 Scene 7

CORNWALL enters with REGAN, GONERIL, EDMUND, and servants.

CORNWALL

(to GONERIL) Hurry to your husband. Show him this letter. The French army has landed.—Find the traitor Gloucester.

Some servants exit.

REGAN

Hang him instantly.

GONERIL

Pluck out his eyes.

CORNWALL

Leave him to my displeasure.—Edmund, keep you our sister company. The revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding. Advise the duke where you are going, to 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

My lord of Gloucester hath conveyed him hence.
Some five or six and thirty of his knights,
15 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-armèd friends.

CORNWALL

Get horses for your mistress.

Hang him immediately.

GONERIL

Gouge out his eyes!

CORNWALL

Leave him to my wrath.—Edmund, go with my sister-in-law. You shouldn't have to see the punishment we inflict on your father. Tell the Duke of Albany to prepare for war immediately. We will do the same. We'll keep the lines of communication open between us. (to GONERIL) Goodbye, my dear sister-in-law. (to EDMUND) Goodbye, lord Gloucester.

OSWALD enters.

Hello. Where's the king?

OSWALD

Lord Gloucester has helped him leave. Thirty-five or thirty-six of his knights met him at the gate, and together with some others they've set off for Dover, where they claim to have powerful friends.

CORNWALL

Prepare the horses for your lady.

Exit OSWALD

GONERIL

20 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

Though well we may not pass upon his life
Without the form of justice, yet our power
25 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

Bind fast his corky arms.

OSWALD exits.

GONERIL

Goodbye, my sweet lord.—Goodbye, my sister.

CORNWALL

Goodbye, Edmund.

GONERIL and EDMUND exit.

Go find the traitor Gloucester. Tie him up like a thief and bring him here to me.

Some servants exit.

I can't condemn him to death without a formal trial, but I'm powerful enough that I can still do *something* to express my anger. Some men may blame me for doing this, but they won't be able to do anything about it.—Who's there? Is that the traitor?

Two or three servants bring in GLOUCESTER.

REGAN

Ungrateful traitor! That's him.

CORNWALL

Tie up his withered old arms.

GLOUCESTER

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

CORNWALL

30 Bind him, I say.

Servants bind GLOUCESTER

REGAN

Hard, hard.—O filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.

CORNWALL

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

REGAN plucks GLOUCESTER's beard

GLOUCESTER

By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

REGAN

35 So white, and such a traitor?

GLOUCESTER

Naughty lady,

GLOUCESTER

What are you doing? My friends, remember that you're my
guests here. Don't play any nasty tricks on me.

CORNWALL

Tie him up, I tell you.

Servants tie up GLOUCESTER.

REGAN

Tie him up harder.—You filthy traitor!

GLOUCESTER

I'm not a traitor, unfair lady.

CORNWALL

Tie him to this chair.—You'll see, criminal—

REGAN pulls GLOUCESTER's beard.

GLOUCESTER

By the gods, it's disgraceful for you to pull my beard.

REGAN

As old and white-haired as you are, and you're such a traitor?

GLOUCESTER

These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin
Will quicken and accuse thee. I am your host.
With robbers' hands my hospitable favors
40 You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?

CORNWALL

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

REGAN

Be simple-answered, for we know the truth.

CORNWALL

And what confederacy have you with the traitors
Late footed in the kingdom?

REGAN

To whose hands

45 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.

REGAN

And false.

Wicked woman, these white hairs you're pulling off my chin
will come to life and accuse you of wrong-doing. You are my
guests. This is no way to treat a host who has welcomed you
into his house. What do you think you're doing?

CORNWALL

Tell us about the letters that you got from France.

REGAN

Get to the point, since we already know the truth.

CORNWALL

And what's your connection with the traitors who landed in our
kingdom recently?

REGAN

The ones you've sent our lunatic king to. Tell us.

GLOUCESTER

I got a letter that made some guesses about what was going
on, without any proof. It came from a neutral party, not from
someone opposed to you.

CORNWALL

How clever of you.

REGAN

Clever lies.

CORNWALL

Where hast thou sent the king?

GLOUCESTER

To Dover.

REGAN

50 Wherefore to Dover? Wast thou not charged at peril—

CORNWALL

Wherefore to Dover?—Let him first answer that.

GLOUCESTER

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

REGAN

Wherefore to Dover, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Because I would not see thy crûel nails

55 Pluck out his poor old eyes, nor thy fierce sister

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.

The sea, with such a storm as his bare head

In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up,

And quenched the stellèd fires.

60 Yet poor old heart, he holp the heavens to rain.

If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time,

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

CORNWALL

Where have you sent the king?

GLOUCESTER

To Dover.

REGAN

Why Dover? Weren't you ordered, on penalty of—

CORNWALL

Why Dover?—Let him answer that question first.

GLOUCESTER

I'm backed into a corner with nowhere to run.

REGAN

Why Dover?

GLOUCESTER

Because I didn't want to watch while you gouged out his poor old eyes with your cruel fingernails, or while your vicious sister sank her fangs into his sacred flesh. You left him out in the storm in the black night, bareheaded, a storm so terrible that if it had happened at sea, the waters would have risen up and extinguished the fire burning in the stars. And the poor old man just wept, mixing his tears with the rain. If wolves had been howling outside your gate at the heart of that storm, you would've told your doorman to let them in, despite all the

All crûels else subscribed. But I shall see
The wingèd vengeance overtake such children.

CORNWALL

65 "See" 't shalt thou never.—Fellows, hold the chair.—
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

GLOUCESTER

He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help!

CORNWALL plucks out one of **GLOUCESTER**'s eyes and
stamps on it

O cruel! O you gods!

REGAN

70 One side will mock another—th' other too.

CORNWALL

If you see vengeance—

FIRST SERVANT

Hold your hand, my lord!
I have served you ever since I was a child.
But better service have I never done you
75 Than now to bid you hold.

REGAN

cruelties you inflict on the world. But soon I'll see the gods
punish you for your lack of respect to your father.

CORNWALL

You won't be seeing anything.—Hold his chair still, men.—I'm
going to put my foot on his eyes.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, help me, anyone who wants to live long!

CORNWALL gouges out one of **GLOUCESTER**'s eyes and steps
on it.

Oh, so cruel! Oh dear gods!

REGAN

Now he's a little crooked. Gouge out the other eye too.

CORNWALL

If you see vengeance—

FIRST SERVANT

Stop, my lord! I've served you since childhood, but I've never
done you a better service than telling you to stop.

REGAN

How now, you dog?

FIRST SERVANT

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

CORNWALL

My villein!

FIRST SERVANT

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

FIRST SERVANT and **CORNWALL** draw and fight **CORNWALL**
is wounded

REGAN

80 (*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
To see some mischief on him. Oh!

85 (*dies*)

CORNWALL

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

What's this, you dog?

FIRST SERVANT

I am willing to fight you if I must. What do you mean by all this?

CORNWALL

My peasant, acting like this?

FIRST SERVANT

Come on then. Over my dead body.

*The FIRST SERVANT and CORNWALL draw swords and fight.
CORNWALL is wounded.*

REGAN

(*to another servant*) Give me your sword.—A lowly peasant
defying his lord like this?

*She takes a sword and stabs the FIRST SERVANT from behind,
killing him.*

FIRST SERVANT

I am dying!—My lord, you still have one eye left to see
Cornwall punished. Oh! (*he dies*)

CORNWALL

We'll just have to stop him from seeing ever again. Out, vile
jelly, pop out of your eye sockets!

(plucks out GLOUCESTER's other eye)

Where is thy luster now?

GLOUCESTER

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

90 Edmund, enkindle all the sparks of nature

To quit this horrid act.

REGAN

Out, treacherous villain!

Thou call'st on him that hates thee. It was he

That made the overture of thy treasons to us,

Who is too good to pity thee.

GLOUCESTER

95 O my follies! Then Edgar was abused.

Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

REGAN

Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell

His way to Dover.

Exeunt some servants with GLOUCESTER

(to CORNWALL) How is 't, my lord? How look you?

CORNWALL

100 I have received a hurt. Follow me, lady.—

(he gouges out GLOUCESTER's other eye)

Where's your sparkle now?

GLOUCESTER

Nothing but darkness and horror. Where's my son Edmund?

Edmund, let your love for me ignite your bloodlust to avenge
this horrible crime!

REGAN

Wrong, evil traitor. You're appealing to a son who hates you. He
was the one who revealed your treason to us. He's too good to
have any compassion for you.

GLOUCESTER

What a fool I've been! This means I've mistreated Edgar. Dear
God, forgive me. Let him be well!

REGAN

Kick him out of the gate. He can sniff his way to Dover.

Some servants exit with GLOUCESTER.

(to CORNWALL) What is it, my lord? Why do you look like that?

CORNWALL

Turn out that eyeless villain. Throw this slave
Upon the dunghill.—Regan, I bleed apace.
Untimely comes this hurt. Give me your arm.

Exit CORNWALL with REGAN

SECOND SERVANT

I'll never care what wickedness I do,
105 If this man come to good.

THIRD SERVANT

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

SECOND SERVANT

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

THIRD SERVANT

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

Exeunt severally

I'm wounded. Follow me, madam.—Throw the blind traitor outside. And throw this dead peasant into the manure pit.—Regan, I'm bleeding. It's a bad time for such an injury. Give me your arm.

CORNWALL and REGAN exit.

SECOND SERVANT

If our criminal master gets off free, I won't care what happens to me anymore.

THIRD SERVANT

If she lives a long and happy life, then all women may as well turn into monsters.

SECOND SERVANT

Let's follow the old earl, and get that crazy Tom to take him wherever he wants to go. As a wandering lunatic, he can do whatever he wants.

THIRD SERVANT

Go ahead. I'll get some cloth and egg whites to bandage his bleeding face. Heaven help him!

They exit in different directions.

Act 4 Scene 1

Enter EDGAR diguised

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,
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.

EDGAR enters in disguise.

EDGAR

Still, I'm better off now, as a beggar who is openly hated, than
when I was flattered to my face hated in secret. The lowliest
and most dejected creatures live without fear and still harbor
hope. The worst kind of change is when good fortune turns
sour. At the bottom, any change is for the better. So I welcome
this wind freely. I've sunk as far down as I can go, so I've got
nothing more to fear from the weather.

GLOUCESTER enters, led by an OLD MAN.

But who is this? My father, led by a poor peasant? Oh, life is full
of surprises! We age and die because they wear us out.

OLD MAN

(to GLOUCESTER) My good lord,
I've rented land from you and your father for eighty years.

GLOUCESTER

Away, get out of here. Leave me, my friend. There's nothing
you can do to help me now, and being with me puts your life in

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"?
I am worse than e'er I was.

OLD MAN

30 (to GLOUCESTER)

'Tis poor mad Tom.

EDGAR

danger.

OLD MAN

But you can't see where you're going, sir.

GLOUCESTER

I don't have anywhere to go, so I don't need to see. When I could see, I didn't always see clearly. I made

mistakes, I stumbled and fell. It's often the case that having something makes us spoiled, while not having it turns out to be advantageous. So may it be with my eyesight. Oh, my dear son Edgar,

how enraged I was at you when I was deceived. If I live long enough to touch you again, that would be as good as having my eyesight back.

OLD MAN

Who's that? Who's there?

EDGAR

(to himself) Oh, gods! Who can ever say, "This is as bad as it can get"? I'm worse off now than ever before.

OLD MAN

(to GLOUCESTER) It's poor crazy Tom.

EDGAR

(aside) And worse I may be yet. The worst is not
So long as we can say "This is the worst."

OLD MAN

(to EDGAR) Fellow, where goest?

GLOUCESTER

Is it a beggarman?

OLD MAN

35 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,
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
40 Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more since.
As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods.
They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR

(aside)

How should this be?
Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
45 Angering itself and others.—Bless thee, master!

(*to himself*) And my life could still be worse. If you have the presence of mind to say, "This is the worst," then it's not the worst yet.

OLD MAN

(to EDGAR) Where are you going, man?

GLOUCESTER

Is it a beggar?

OLD MAN

Yes, he's both crazy and a beggar.

GLOUCESTER

Well, he can't be completely crazy, or he wouldn't be able to beg. Last night during the storm I saw a man who was both poor and crazy. He made me think that men are as weak and insignificant as worms. I was reminded of my son, even though I despised my son at that time. Now I know better. The gods play around with us as cruelly as schoolboys who pull the wings off flies.

EDGAR

(*to himself*) What's going on? I hate pretending I'm a wandering beggar when all I want to do now is comfort my poor father.—Bless you, master.

GLOUCESTER

Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN

Ay, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

Then prithee, get thee gone. If for my sake
Thou wilt o'er take us hence a mile or twain
I' th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love.
50 And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Which I'll entreat to lead me.

OLD MAN

Alack, sir, he is mad.

GLOUCESTER

'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind.
Do as I bid thee. Or rather, do thy pleasure.
Above the rest, be gone.

OLD MAN

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

Exit OLD MAN

GLOUCESTER

Sirrah, naked fellow—

GLOUCESTER

Is that the naked guy?

OLD MAN

Yes, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

(*to the OLD MAN*) Then please go. If you're willing to do me a favor, as an old friend, then catch up to us a mile or two further on the way to Dover, and bring some clothes for this poor beggar. I'll ask him to be my guide.

OLD MAN

But sir, he's crazy.

GLOUCESTER

It's the tragedy of our times that lunatics must lead the blind.
Do as I asked you. Or rather, do what you feel like doing. But above all, get out of here.

OLD MAN

I'll bring the crazy beggar the best clothes I have, no matter what happens.

He exits.

GLOUCESTER

Hey, naked guy—

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold.

(aside) I cannot daub it further.

GLOUCESTER

Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR

60 (aside) And yet I must.—Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

GLOUCESTER

Know'st thou the way to Dover?

EDGAR

Both stile and gate, horseway and footpath. Poor Tom hath been scared out of his good wits. 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; Modo, of murder; Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing, who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women. So bless thee, master.

GLOUCESTER

70 (giving EDGAR a purse)

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched

EDGAR

Poor Tom's chilly. (*to himself*) I can't play this role any longer.

GLOUCESTER

Come here, man.

EDGAR

(*to himself*) But I must.—Bless you, sir. Your dear eyes are bleeding.

GLOUCESTER

Do you know the way to Dover?

EDGAR

I know it like the back of my hand, every step of the way. Poor Tom has been scared out of his mind. Bless you, good man, and stay away from the devil. Five devils haunted Poor Tom at the same time: Obidicut, the devil of lust; Hobbididence, the devil of mutes; Mahu, the devil of stealing; Modo, the devil of murder; and Flibbertigibbet, the devil of mockery, who causes chambermaids to make silly faces. Bless you, master.

GLOUCESTER

(giving EDGAR a purse) Here, take some money. The torments of heaven have brought you down to this humble state. My misery makes you more fortunate in comparison. It should

Makes thee the happier. Heavens, deal so still.
Let the superfluous and lust-dighted man,
75 That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly.
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR

Ay, master.

GLOUCESTER

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

EDGAR

Give me thy arm.
Poor Tom shall lead thee.

Exeunt

Enter GONERIL and EDMUND the bastard

GONERIL

always work like that. The spoiled man who has everything, who can't see the misery around him because he doesn't feel it himself, should be made to feel agony so he can learn to share his wealth. That way wealth would be redistributed until everyone has enough to survive. Are you familiar with Dover?

EDGAR

Yes, sir.

GLOUCESTER

There's a cliff there that leans precariously over the deep sea. Take me to the edge of it, and I'll reward all your troubles with something valuable. Once I'm there, I won't need a guide anymore.

EDGAR

Give me your arm. Poor Tom will take you there.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 2

GONERIL enters with **EDMUND**.

GONERIL

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

Enter OSWALD

Now, where's your master?

OSWALD

Madam, within—but never man so changed.
I told him of the army that was landed.
5 He smiled at it. I told him you were coming.
His answer was “The worse.” Of Gloucester’s treachery
And of the loyal service of his son,
When I informed him, then he called me “sot,”
And told me I had turned the wrong side out.
10 What most he should dislike seems pleasant to him;
What like, offensive.

GONERIL

(to EDMUND)

Then shall you go no further.
It is the cowish terror of his spirit
That dares not undertake. He'll not feel wrongs
15 Which tie him to an answer. Our wishes on the way
May prove effects. Back, Edmund, to my brother.
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers.
I must change names at home, and give the distaff

Welcome, my lord. I'm surprised my bland husband didn't meet me on the way here.

OSWALD enters.

Where's your master?

OSWALD

He's inside, ma'am, but he has changed dramatically since you last saw him. When I told him that the invading army has landed, he just smiled at me. When I told him you were on your way, he replied, “Too bad.” When I told him about Gloucester’s betrayal and his son Edmund’s loyal service, he called me an idiot and said I had it all wrong. He was delighted by the bad news and disgusted by the good news.

GONERIL

(to EDMUND) Then don't come in with me. He's a coward and can't commit himself to doing anything risky. He chooses not to be insulted rather than challenge those who offend him. But what we talked about with longing on the way may soon come true. [Edmund](#), go back to see my brother-in-law. Gather his soldiers and organize his troops. I plan to take charge of my household. From now on I will wear the pants, and my husband can play the housewife. We can trust Oswald to carry

Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
20 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.
Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air.
25 (*kisses EDMUND*) Conceive, and fare thee well.

EDMUND

Yours in the ranks of death.

GONERIL

My most dear Gloucester!

Exit EDMUND

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

OSWALD

Madam, here comes my lord.

Exit OSWALD

Enter ALBANY

GONERIL

I have been worth the whistle.

messages between us. If you act boldly, you will soon obey me as your true mistress. Take this as a token of my esteem. Don't speak. Lean down. This kiss should encourage you. (*she kisses EDMUND*) I hope you understand me. Goodbye, and good luck.

EDMUND

I'm at your service until death.

GONERIL

My dear Gloucester!

EDMUND exits.

What a man!—especially compared to my husband. Edmund, you deserve me to be your woman. There's a fool sharing my bed now.

OSWALD

Ma'am, my master's coming.

He exits.

ALBANY enters.

GONERIL

So you finally find me worthy of your attentions.

ALBANY

O Goneril,
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition.
That nature, which contemns its origin
35 Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap perforce must wither
And come to deadly use.

GONERIL

No more. The text is foolish.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.
40 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 madded.

45 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:
50 Humanity must perforce prey on itself

ALBANY

Goneril, you aren't worth the dust the wind blows in your face. I don't trust you. You can't trust anyone who abuses her own father, her flesh and blood. A woman who breaks off relations with her bloodline is like a branch that tries to break away from the tree. She will wither and come to a bad end.

GONERIL

Oh, shut up. Your words are idiotic.

ALBANY

Bad people can't appreciate wisdom or goodness. They only like things as bad as themselves. What have you two sisters done? You're tigers, not daughters. Barbaric degenerates, you've driven insane a kindly old father, whom even an angry bear would treat gent-ly. Could my good brother-in-law—a man to whom the

king gave half his kingdom—have allowed you to do it? If the heavens don't punish these crimes immediately, the end will come. Human beings will become cannibals, like ravenous sea fishes.

Like monsters of the deep.

GONERIL

Milk-livered man
That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs—
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honor from thy suffering; that not know'st
55 Fools do those villains pity who are punished
Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless land,
With plumèd helm thy state begins to threat,
Whiles thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries,
60 "Alack, why does he so?"

ALBANY

See thyself, devil!
Proper deformity shows not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL

O vain fool!

ALBANY

Thou changèd and self-covered thing, for shame!
Bemonster not thy feature. Were 't my fitness
65 To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,

GONERIL

Coward! You take everything lying down, you just turn the other cheek—you can't even see the difference between being honored and being taken advantage of! If we punish [criminals](#) before they have a chance to commit their crimes, you're a fool to pity them. Why aren't you preparing for war? The French have invaded our peaceful country. Your territory is at risk, and all you can do is sit around like a preachy fool and whine, "Ah, why is he doing that?"

ALBANY

Look at yourself, devilish shrew! A woman deformed by hatred and rage is more horrifying than the devil!—at least the devil is supposed to look that way.

GONERIL

You useless fool!

ALBANY

Shame on you, warped hag! Your true demonic features are distorting your body. If I let myself do what I yearn to, I'd rip the flesh off your bones. But I won't attack a woman, even if she is a demon.

A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood, mew!

Enter FIRST MESSENGER

ALBANY

70 What news?

FIRST MESSENGER

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,
75 Opposed against the act, bending his sword
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,
80 You justicers, that these our nether crimes

GONERIL

I sneeze on your manhood. Ha!

The FIRST MESSENGER enters.

ALBANY

What news do you bring?

FIRST MESSENGER

Oh my lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead. He was killed by his
servant as he about to gouge out Gloucester's other eye.

ALBANY

Gloucester's eyes?

FIRST MESSENGER

A servant Gloucester had raised in his house, full of
compunction, opposed the blinding and turned his sword on
the Duke of Cornwall. Enraged, Cornwall attacked and killed
the servant, but not without receiving his own wound, of which
he later died.

ALBANY

There's justice in heaven after all! That these crimes are
punished so quickly is proof. But oh, poor Gloucester! Did he

So speedily can vengeance! But oh, poor Gloucester—
Lost he his other eye?

FIRST MESSENGER

Both, both, my lord.—
This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer.
'Tis from your sister.

GONERIL

85 (aside)

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

Exit GONERIL

ALBANY

90 Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

FIRST MESSENGER

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

FIRST MESSENGER

lose his other eye?

FIRST MESSENGER

He lost both, my lord.—Ma'am, this letter is from your sister,
and needs an immediate answer.

GONERIL

(to herself) In a way I'm glad to hear that Cornwall is dead. But on the other hand, Edmund is traveling with Regan, who is now a widow. If something happens between them on the road, it would shatter my hopes of having Edmund for myself and escaping this hateful life. Still, there are benefits to having Cornwall out of the way.—I'll read this letter and answer it.

She exits.

ALBANY

Where was Gloucester's son Edmund when they gouged his eyes out?

FIRST MESSENGER

He was on his way here with your wife.

ALBANY

But he isn't here now.

FIRST MESSENGER

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,
95 And quit the house on purpose that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou showed'st the king,
And to revenge thine eyes.—Come hither, friend.
Tell me what more thou know'st.

Exeunt

Enter KENT disguised and GENTLEMAN

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

Something he left imperfect in the state which, since his
coming forth, is thought of; which imports to the kingdom so

No, my lord. I met him going back again.

ALBANY

Does he know about this wicked crime?

FIRST MESSENGER

Yes, my lord. He was the one who denounced his father. He
then left the house specifically so that the punishment might
be carried out without concern for their father-son bond.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I'll thank you forever for the love you've shown the
king. I'll get revenge for what they did to your eyes.—Come
here, my friend. What else you do know?

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 3

KENT enters in disguise, along with the **GENTLEMAN**.

KENT

Do you know why the King of France suddenly went back
home?

GENTLEMAN

He'd left some unfinished business, which he remembered
after arriving here. It was urgent and important enough to

much fear and danger that his personal return was most required and necessary.

KENT

Who hath he left behind him general?

GENTLEMAN

The Marshal of France, Monsieur la Far.

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

Ay, sir. She took them, read them in my presence,
And now and then an ample tear trilled down
Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen
Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,

15 Sought to be king o'er her.

KENT

O, then it moved her?

GENTLEMAN

Not to a rage. Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once—her smiles and tears
Were like a better way. Those happy smilets

require his personal presence.

KENT

Whom did he leave in charge here?

GENTLEMAN

The marshal of France, Monsieur la Far.

KENT

Was Queen Cordelia aggrieved by the letters you delivered?

GENTLEMAN

Yes, sir. She took the letters and read them in front of me. Now and then a large tear trickled down her delicate cheek. She seemed to be trying to control her emotions, which were overwhelming her.

KENT

So she was moved by it?

GENTLEMAN

There were no outbursts. She was struggling between emotion and self-control. You've seen how it can rain while the sun shines? That's how she was, smiling and crying at once, only more lovely. The little smile on her full lips didn't seem aware

20 That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know
What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved
If all could so become it.

KENT

Made she no verbal question?

GENTLEMAN

25 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!
Kent, father, sisters! What, i' th' storm, i' th' night?
Let pity not be believed." There she shook
30 The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
And clamor moistened. Then away she started
To deal with grief alone.

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

No.

of the tears that were dropping like diamonds from her pearly eyes. If everyone looked so lovely in their sorrow, then sorrow would be highly prized.

KENT

She didn't ask anything?

GENTLEMAN

Actually, once or twice she sighed and said, "father," as if the word were pressing on her chest. Once she exclaimed, "Sisters, sisters, shame on you! Kent, father, sisters! What, out in a storm in the middle of the night? I can't believe it." The tears fell from her eyes like holy water. Then she ran away to grieve alone.

KENT

It must be fate that makes us who we are—otherwise someone as good as Cordelia could not possibly be related to those two witches. Have you not spoken to her since then?

GENTLEMAN

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
40 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
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
45 To his dog-hearted daughters. These things sting
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT

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

KENT

Did this happen before the King of France returned home?

GENTLEMAN

No, afterward.

KENT

Well, sir, poor delirious Lear is in town. Sometimes when he's lucid he remembers why we're here, and absolutely refuses to see his daughter.

GENTLEMAN

Why, good sir?

KENT

He's too overwhelmed with shame. He remembers how unkind he was to her, how he disowned her and sent her abroad, how he gave her rightful inheritance to her two dog-hearted sisters. All those memories pain his mind so deeply that guilt and shame keep him away from Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Oh, the poor man!

KENT

Have you heard about Albany's and Cornwall's troops?

GENTLEMAN

'Tis so. They are afoot.

KENT

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

Exeunt

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

GENTLEMAN

I have. They're on the march.

KENT

Well, sir, I'll take you to Lear and have you stay with him a while. I have important business that requires me to remain in disguise a while longer. When I've revealed my true identity, you'll be glad you took the time to help me out. Please come with me.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 4

CORDELIA enters with a **DOCTOR** and soldiers carrying drums and banners.

CORDELIA

Sadly, it's the king that's missing. They saw him just now as mad and deranged as the stormy sea, singing loudly, wearing a crown of nettles, thorns, hemlock, and all the other weeds that grow in our cornfields.—Send out a hundred soldiers to find him. Search high and low, in every acre of the fields, and bring him here for me to see him.

Some soldiers exit.

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

DOCTOR

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

CORDELIA

All blessed secrets,
All you unpublished virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears. Be aidant and remediate
In the good man's distress. Seek, seek for him,
Lest his ungoverned rage dissolve the life
20 That wants the means to lead it.

Enter SECOND MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

News, madam.
The British powers are marching hitherward.

CORDELIA

'Tis known before. Our preparation stands

What can human knowledge do to make him sane again? I'd give all my wealth to whoever can help him.

DOCTOR

There is a way, ma'am. Nature heals people with rest, which Lear hasn't had. But there are many herbs that will help him rest and take his mind off his anguish for a while.

CORDELIA

Then I'll water all those precious herbs with my tears to make them grow. May they relieve a sick old man's suffering. Go find those herbs for him, before his madness puts his life in danger.

The SECOND MESSENGER enters.

SECOND MESSENGER

I have news, ma'am. The British forces are on their way here.

CORDELIA

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

Exeunt

Enter REGAN and the steward OSWALD

REGAN

But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD

Ay, madam.

REGAN

Himself in person there?

OSWALD

Madam, with much ado.

Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN

5 Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

We already knew that. Our forces are ready for them. Oh, father, I'm taking care of your business. That's why the King of France listened to my pleas and tears. We're not invading England out of ambition or greed, but out of love—dear love!—and my father's right to his kingdom. I hope I see him and hear him again soon.

They all exit.

Act 4 Scene 5

REGAN enters with **OSWALD**.

REGAN

Have my brother-in-law's troops been mobilized?

OSWALD

Yes, ma'am.

REGAN

Is he there in person?

OSWALD

Yes, making a big fuss. Your sister's the better soldier of the two.

REGAN

Lord Edmund didn't speak to your master at home?

OSWALD

No, madam.

REGAN

What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD

I know not, lady.

REGAN

Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.

10 It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,
To let him live. Where he arrives he moves
All hearts against us. Edmund I think is gone
In pity of his misery to dispatch
His nighted life; moreover to descry
15 The strength o' th' enemy.

OSWALD

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

REGAN

Our troops set forth tomorrow. Stay with us.
The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD

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

OSWALD

No, ma'am.

REGAN

What could my sister's letter to him say?

OSWALD

I don't know, ma'am.

REGAN

He rushed away on serious business. It was a huge mistake to let old Gloucester live after we blinded him. Wherever he goes, he inspires compassion and people turn against us. I think Edmund went off to kill him, to put him out of his blind misery. And also to find out the size of the enemy army.

OSWALD

I have to follow him and give him the letter.

REGAN

Our troops are deployed tomorrow. Stay with us tonight. It's dangerous out there.

OSWALD

I can't, ma'am. My lady ordered me to deliver her letter.

REGAN

20 Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word? Belike
Some things—I know not what. I'll love thee much.
Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD

Madam, I had rather—

REGAN

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

OSWALD

I, madam?

REGAN

I speak in understanding. Y' are. I know 't.
30 Therefore I do advise you, take this note.
My lord is dead. Edmund and I have talked,
And more convenient is he for my hand
Than for your lady's. You may gather more.
If you do find him, pray you give him this.
35 And when your mistress hears thus much from you,
I pray desire her call her wisdom to her.
So fare you well.

REGAN

Why would she write to Edmund? Couldn't you just deliver the message orally? It probably has something to do with... I don't know. I'll be so grateful to you if you let me open that letter.

OSWALD

Ma'am, I'd rather—

REGAN

I know your lady Goneril doesn't love her husband. I'm sure of that. And when she was here recently she flirted with Edmund and gave him significant glances. I know she trusts you and tells you everything.

OSWALD

Me, ma'am?

REGAN

I know what I'm talking about. You're close to her, I know it. So I recommend you take note of what I'm about to say. My husband is dead. Edmund and I have talked, and it makes more sense for him to marry me than Goneril. You can figure out the rest. If you find him, please [give](#) him this. And when your mistress hears about all this, please tell her to use her head next time. So goodbye. If you happen to hear anything about that blind traitor Gloucester, I'll reward anyone who snuffs him out.

If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD

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

REGAN

Fare thee well.

Exeunt severally

OSWALD

If I could run into him, ma'am, I'd prove which side I'm on.

REGAN

Goodbye.

They exit in opposite directions.

Act 4 Scene 6

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.
Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER enters with **EDGAR**, who is dressed as a peasant.

GLOUCESTER

When will we get to the top of that cliff?

EDGAR

We're walking up to the top right now. See how hard it is to climb?

GLOUCESTER

The ground feels flat to me.

EDGAR

No, it's dreadfully steep. Listen. Do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

EDGAR

5 Why then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER

So may it be indeed.
Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

EDGAR

You're much deceived. In nothing am I changed
10 But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks you're better spoken.

EDGAR

Come on, sir. Here's the place. Stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
15 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,

GLOUCESTER

No, really, I don't.

EDGAR

Then your other senses must be getting worse because of the
trauma of blindness.

GLOUCESTER

It may be so. It seems to me that your voice has changed, and
that your speech is more elegant than it used to be.

EDGAR

You're mistaken about all that. The only thing different about
me is my clothes.

GLOUCESTER

I think you're more articulate.

EDGAR

Come on, sir. This is the place. Stand still. It's so scary to look
down! It makes me dizzy. The crows flying down below look as
small as ants. Halfway down the cliff there's somebody
clinging to the rock and gathering wild herbs—a risky business!
He looks like a dot to me. The fishermen walking along the
beach are as small as mice. That big ship over there looks no
bigger

Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
20 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

25 Set me 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.
(gives EDGAR another purse)

30 Here, friend, 's another purse, in it a jewel
Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods
Prosper it with thee! Go thou farther off.
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

Now fare you well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

than its lifeboat, and its lifeboat looks as small as a tiny buoy.
Up here you can't even hear the waves crashing against the
rocks. I have to stop looking, or my head will start spinning and
I'll fall.

GLOUCESTER

Lead me to where you're standing.

EDGAR

Give me your hand. You're now within a foot of the cliff's edge. I
wouldn't try to jump up and down here for anything on earth.

GLOUCESTER

Let go of my hand. (*he gives EDGAR another purse*) Here's
another purse, my friend. Inside it there's a jewel that any poor
man would be happy to have. I hope it's only the beginning of
future prosperity for you. Now go further away. Say goodbye to
me, and let me hear your footsteps as you walk away.

EDGAR

Goodbye, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR moves aside

EDGAR

35 (*aside*) Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER

O you mighty gods, (*kneels*)
This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off.
If I could bear it longer and not fall
40 To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathèd part of nature should
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
45 The treasury of life when life itself
Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought,
By this had thought been past. Alive or dead?—
Ho you, sir, friend! Hear you, sir? Speak.—
Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives.—
50 What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

EDGAR moves aside.

EDGAR

(*to himself*) I'm toying with his despair to cure him of it.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, you mighty gods! (*he kneels*) I hereby renounce this world
and all my troubles and torments. If I could bear them better,
and not fight against your unstoppable decisions, then I would
simply wait until I expired naturally. If Edgar's alive, bless him,
gods!—Now, man, goodbye. (*he falls*)

EDGAR

Gone, sir. Goodbye. (*to himself*) But I still wonder if it's possible
for his own imagination to kill him, since he's so willing to die. If
he'd been standing on the edge of the cliff as he thought, he'd
be dead right now. Is he alive or dead?—Hey, sir, friend! Can
you hear me? Answer me.—Maybe he passed away after all.
But no, he's stirring.—Who are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Away, and let me die.

EDGAR

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating,
Thou'dst shivered like an egg. But thou dost breathe,
Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.
55 Ten masts at each make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell.
Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

GLOUCESTER

But have I fall'n, or no?

EDGAR

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.
60 Look up a-height. The shrill-gorged lark so far
Cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, I have no eyes.
Is wretchedness deprived that benefit,
To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort
65 When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage
And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR

Give me your arm.

Go away and let me die.

EDGAR

Even if you were made of feathers and air, you should've been
smashed in pieces like an egg after falling as far as you just
did. But your flesh is solid, your mind is strong, you're breathing
and talking, you're not bleeding. You just fell the height of ten
ship masts, straight down. It's a miracle you're alive. Say
something again.

GLOUCESTER

But did I fall or not?

EDGAR

You fell from the terrifying top of this chalk cliff. Look for
yourself—see the top of the cliff way up there? The lark shrilly
singing up there is too far away to be heard. Just look.

GLOUCESTER

I can't. I have no eyes. If you're wretched and desperate, aren't
you allowed to kill yourself? It used to be the last ditch comfort
of miserable people.

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR

This is above all strangeness.
Upon the crown o' th' cliff, what thing was that
70 Which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER

A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR

As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
Horns whelked and waved like the enragèd sea.
It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
75 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself,
"Enough, enough," and die. That thing you speak of,
80 I took it for a man. Often 'twould say,
"The fiend, the fiend!" He led me to that place.

Give me your arm. Get up. There you go. How do you feel? Can you feel your legs? You're standing.

GLOUCESTER

Only too well.

EDGAR

This is beyond weird. What was that thing I saw moving away
from you up on the cliff before you fell?

GLOUCESTER

That was a poor unlucky beggar.

EDGAR

From down here, I thought his eyes looked like full moons. He
had a thousand noses and twisted horns, like wave crests in a
storm at sea. It was some devil. You lucky old man, it seems
that the gods have saved your life. They love to perform
miracles so that humans will worship them.

GLOUCESTER

I understand now. From now on I'll put up with my anguish until
the anguish itself cries out, "Enough, enough!" and disappears.
I thought that thing you're talking about was a man. It would
often talk about the devil. It took me to that deadly 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

85 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. Draw me a
clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse! Peace,

90 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**EDGAR**

Cheer up and be at peace.

LEAR enters, insane.

But who is that? A sane person would never dress like this.

LEAR

No, they can't accuse me of counterfeiting coins. I'm the king
himself.

EDGAR

(to himself) Oh, what a heartbreakin sight!

LEAR

Life's better at [breaking hearts](#) than art is.—Hey, a new recruit.
Here's your enlistment bonus.—Look how awkwardly he
handles his crossbow.—Come on, pull it back farther!—Look,
look, a mouse! Calm down, this

piece of cheese will get him.—I challenge you to a match. I'll
even fight a giant.—Call out the infantry. —Oh, that arrow was
well shot. Whoosh! Right in the bull's eye.—What's the
password?

EDGAR

Sweet marjoram.

LEAR

95 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.

Sweet marjoram.

LEAR

That's it!

GLOUCESTER

I know that voice.

LEAR

Ha! Goneril with a white beard? Ha, Regan?—They flattered me and told me how wise I was, wise before my time. To agree to everything I said was not truly devout.—The rain came to drench me, and the wind to make me shiver, and the thunder wouldn't stop roaring when I ordered it to. That's when I learned the truth about them. That's when I sniffed them out. I tell you, they are not honest men. They told me I was everything. It's a lie. I'm not immune to chills.

GLOUCESTER

I recognize something about that voice. Isn't that the king?

LEAR

Yes, every inch a king. My subjects tremble when I look at them. I pardon that man. What are you accused of? Adultery? I'll commute your death sentence. To die for adultery? No. Little birds do it, and dragonflies copulate right in front of me.

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.

115 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 sulfurous 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

125 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

Let's have more sex in the world, since Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to him than my daughters, conceived in lawful wedlock, have been to me. Get to it, be lustful, sleep around—I need soldiers for my army. Look at that simpering lady over there. From looking at her face, I'd say she's

frigid. She pretends to be virtuous and to disdain the word "sex, but she's hornier than a passel of rabbits. Women are sex machines below the waist, though they're chaste up above. Above the waist they belong to God, but the lower part belongs to the devil. That's where hell is, and darkness, and fires and stench! Death and orgasm! Ah, ah, ah! Give me an aphrodisiac, pharmacist. Let me have sweet dreams. There's money in it for you.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, let me kiss his hand!

LEAR

Let me wipe it off first. It stinks of death.

GLOUCESTER

A ruined man! This is how the whole world will end up, worn away to nothing.—Do you know who I am?

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

135 Read.

GLOUCESTER

What, with the case of eyes?

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

140 I see it feelingly.

LEAR

I remember your eyes quite well. Are you squinting at me? Go
ahead, try to make me fall in love, blind [Cupid](#). I won't ever
love again. Read this letter. Just look at the handwriting.

GLOUCESTER

If every letter on that page were a sun, I couldn't see even one
of them.

EDGAR

(to himself) I wouldn't believe this if I weren't seeing it with my
own eyes. It's real, and it breaks my heart.

LEAR

Read it.

GLOUCESTER

How? With my eye sockets?

LEAR

Oh ho, is that what you're getting at? You want money before
you'll read? No eyes in your head til there's money in your
wallet? Your eyes are in a bad way, your wallet's empty, but
you understand the ways of the world.

GLOUCESTER

I do understand, by touch.

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?

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. Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand.
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back.
Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
Through 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.
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.

What, are you crazy? You don't need eyes to see how the world works. Look with your ears. Look how the judge yells at a simple thief. Listen. But mix them up, have them switch places, and do you think you'd be able to tell which one is which? Have you seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER

Yes, sir.

LEAR

And you saw how the beggar ran from the mutt? That's authority! Even a dog is obeyed sometimes. You stupid cop, stop your violence! Why are you whipping that whore? You should be whipping yourself, since you lust after her and yearn to do the same thing for which you're punishing her. One criminal punishes another. Poor men's sins are much more noticeable than rich men's. Cover up a crime with gold and the arm of justice can't touch it. But dress the crime in rags and it's caught easily. Everyone sins. You can't blame anyone for it anyone, I say. I'll vouch for that. Believe me, my friend, since I have the power to stop the prosecutors. Get yourself some glass eyes, and pretend to see things you can't, like a crooked politician. Now, now, now, now. Pull off my boots. Harder, harder. Like that.

EDGAR

(aside) O matter and impertinency mixed! Reason in madness!

LEAR

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

GLOUCESTER

170 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.
It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt. I'll put 't in proof.
175 And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Enter GENTLEMAN with two others

GENTLEMAN

Oh, here he is. Lay hand upon him.—Sir,
Your most dear daughter—

EDGAR

(to himself) Oh, wisdom and absurdity mixed up together!
Reason in madness!

LEAR

If you want to cry over my bad luck, I'll give you my eyes. I know you. Your name's Gloucester. You have to be patient with me. I came here crying. The first time we see the world as newborns, we cry and scream. I'll read you a sermon. Listen to this.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, how awful!

LEAR

When we're born, we cry because we've arrived on the stage of life, like all the other fools. That's a nice hat you've got there. How ingenious to make horseshoes out of felt. I'll test it out. And when I've sneaked up on my sons-in-law, then I'll kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

The GENTLEMAN enters with two other gentlemen.

GENTLEMAN

(noticing LEAR) Oh, here he is. Grab him.—Sir, your most dear daughter—

LEAR

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

GENTLEMAN

You shall have anything.

LEAR

No seconds? All myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
185 To use his eyes for garden water-pots,
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

GENTLEMAN

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

190 You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR**LEAR**

What, I'm a prisoner? No rescue for me? My luck has always been bad. Treat me well. There's a ransom. I need a doctor. My brains are injured.

GENTLEMAN

You can have anything you want.

LEAR

Will no one back me up? Am I all alone? That would make anyone cry enough to water his garden with his tears.

GENTLEMAN

Good sir—

LEAR

I'll die *courageously*, like a well-dressed bridegroom. Okay, I'll be cheery. I'm king. Did you know that, gentlemen?

GENTLEMAN

You're of royal blood, and we obey you.

LEAR

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
195 Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

EDGAR

Hail, gentle sir.

GENTLEMAN

Sir, speed you. What's your will?

EDGAR

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

GENTLEMAN

Most sure and vulgar. Everyone hears that
200 That can distinguish sound.

EDGAR

But, by your favor, how near's the other army?

GENTLEMAN

Near and on speedy foot. The main descry

Then there's still a chance. Come and get it! But you'll have to catch me! Catch me if you can! Sa, sa, sa, sa.

LEAR exits running, chased by two gentlemen.

GENTLEMAN

This is a difficult to see even in a beggar. In a king, the sight is unbearable. He has a daughter good enough to cancel out the wickedness of the other two.

EDGAR

Hello, good sir.

GENTLEMAN

How do you do, sir. How can I help you?

EDGAR

Have you heard any news of impending battle?

GENTLEMAN

Certainly. Everyone who can hear has heard about it.

EDGAR

Could you tell me how near the enemy is?

GENTLEMAN

Stands in the hourly thought.

EDGAR

I thank you, sir. That's all.

GENTLEMAN

Though that the queen on special cause is here,

205 Her army is moved on.

EDGAR

I thank you, sir.

Exit GENTLEMAN

GLOUCESTER

You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me.

Let not my worser spirit tempt me again

To die before you please.

EDGAR

Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER

210 Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR

A most poor man made tame to fortune's blows,
Who by the art of known and feeling sorrows

Very near, and approaching fast. The main body of the army is expected here any hour now.

EDGAR

Thank you, sir. That's all I wanted to know.

GENTLEMAN

The queen is here on special business, and her army has moved on.

EDGAR

Thank you, sir.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

GLOUCESTER

Gentle gods in heaven, please let me die. Don't tempt me to suicide again.

EDGAR

Pray well, father.

GLOUCESTER

And who are you, good sir?

EDGAR

I'm a poor man who's been humbled by many misfortunes. I've had enough sorrow in my life to feel compassion for others.

Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some biding.

GLOUCESTER

Hearty thanks.

215 The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot and boot.

Enter OSWALD the steward

OSWALD

A proclaimed prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor,
220 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

Wherefore, bold peasant,
Darest thou support a published traitor? Hence,
Lest that th' infection of his fortune take
225 Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

Give me your hand. I'll lead you to some shelter.

GLOUCESTER

Thank you very much. May heaven bless you.

OSWALD enters.

OSWALD

What good luck! I'll get the promised reward. That blind head
of yours was created to make me rich. You old traitor, repent all
your sins. Prepare to die.

GLOUCESTER

Death is exactly what I want. I hope you're strong enough to do
it.

EDGAR steps in between GLOUCESTER and OSWALD.

OSWALD

Whoa, man, you dare to support someone who's been
proclaimed a traitor? Get out of here, before his bad luck
infects you too. Let go of his arm.

EDGAR

'Chill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.

OSWALD

Let go, slave, or thou diest!

EDGAR

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

OSWALD

Out, dunghill!

EDGAR

'Chill pick your teeth, zir. Come, no matter vor your foins.

EDGAR and OSWALD fight

OSWALD

235 (*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**EDGAR**

Oh no, sir, I won't let him go, sir, not without a good reason.

OSWALD

Let go of him, peasant, or you die!

EDGAR

Get on with your business, sir, and leave the poor people alone. If [macho talk](#) like yours could kill me, I'd have died weeks ago. No, don't come near the old man. Keep away, I'm warning you, or I'll find out whether your head is harder than my walking stick. I'm completely serious.

OSWALD

Get out of here, you pile of crap.

EDGAR

I'll knock your teeth out, sir. To hell with your sword.

EDGAR and OSWALD fight.

OSWALD

(*falling*) You peasant, you've killed me! Villain, take my money.
If you survive, make sure I have a decent burial. Give the letters I'm carrying to Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. He's with the English camp. Oh, early death! (*he dies*)

EDGAR

240 I know thee well—a serviceable villain,
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit you down, father. Rest you.

Let's see these pockets. The letters that he speaks of
May be my friends. He's dead. I am only sorry
He had no other death's-man. Let us see.

(*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.
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 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—an affectionate servant, and for you her own for venture,

Goneril."

O indistinguished space of woman's will!
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life,

I know you well. You're a hardworking villain who'd do anything his evil mistress wanted him to.

GLOUCESTER

Is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit down and rest, father. Let's look in his pockets. The letters he spoke of may help me. He's dead. I'm just sorry I had to be the one to kill him. Let's see here.

(*takes letters out of OSWALD's pocket and opens them*)

Come on, envelope, open up for me. I know it's bad manners, but we kill our enemies to know their secrets. Reading their mail isn't as bad.

(*reads*)

"Don't forget the vows we made to each other. You have many chances to kill Albany. If you have the strength of will to do it, you'll have many opportunities. If he returns in triumph, then all is lost. I'll be his prisoner, and his bed will be my prison. Help me escape him, and you can take his place. Your—I wish I could say "wife"—loving servant, who is ready to love you, Goneril."

Is there no limit to women's lust? She's plotting against the life of her virtuous husband, and wants my brother to replace him!

(*to the dead OSWALD*) I'll bury you here in a shallow grave, you messenger for lustful criminals. In due time I'll show this ugly

And the exchange my brother!—Here in the sands
Thee I'll rake up, the post unsanctified
Of murderous lechers. And in the mature time
With this ungracious paper strike the sight
Of the death-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,
265 That I stand up and have ingenious feeling
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.
270 Far off methinks I hear the beaten drum.
Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

Exeunt

Enter CORDELIA, KENT disguised, GENTLEMAN, and DOCTOR

letter to the duke whose life's at risk. It's a good thing for him that I can tell him about your death and the letter you were carrying.

GLOUCESTER

The king is insane. I hate the fact that I'm sane enough to be aware of my own great suffering. It'd be better to be delirious and unaware of anything. Then my mind would be free of sorrow, and sadness would be forgotten in my hallucinations.

Drums play in the distance.

EDGAR

Give me your hand. I think I hear the drums far away. Come, father, I'll leave you at a friend's house.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 7

CORDELIA enters with KENT in disguise, the GENTLEMAN, and the 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.

CORDELIA

Be better suited.
These weeds are memories of those worser hours.
I prithee, put them off.

KENT

Pardon, dear madam.
Yet to be known shortens my made intent.
10 My boon I make it that you know me not
Till time and I think meet.

CORDELIA

Then be 't so, my good lord.—
How does the king?

DOCTOR

Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA

Oh, Kent, what could I ever do to become as good as you are? I
won't live long enough, and all my efforts will fail me.

KENT

Just being thanked is more than enough for me, madam. I
hope all reports about me simply tell the truth, no more or less.

CORDELIA

Change into better clothes. These rags will just remind us of
those bad times when you had to wear a disguise. Please take
them off.

KENT

I'm sorry, madam, but I can't do that yet. If people recognize
me now, I won't be able to carry out my plans. I have to ask
you, as a favor, not to let on that you recognize me until the
time is right.

CORDELIA

All right, my lord.—How's the king doing?

DOCTOR

He's still sleeping, ma'am.

CORDELIA

O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abusèd nature,
Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up,
15 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

Ay, madam. In the heaviness of his sleep
20 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

Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there!

CORDELIA

Kind gods, heal the wounds that he's wrongly suffered! Restore
the sanity of this father whose children have driven him mad
and changed him into a child again!

DOCTOR

Would you mind if we woke up the king? He's slept a long
time.

CORDELIA

Do whatever you think best. Is he in his royal garments?

Servants carry in LEAR sleeping in a chair.

GENTLEMAN

Yes, ma'am. We changed his clothes while he was fast asleep.

DOCTOR

Stay close by when we wake him up, ma'am. I'm sure he will
stay under control.

CORDELIA

All right.

DOCTOR

Please come closer.— Make the music louder, please!

CORDELIA

(*kisses LEAR*) O my dear father, restoration hang
25 Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

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

DOCTOR

Madam, do you. 'Tis fittest.

CORDELIA

(*kisses LEAR*) Oh, my dear father, please get better. May my
kiss heal the wounds inflicted on you by my sisters—who
should have respected and cherished you.

KENT

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

If you hadn't been their father, your white hair would have
inspired in them only compassion. Is this a face that should
have endured the freezing winds or withstood the dreadful
thunder or the terrible lightning? To stay awake all night like a
guardsman—poor lost soul!—with only your thinning hair for a
helmet? I would've let even my enemy's nastiest dog stay
inside by the fireplace on that night, even if he had bit me. And
were you then happy to find shelter on a bed of hay along with
swine and homeless bums? Oh, oh! It's a wonder you didn't
lose your life and your mind all at once.—He's waking up. Talk
to him.

DOCTOR

You talk to him, ma'am. That's most appropriate.

CORDELIA

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
45 Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

CORDELIA

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

50 Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
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
55 Of my condition.

CORDELIA

How are you, my royal lord? How is your majesty doing?

LEAR

You do me wrong by taking me out of the grave. You're a soul
in heaven, but I'm tied to the fiery wheel of a torture machine in
hell. Even my tears burn me like molten lead.

CORDELIA

Sir, do you know who I am?

LEAR

You're a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA

(whispering to the DOCTOR) He's still in outer space.

DOCTOR

He's still half asleep. Let him be for a bit.

LEAR

Where have I been? Where am I? Is it daytime? I've been
tricked. I would die of pity to see someone else in my
condition. I don't know what to say. I can't even be sure these
are my hands. Let's see. I feel this pinprick. I wish I knew what is
happening.

CORDELIA

(*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.

I am a very foolish fond old man,
60 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less.
And to deal plainly
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man.

Yet I am doubtful, for I am mainly ignorant
65 What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments. Nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA

And so I am, I am.

LEAR

70 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

CORDELIA

(*kneeling*) Look at me, sir, and give me your blessing. No, sir,
don't kneel.

LEAR

Please don't make fun of me. I'm a foolish, senile old man,
eighty-something years old, not an hour more or less. To put it
plainly, I'm afraid I'm not quite sane. I feel I should recognize
you and that man (*he points to KENT*),

but I'm not sure. I don't know where I am. I don't remember
these clothes. I can't recall where I slept last night. Don't laugh
at me, but I swear I think this lady is my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA

And I am, I am.

LEAR

Are your tears wet? Yes, indeed they are. Please don't cry. If
you have poison for me, I'll drink it. I know you don't love me. If

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.

You have some cause; they have not.

CORDELIA

No cause, no cause.

LEAR

75 Am I in France?

KENT

In your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR

Do not abuse me.

DOCTOR

Be comforted, good madam. The great rage,

You see, is killed in him. And yet it is danger

80 To make him even o'er the time he has lost.

Desire him to go in. Trouble him no more

Till further settling.

CORDELIA

Will 't please your highness walk?

LEAR

You must bear with me.

85 Pray you now, forget and forgive.

I am old and foolish.

I remember, your sisters did me wrong for no reason. But you didn't, even though you had every reason.

CORDELIA

I had no reason, no reason.

LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

You're in your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR

Don't deceive me.

DOCTOR

You can relax, ma'am. His insane period is over. But it's dangerous to make him try to make sense of the time he lost. Ask him to go in. Don't trouble him further until his mind is more settled.

CORDELIA

Would your highness like to take a walk?

LEAR

You'll have to bear with me. Please forgive and forget. I'm old and foolish.

Exeunt

Manent KENT and GENTLEMAN

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

Most certain, sir.

GENTLEMAN

Who is conductor of his people?

KENT

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

GENTLEMAN

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

KENT

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

GENTLEMAN

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

Exit GENTLEMAN

They exit.

KENT and the GENTLEMAN remain.

GENTLEMAN

Is it true, sir, that the Duke of Cornwall was killed as they say?

KENT

Yes, it's true, sir.

GENTLEMAN

Who is leading his men?

KENT

They say Gloucester's bastard son is.

GENTLEMAN

I hear that Edgar, Gloucester's exiled son, is with the Earl of Kent in Germany.

KENT

You can't trust all the rumors. It's time to reassess the situation. The British troops are coming near.

GENTLEMAN

It will likely be a bloody fight. Goodbye, sir.

He exits.

KENT

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

Exit

Enter with drum and colors EDMUND, REGAN, gentlemen, and soldiers

EDMUND

(to a gentleman) Know of the duke if his last purpose hold,
Or whether since he is advised by aught
To change the course. He's full of alteration
And self-reproving. Bring his constant pleasure.

Exit gentleman

REGAN

5 Our sister's man is certainly miscarried.

EDMUND

'Tis to be doubted, madam.

REGAN

Now, sweet lord,
You know the goodness I intend upon you.
Tell me but truly—but then speak the truth—

KENT

My life and my plans completely depend on how today's battle ends.

He exits.

Act 5 Scene 1

EDMUND, REGAN, gentlemen, and soldiers enter with drums and banners.

EDMUND

(to a gentleman) Go find out from the Duke of Albany if his decision still holds, or if he's changed his mind. He's always going back and forth and second-guessing himself. Come back and tell me what his final decision is.

Gentleman exits.

REGAN

My sister's servant Oswald has certainly run into trouble.

EDMUND

I'm afraid that may be the case, madam.

REGAN

Now, my sweet lord, you know how much I like you. Tell me truthfully, do you love my sister?

Do you not love my sister?

EDMUND

In honored love.

REGAN

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

EDMUND

That thought abuses you.

REGAN

I am doubtful that you have been conjunct
And bosomed with her as far as we call hers.

EDMUND

15 No, by mine honor, madam.

REGAN

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

EDMUND

Fear me not.—
She and the duke her husband!

*Enter with drum and colors **ALBANY** and **GONERIL**, with troops*

EDMUND

Yes, truly and honorably.

REGAN

But have you ever gone in my brother-in-law's bed and had
sex with her?

EDMUND

No. You dishonor yourself and our relationship by thinking that.

REGAN

I'm just worried that you've been cozying up to her, and gotten
intimate with her.

EDMUND

No, I swear on my honor, I haven't, madam.

REGAN

I can't stand her. Please, my lord, don't be friendly with her.

EDMUND

Don't worry about me.—Your sister and the duke are here.

***ALBANY**, **GONERIL**, and soldiers enter with drums and banners.*

GONERIL

(aside) I had rather lose the battle than that sister

20 Should loosen him and me.

ALBANY

Our very loving sister, well bemet.—
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
25 I never yet was valiant. For this business,
It touches us as France invades our land,
Not bolds the king, with others whom I fear
Most just and heavy causes make oppose.

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN

Why is this reasoned?

GONERIL

30 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.

GONERIL

(to herself) I'd rather lose this battle than allow that sister of mine to come between me and Edmund.

ALBANY

My dear and loving sister-in-law, I'm happy to see you. (to EDMUND) Sir, I've heard that the king has joined up with his daughter as well as others who have complained about our strict policies. I've never fought for a cause I didn't believe in. I'm concerned about the French because they have invaded our soil, not because they support King Lear or those others—who, I'm afraid, may have legitimate grievances against us.

EDMUND

Noble words, sir.

REGAN

Why are we talking about this?

GONERIL

We must join forces against the enemy. Our domestic squabbles are not the issue here.

ALBANY

Then let's meet with our senior command and discuss what to do next.

EDMUND

35 I shall attend you presently at your tent.

REGAN

Sister, you'll go with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

'Tis most convenient. Pray you, go with us.

GONERIL

(aside) Oh ho, I know the riddle.—I will go.

Enter EDGAR disguised

EDGAR

40 (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

Speak.

EDMUND

I'll meet you at your tent.

REGAN

Goneril, are you coming with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

It's the best thing to do. Please come with me.

GONERIL

(to herself) Oh ho, I know her little tricks.—Okay, I'll go.

EDGAR enters, disguised as a peasant.

EDGAR

(to ALBANY) If you can stoop to speak to a man as poor as I am, then listen to me, please.

ALBANY

(to EDMUND, REGAN, and GONERIL exiting) I'll catch up with you.—

Everyone exits except ALBANY and EDGAR.

Go ahead.

EDGAR

(giving ALBANY a letter)

Before you fight the battle, ope this letter.

45 If you have victory, let the trumpet sound

For him that brought it. Wretched though I seem,
I can produce a champion that will prove
What is avouchèd there. If you miscarry,
Your business of the world hath so an end,

50 And machination ceases. Fortune love you.

ALBANY

Stay till I have read the letter.

EDGAR

I was forbid it.

When time shall serve, let but the herald cry,

And I'll appear again.

ALBANY

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

Exit EDGAR

Enter EDMUND

EDMUND

The enemy's in view. Draw up your powers.

(gives ALBANY a document)

EDGAR

(giving ALBANY a letter) Before you go into battle, open this letter. If you win, then blow your trumpet as a signal for me. I may look wretched, but I'll bravely stand up to defend my claims. If you die in battle, all your projects and this plan are off. Good luck to you.

ALBANY

Wait until I read the letter.

EDGAR

I was ordered not to. When the time comes, tell the herald to blow the trumpet and I'll return.

ALBANY

Goodbye, then. I'll take a look at your letter.

EDGAR exits.

EDMUND enters.

EDMUND

The enemy's in sight. Prepare your troops. (gives ALBANY a document) The reconnaissance operation has returned this

Here is the guess of their true strength and forces
By diligent discovery, but your haste
60 Is now urged on you.

ALBANY

We will greet the time.

Exit ALBANY

EDMUND

To both these sisters have I sworn my love,
Each jealous of the other as the stung
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoyed
65 If both remain alive. To take the widow
Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril,
And hardly shall I carry out my side,
Her husband being alive. Now, then, we'll use
His countenance for the battle, which being done,
70 Let her who would be rid of him devise
His speedy taking off. As for the mercy
Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,
The battle done and they within our power,
Shall never see his pardon, for my state
75 Stands on me to defend, not to debate.

Exit

estimate of the enemy's manpower and weaponry. But now, please hurry.

ALBANY

We'll be ready when the time comes.

He exits.

EDMUND

I've sworn my love to both of these sisters. They're jealous of each other like poisonous snakes. Which one of them should I pick? Both? One? Neither? I can't enjoy either of them as long as the other one's alive. Goneril would go crazy if I chose Regan, but it would be hard to get in with Goneril while her husband's still alive. I'll use Albany's power and authority for now to win the war, but afterward one of the sisters—whichever one wants to—can get rid of him. Albany wants to spare Lear and Cordelia, but once they are my prisoners after the battle, they won't stay alive long enough to see his pardon. I have to defend my position with actions, not words.

He exits.

Act 5 Scene 2

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

Grace go with you, sir.

Exit EDGAR

Alarum and retreat within

Enter EDGAR

EDGAR

5 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

Sounds of battle offstage. CORDELIA enters hand in hand with LEAR, accompanied by drums, banners, and French troops. They cross the stage and exit.

EDGAR enters, disguised, along with GLOUCESTER.

EDGAR

Here, father, rest awhile in the shade of this tree. Say a little prayer for our side in battle. If I ever come back, I'll bring you good news.

GLOUCESTER

Good luck, sir.

EDGAR exits.

Sounds of battle offstage. They grow fainter.

EDGAR returns.

EDGAR

We have to get out of here, old man. Let me help you up. Let's go! King Lear's been defeated. He and his daughter are captured. Give me your hand. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

No further, sir. A man may rot even here.

EDGAR

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

GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.

Exeunt

I can't go any further, sir. This is as good a place as any to die.

EDGAR

Are you depressed again? You can't choose your time of death
any more than your time of birth. We live and die when our
time comes. Come on.

GLOUCESTER

And that's true too.

They exit.

Act 5 Scene 3

*Enter in conquest with drum and colors **EDMUND**, with **LEAR** and **CORDELIA** as prisoners, and **FIRST CAPTAIN** with soldiers*

EDMUND

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

CORDELIA

(to **LEAR**)

We are not the first
5 Who with best meaning have incurred the worst.
For thee, oppressèd King, I am cast down.
Myself could else outfrown false fortune's frown.

***EDMUND** enters, victorious, with drums and banners. **LEAR** and **CORDELIA** enter as prisoners, led by the **FIRST CAPTAIN** and soldiers.*

EDMUND

Officers, take them away. Guard them carefully until we decide
how to punish them.

CORDELIA

(to **LEAR**) At least we're not the first ones in our position. The
road to hell is paved with good intentions. But I'm worried
about you, my poor King. If it were only me, I would just wait
out my bad luck. Should we meet with my sisters?

Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

LEAR

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.

10 We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage.

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down

And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,

And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

15 Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too—

Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out—

And take upon 's the mystery of things

As if we were God's spies. And we'll wear out

In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones

20 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?

He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven

And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes.

25 The good years shall devour them, flesh and fell,

Ere they shall make us weep. We'll see 'em starve first.

LEAR

No, no, no, no! Come on, let's go to prison. The two of us together will sing like birds in a cage. We will be good to each other. When you ask for my blessing, I'll get down on my knees and ask you to forgive me. That's how we'll live—we'll pray, we'll sing, we'll tell old stories, we'll laugh at pretentious courtiers, we'll listen to nasty court gossip, we'll find out who's losing and who's winning, who's in and who's out. We'll think about the mysteries of the universe as if we were God's spies. In prison we'll outlast hordes of rulers that will come and go as their fortunes change.

EDMUND

Take them away.

LEAR

My Cordelia, even the gods admire how much you've sacrificed for me. Have I hugged you yet? Anyone who wants to separate us will have to smoke us out of the cave of our togetherness like foxes. Wipe your eyes.

Our jailers will shrivel up with old age before they make us cry again. We'll watch them starve to death first.

Come.

Exeunt LEAR and CORDELIA, led by soldiers

EDMUND

Come hither, captain. Hark.

(gives FIRST CAPTAIN a document)

30 Take thou this note. Go follow them to prison.

One step I have advanced thee. If thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes. Know thou this: that men
Are as the time is. To be tender-minded
35 Does not become a sword. Thy great employment
Will not bear question. Either say thou'l do 't,
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
40 As I have set it down.

FIRST CAPTAIN

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

Come on.

LEAR and CORDELIA exit, led by soldiers.

EDMUND

Come here, captain. Listen. (gives the FIRST CAPTAIN a sheet of paper) Take this note. Follow those two to prison and follow these instructions. I've already promoted you once. If you do as you're told, you'll be richly rewarded. Just remember this: you have to go with the times, and these are the times for being tough. A soldier can't afford to be a ninny. There'll be no quibbling about this assignment. Either you accept it, or go find some other way to support yourself.

FIRST CAPTAIN

I'll do it, sir.

EDMUND

Then off you go. When you've finished, you'll be a happy man.
Go immediately, and do exactly as I wrote down.

FIRST CAPTAIN

Jobs are hard to come by. I can't pull a cart or eat dried oats like a horse. If it's work for a man, I'll do it.

Exit FIRST CAPTAIN

Flourish Enter the Duke of ALBANY, the two ladies GONERIL and REGAN, a SECOND CAPTAIN, and soldiers

ALBANY

(to EDMUND) Sir, you have shown today your valiant strain,
And fortune led you well. You have the captives
45 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
To send the old and miserable king
50 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
Which do command them. With him I sent the queen,
55 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,
And the best quarrels, in the heat, are cursed

The FIRST CAPTAIN exits.

Trumpets play. ALBANY enters with GONERIL and REGAN, a SECOND CAPTAIN, and more soldiers.

ALBANY

(to EDMUND) Sir, you've shown your true courage today, and luck was on your side. You've taken prisoner the leaders of the opposition. I need to take cus-

tody of them so I can do what's best out of concern for their honor and the safety of the kingdom.

EDMUND

Sir, I decided it was appropriate to send the pathetic old king to a guarded prison cell. His old age and his title make him so popular among the commoners that I was worried our enlisted soldiers would turn against us on his behalf. I sent the French queen with him too, for the same reason. They're ready to meet with you tomorrow, or whenever you like, wherever you'd like to hold your hearing. These are difficult times. Many have lost friends in battle, and soldiers will curse even a justified war if it causes them pain. We need a more appropriate place to discuss Cordelia and her father.

60 By those that feel their sharpness.

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

ALBANY

I hold you but a subject of this war,
Not as a brother.

REGAN

That's as we list to grace him.
65 Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded
Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers,
Bore the commission of my place and person—
The which immediacy may well stand up
And call itself your brother.

GONERIL

Not so hot.
70 In his own grace he doth exalt himself
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.

ALBANY

I'm sorry, sir, but in this war I consider you a subordinate, not
my equal.

REGAN

That's for to me to decide. You might have asked my opinion
before saying something so rude. Edmund has led our forces
well, and implemented my wishes—and his close connection
with me gives him the right to be considered your equal.

GONERIL

Not so fast. He has distinguished himself as a great soldier in
his own right, deserving more than any honor your can bestow
on him.

REGAN

I'm the one who gave him his military commission, and it is as
my proxy that he fought bravely.

ALBANY

He'd really be your proxy if he married you.

REGAN

Jesters do oft prove prophets.

GONERIL

Holla, holla!

That eye that told you so looked but asquint.

REGAN

75 Lady, I am not well, else I should answer

From a full-flowing stomach.

(to EDMUND) General,

Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony.

Dispose of them, of me. The walls is thine.

80 Witness the world that I create thee here

My lord and master.

GONERIL

Mean you to enjoy him then?

ALBANY

The let-alone lies not in your good will.

EDMUND

Nor in thine, lord.

ALBANY

Half-blooded fellow, yes.

REGAN

Don't joke, it might come true.

GONERIL

Whoa, whoa! You're so infatuated with him that you're hallucinating.

REGAN

Hey, lady, if I weren't feeling a little sick, I'd give you a piece of my mind. (to EDMUND) General, take my soldiers, my prisoners, my whole inheritance, and do as you like with them. I surrender myself to your good judgment. Let the whole world see that I hereby make you my lord and master.

GONERIL

Are you trying to sleep with him?

ALBANY

(to GONERIL) It's not up to you to say "Yes" or "No."

EDMUND

Nor is it up to you, my lord.

ALBANY

Yes it is, you half-blood.

REGAN

(to EDMUND) Let the drum strike and prove my title thine.

ALBANY

85 Stay yet. Hear reason.—Edmund, I arrest thee
On capital treason, and in thine attaint
This gilded serpent.(*indicates GONERIL*)

(to REGAN) For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife.

90 '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

An interlude!

ALBANY

Thou art armed, Gloucester. Let the trumpet sound.

95 If none appear to prove upon thy person
Thy heinous, manifest, and many treasons,
There is my pledge. (*throws down his glove*)
I'll make it on thy heart,

Ere I taste bread, thou art in nothing less

100 Than I have here proclaimed thee.

REGAN**REGAN**

(to EDMUND) Let the drums beat. Prove your right to me by defeating any challenger.

ALBANY

Hang on a second. Listen to me.—Edmund, you're under arrest for capital treason. Along with you, your co-conspirator, this snake of a woman. (*points at GONERIL* Then, speaking to REGAN) My dear sister-in-law, I veto your marriage announcement for the benefit of my wife, who is already engaged to Edmund. So if you want to get married, you'll have to woo me. My wife's already spoken for.

GONERIL

What a farce!

ALBANY

You've got a sword, Gloucester. Blow the trumpets. If nobody else comes to challenge you and prove what an abominable traitor you have been, I'll have to challenge you myself. (*he throws down his glove*) I'll prove soon enough that you're just as wicked as I say you are.

REGAN

Sick, oh, sick!

GONERIL

(aside) If not, I'll ne'er trust medicine.

EDMUND

(throwing down his glove)

There's my exchange. What in the world he is

105 That names me traitor, villainlike he lies.

Call by thy trumpet. He that dares approach,

On him—on you, who not?—I will maintain

My truth and honor firmly.

ALBANY

A herald, ho!

EDMUND

110 A herald, ho, a herald!

Enter a HERALD

ALBANY

(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.

Oh, I'm sick, sick!

GONERIL

(to herself) If she's not ill, I'll never trust drugs again.

EDMUND

(throwing down his glove) You're on. Whoever calls me a traitor
is a vicious liar. Blow the trumpet. Anyone who dares to step
forward and make that accusation—you or anyone else—go
ahead. I'll uphold my truth and my honor.

ALBANY

A [herald!](#) Call a herald!

EDMUND

A herald, a herald!

A HERALD enters.

ALBANY

(to EDMUND) You're on your own now. The soldiers were all
drafted in my name, and now they are discharged in my name.

REGAN

I feel sicker and sicker.

ALBANY

She is not well. Convey her to my tent.

Exit REGAN, led

115 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)

"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."

EDMUND

Sound!

First trumpet

HERALD

Again!

Second trumpet

ALBANY

She's not feeling well. Take her to my tent.

REGAN is helped to exit.

Come here, herald.—Let the trumpet sound!—Read this out. (*he hands the HERALD a document*)

SECOND CAPTAIN

Blow the trumpet!

A trumpet sounds.

HERALD

(reads)

"If any noble man in the army asserts that Edmund, so-called
Earl of Gloucester, is a traitor many times over, let him step
forward by the third trumpet blast."

EDMUND

Sound!

First trumpet sounds.

HERALD

Again!

Second trumpet sounds.

HERALD

Again!

Third trumpet Trumpet answers within Enter EDGAR, at the third sound, armed, a trumpet before him

ALBANY

(to HERALD) Ask him his purposes, why he appears

125 Upon this call o' th' trumpet.

HERALD

What are you?

Your name, your quality, and why you answer

This present summons?

EDGAR

O, know, my name is lost.

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

130 Yet am I noble as the adversary

I come to cope withal.

ALBANY

Which is that adversary?

EDGAR

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

EDMUND

Himself. What sayst thou to him?

HERALD

Again!

Third trumpet sounds. Another trumpet answers inside. EDGAR enters, wearing armor.

ALBANY

(to HERALD) Ask him why he's stepping forward.

HERALD

Who are you? What's your name and rank, and why are you stepping forward?

EDGAR

I've lost my name and title to a traitor. But I'm as noble as my opponent.

ALBANY

And who is that?

EDGAR

Who's the spokesman for Edmund, Earl of Gloucester?

EDMUND

I'm my own spokesman. What do you have to say to me?

EDGAR

Draw thy sword,
That if my speech offend a noble heart
135 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,
140 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
145 A most toad-spotted traitor. Say thou "No,"
This sword, this arm, and my best spirits are bent
To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
Thou liest.

EDMUND

In wisdom I should ask thy name.
But since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,
150 And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely I might well delay
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn.
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head,
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart—

EDGAR

Draw your sword. If I offend you by what I say, you can use your sword to take revenge. Here's mine. (*he draws his sword*) Look at it. It's the symbol of my honor, my rank, and my status as a knight. In spite of your youth, rank, strength, and excellence at warfare, in spite of your courage, your recent victory, and your good luck, I declare that you're a traitor. You've betrayed your gods, your brother, and your father. You've plotted against this noble duke. You're a rotten traitor, through and through, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. If you disagree with me, I'm ready to use this sword and my courage to prove that you're a liar.

EDMUND

Normally I would ask you what your name is first. But since you look so fine and noble, and since you're so well mannered in your speech, I'm prepared to overlook the rules of knighthood, which say I should refuse to fight a man I don't know. I throw your accusations back in your face. Your lies can hardly hurt me, but I'll

155 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

This is practice, Gloucester.

160 By th' law of arms thou wast not bound to answer
An unknown opposite. Thou art not vanquished,
But cozened and beguiled.

ALBANY

Shut your mouth, dame,
Or with this paper shall I stop it.—Hold, sir,
(gives the letter to EDMUND)

165 Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil.—
(to GONERIL) Nay, no tearing, lady. I perceive you know it.

GONERIL

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

ALBANY

Most monstrous, oh!

still fight you and embed your lies back in your hellish heart.—
Trumpets, blow!

Trumpets play. EDMUND and EDGAR fight. EDMUND falls.

ALBANY

(to EDGAR) Save him, save him!

GONERIL

You were tricked into fighting, Gloucester. According to the laws of war, you didn't have to fight a stranger. You haven't lost this fight; you've been tricked and deceived.

ALBANY

Shut your mouth, woman, or I'll shove this paper in it.—Stop, sir.
(gives the letter to EDMUND) You despicable criminal, read your crime.
(to GONERIL) Don't try to tear it up, madam. I take it you know what this letter says.

GONERIL

And what if I do? I make the laws, not you. Who can prosecute me for it?

ALBANY

Oh, monstrous! (to EDMUND) Do you know what letter this is?

(to EDMUND) Know'st thou this paper?

EDMUND

170 Ask me not what I know.

Exit GONERIL

ALBANY

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.

175 (to EDGAR)

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

EDGAR

Let's exchange charity.
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund.
If more, the more thou'st wronged me.
180 My name is Edgar, and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices

EDMUND

Don't ask me what I know.

GONERIL exits.

ALBANY

Follow her. She's desperate. Make sure she doesn't do anything stupid.

A soldier exits.

EDMUND

I've done everything you accuse me of—and more, much more. You'll find out everything in due time. It's all over now, and so am I. (to EDGAR) But who are you, you who've managed to defeat me? If you're a nobleman, I forgive you.

EDGAR

Let's forgive each other. I'm no less noble than you are, Edmund. If I'm more noble than you, you've done me wrong. My name is Edgar, and I'm your father's son. The gods are fair, and they use our little vices to punish us. The woman he committed adultery with, your mother, cost him his eyes.

Make instruments to plague us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

EDMUND

Thou'st spoken right. 'Tis true.
185 The wheel is come full circle. I am here.

ALBANY

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

EDGAR

190 Worthy prince, I know 't.

ALBANY

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

EDGAR

By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale,
And when 'tis told, oh, that my heart would burst!
195 The bloody proclamation to escape,
That followed me so near—O our lives' sweetness,

That we the pain of death would hourly die

EDMUND

You're right. That's true. It's all come full circle, and here I am.

ALBANY

I suspected that you were noble when I saw how you walked.
Let me embrace you. I swear I never hated you or your father!

EDGAR

I know, prince.

ALBANY

Where have you been hiding? How did you know what
happened to your poor father?

EDGAR

I knew because I helped nurse him through his suffering. Listen
to my little story, and when it's done, oh, my heart will break!
To escape the decree condemning me

to death, I disguised myself as a madman beggar and became

Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
Into a madman's rags, t' assume a semblance
200 That very dogs disdained. And in this habit
Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
Their precious stones new lost, became his guide,
Led him, begged for him, saved him from despair.
Never—O fault!—revealed myself unto him
205 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
Told him my pilgrimage. But his flawed heart—
Alack, too weak the conflict to support—
210 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.

EDMUND

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

ALBANY

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

EDGAR

This would have seemed a period

a creature despised even by dogs.—Oh, how sweet our lives
must be if we prefer to die gradually by debasing ourselves
rather than dying all at once!—In that disguise I met up with my
father with bloody sockets where his beautiful eyes used to be.
I became his guide, I led him and begged for him, and kept
him from suicide. I never—oh, what a mistake!—revealed
myself to him until half an hour ago, when I was in my armor.
With hope in my heart I asked him for his blessing, not sure
that he'd give it to me. He did. I told him everything that had
happened on my journey. But his frail heart, too weak to
grapple with such a conflict between joy and sadness, gave
out.

EDMUND

Your words have moved me, and maybe it'll do some good.
But go on. You look like you have something more to say.

ALBANY

If there's anything more sorrowful left to add, keep it to
yourself. I'm almost ready to break down hearing this much.

EDGAR

To such as love not sorrow, but another
To amplify too much would make much more
And top extremity.

220 Whilst I was big in clamor came there in a man
Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
Shunned my abhorred society, but then, finding
Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
He fastened on my neck, and bellowed out

225 As he'd burst heaven, threw him on my father,
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear received—which in recounting

His grief grew puissant and the strings of life
Began to crack. Twice then the trumpets sounded,
230 And there I left him tranced.

ALBANY

But who was this?

EDGAR

Kent, sir, the banished Kent, who in disguise
Followed his enemy king and did him service
Improper for a slave.

*Enter **SECOND KNIGHT** with a bloody knife*

SECOND KNIGHT

Help, help, O, help!

This may have seemed like the pinnacle of sadness, but if I went on I could outdo it. While I was sobbing loudly, a man came in. He had seen me in my ragged clothes and shunned me, but when he found out who I was, he clasped my neck with his strong arms and cried to high heaven. He threw himself on my father and told the saddest story you've ever heard about Lear and him. As he was telling that story he grieved more and

more, until his heart started to break. Then I heard the trumpets blow twice, and left him there in a trance.

ALBANY

But who was that man?

EDGAR

It was Kent, sir, the exiled Kent, who, after the king treated him like an enemy of the state, put on a disguise and followed his king, carrying out tasks unworthy of even a slave.

*The **SECOND KNIGHT** enters with a bloody knife.*

SECOND KNIGHT

Help, help, oh, help!

EDGAR

What kind of help?

ALBANY

Speak, man.

EDGAR

235 What means that bloody knife?

SECOND KNIGHT

'Tis hot, it smokes.

It came even from the heart of—oh, she's dead!

ALBANY

Who dead? Speak, man.

SECOND KNIGHT

Your lady, sir, your lady. And her sister

240 By her is poisoned. She confesses it.

EDMUND

I was contracted to them both. All three

Now marry in an instant.

EDGAR

Here comes Kent.

ALBANY

Produce their bodies, be they alive or dead.

EDGAR

What kind of help do you need?

ALBANY

Say something, man!

EDGAR

What is that bloody knife?

SECOND KNIGHT

It's still warm from the cut. It was just removed from the heart of—oh, she's dead!

ALBANY

Who's dead? Speak, man.

SECOND KNIGHT

Your wife, sir, your wife. And her sister's dead too, poisoned by your wife. She confessed.

EDMUND

I was engaged to both of them. All three of us will marry now in death.

EDGAR

Here comes Kent.

ALBANY

This judgment of the heavens that makes us tremble
245 Touches us not with pity.

Exit SECOND KNIGHT

Enter KENT

Oh, is this he?
The time will not allow the compliment
Which very manners urges.

KENT

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

ALBANY

Great thing of us forgot!—
250 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

(to SECOND KNIGHT) Bring the bodies here, whether they're alive or dead. We tremble at the gods' wrath, but we don't mourn these deaths.

The SECOND KNIGHT exits.

KENT enters.

Oh, is that Kent? There's no time for polite greetings.

KENT

I've come to say farewell to my king and master. Isn't he here?

ALBANY

What an enormous thing for us to forget!—Edmund, tell us, where's the king? And where's Cordelia?—

GONERIL's and REGAN's bodies are brought out.

Do you see this, Kent?

KENT

Oh, why is this so?

EDMUND

Yet Edmund was beloved.
The one the other poisoned for my sake,
255 And after slew herself.

ALBANY

Even so.—Cover their faces.

EDMUND

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send—
Be brief in it—to th' castle, for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.
260 Nay, send in time!

ALBANY

Run, run, O, run!

EDGAR

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

Edmund

Well thought on. Take my sword. The captain—
Give it the captain.

ALBANY

Haste thee for thy life.

Exit a soldier

Still, Edmund was beloved. One of the sisters poisoned the other out of love for me, and then killed herself.

ALBANY

Apparently so.—Cover their faces.

EDMUND

I wish I could live longer. I want to do a little good despite my evil nature. Go quickly—hurry—to the castle, for I've given orders to have Lear and Cordelia killed. Hurry, send someone immediately!

ALBANY

Run, run, oh, run!

EDGAR

Whom should we look for in the castle?—Whose job is it? Send something along to prove you're withdrawing the orders.

EDMUND

Good idea. Take my sword. The captain—give it to the captain.

EDGAR

Run as if your life depended on it.

A soldier exits.

Edmund

265 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!—hear him hence awhile.

Exit soldiers with EDMUND

Enter LEAR with CORDELIA in his arms, a THIRD KNIGHT following

LEAR

270 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.
275 If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why then, she lives.

KENT

Is this the promised end?

EDGAR

Or image of that horror?

EDMUND

My wife and I ordered him to hang Cordelia in prison and then to make it look as if she committed suicide in despair.

ALBANY

Heaven help her!—Get him out of here for now.

Soldiers exit with EDMUND.

LEAR enters with CORDELIA in his arms, followed by the THIRD KNIGHT.

LEAR

Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you men are made of stone! If I were you with eyes and a tongue to speak with, I'd crack heaven wide open with my laments! She's gone forever. I know how to tell when someone is alive or dead. She's as dead as the cold ground. Let me borrow a mirror. If her breath steams up the glass, then she's alive.

KENT

Is this doomsday? The end of the world?

EDGAR

Or just a foretaste of it?

ALBANY

Fall and cease.

LEAR

This feather stirs. She lives. If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
280 That ever I have felt.

KENT

O my good master!

LEAR

Prithee, away.

EDGAR

'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR

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

THIRD KNIGHT

'Tis true, my lords, he did.

ALBANY

Let the world collapse around us.

LEAR

This feather moved because of her breath. She's alive. If that's true, it makes up for all the sorrows I've ever known.

KENT

Oh, my good master!

LEAR

Please, go away.

EDGAR

It's noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR

Curse you all, you're all murderers and traitors! I could have saved her. Now she's gone forever.—Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a while. Ha? What are you saying?—Her voice always was so soft and gentle. That's a good thing in a woman.—I killed the scum who was hanging you.

THIRD KNIGHT

It's true, my lords, he did.

LEAR

Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day with my good biting falchion

290 I would have made them skip. I am old now,

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.

295 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

300 No, my good lord. I am the very man—

LEAR

I'll see that straight.

LEAR

Didn't I? Back in the old days I would've made him dance with my sword. But I'm old now, and suffering has weakened me. (to KENT) Who are you? My eyesight's not the best, I'll tell you straight.

KENT

We're looking at the unluckiest man who ever lived.

LEAR

My vision is dull. Aren't you Kent?

KENT

That's me. Your servant Kent. Where's your servant [Caius](#) ?

LEAR

He's a good fellow, I can tell you that much. Not afraid to fight, he's a feisty one. He's dead and rotting in the dirt now.

KENT

No, my lord, that was me. I'm the one who—

LEAR

I'll get right on that.

KENT

That from your first of difference and decay
Have followed your sad steps.

LEAR

You're welcome hither.

KENT

Nor no man else. All's cheerless, dark, and deadly.
305 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
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.—

KENT

—followed you on your sad wanderings, ever since your bad luck began.

LEAR

Nice to see you.

KENT

It was me, no one else. Everything is gloomy, dark, and dreadful. Your eldest daughters destroyed 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 talk to him.

The THIRD MESSENGER enters.

EDGAR

Yes, it's pointless.

THIRD MESSENGER

Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY

310 You lords and noble friends, know our intent.
What comfort to this great decay may come
Shall be applied. For us, we will resign
During the life of this old majesty
To him our absolute power.

315 (*to EDGAR and KENT*)

You, to your rights
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

320 And my poor fool is hanged.—No, no, no life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Oh, thou'l^t come no more,
Never, never, never, never.—
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
325 Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips.
Look there, look there. O, O, O, O.

(*dies*)

EDGAR

He faints!—My lord, my lord!

KENT

That doesn't matter much with everything else that's going on.—Gentlemen, I will announce my plans. I'll do everything I can to ease the king's suffering. As for me, I'm surrendering all my power over to him, giving him absolute authority for the rest of his life.

(*to EDGAR and KENT*) You will get back your rightful property and titles, along with new honors that you have more than deserved.—My friends and allies will be rewarded for their support, and my enemies will get what they deserve. Look, look!

LEAR

And my poor *fool* was hanged.— No, no, no life left? Why should a dog or horse or rat have life, but not you? You'll never come to me again, never, never, never, never, never.—Please help me undo this button. Thank you, sir. Do you see that? Look at her. Look, her lips. Look there, look there. Oh, oh, oh, oh. (*he dies*)

EDGAR

He's fainted.—My lord, my lord!

KENT

Break, heart. I prithee, break!

EDGAR

330 *(to LEAR)* Look up, my lord.

KENT

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

EDGAR

Oh, he is gone indeed.

KENT

The wonder is he hath endured so long.
335 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

340 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.

My heart will break, break.

EDGAR

(to LEAR) Look at me, my lord.

KENT

Don't disturb his soul. Let it go up to heaven. His soul would be
angry at anyone who tried to keep him in the torture chamber
of this life any longer.

EDGAR

Oh, he's really gone.

KENT

What's amazing is how long he lasted. He was living on
borrowed time at the end.

ALBANY

Carry them away. Our business now is mourning and grief. *(to KENT and EDGAR)* My friends and soulmates, you two will
reign over this kingdom and keep the wounded country alive.

KENT

I will have to go on a journey to death soon, sir. My master's
calling me. I can't say no.

EDGAR

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

The oldest hath borne most. We that are young

345 Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

Exeunt with a dead march

We must remember the gravity of this sad day. We should speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. The oldest one suffered the most. We young ones will never see as much as he has seen, or live as long.

They exit in a funeral march.