

The Tragedy of King Lear

2.2

Enter the Earl of 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 Prithee, if thou lov'st me, tell me. 5

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

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- 15 taking, 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 20 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! 25

KENT What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou knowest me! Is it two days since I tripped up thy heels and beat thee before the King? Draw, you rogue; for though it be night, yet the moon shines.

[He draws his sword]

I'll make a sop o'th' moonshine of you, you whoreson, 30 cullionly barber-monger, draw!

OSWALD Away. I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT Draw, you rascal. You come with letters against

the King, and take Vanity the puppet's part against the
royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so 35
carbonado your shanks±±draw, you rascal, come your
ways!

OSWALD Help, ho, murder, help!

KENT Strike, you slave! Stand, rogue! Stand, you neat
slave, strike! 40

OSWALD Help, ho, murder, murder!

*Enter Edmond the bastard, [then] the Duke of
Cornwall, Regan, the Duke of Gloucester, and
servants*

EDMOND How now, what's the matter? Part.

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

GLOUCESTER Weapons? Arms? What's the matter here? 45

CORNWALL

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

REGAN The messengers from our sister and the King.

CORNWALL *(to Kent and Oswald)* What is your difference?
Speak. 50

OSWALD I am scarce in breath, my lord.

KENT No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour, you
cowardly rascal. Nature disclaims in thee; a tailor made
thee.

CORNWALL Thou art a strange fellow±±a tailor make a 55
man?

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

CORNWALL Speak yet; how grew your quarrel? 60

OSWALD This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared
at suit of his grey beard±±

KENT Thou whoreson Z, thou unnecessary letter±± *(to
Cornwall)* my lord, if you'll give me leave I will tread
this unbolted villain into mortar and daub the wall of 65
a jakes with him. *(To Oswald)* Spare my grey beard,
you wagtail?

CORNWALL Peace, sirrah.

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir, but anger hath a privilege. 70

CORNWALL Why art thou angry?

KENT

That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intrince t'unloose, smooth every
passion 75

That in the natures of their lords rebel;
Being oil to fire, snow to the colder moods,
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gall and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following. 80

[To Oswald] A plague upon your epileptic visage!
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

What, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER [to Kent] How fell you out? Say that. 85

KENT

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

CORNWALL Why dost thou call him knave?

What is his fault?

KENT His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

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

KENT

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

CORNWALL This is some fellow

Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb 95
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he;
An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth.
An they will take't, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness

Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends 100
Than twenty silly-ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely.

KENT

Sir, in good faith, in sincere verity,
Under th'allowance of your great aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire¹⁰⁵
On flick'ring Phoebus' front^{±±}

CORNWALL

What mean'st by

this?

KENT To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so
much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguiled
you in a plain accent was a plain knave, which for my
part I will not be, though I should win your displeasure ¹¹⁰
to entreat me to't.

CORNWALL *(to Oswald)*

What was th'offence you gave him?

OSWALD

I never gave him any.

It pleased the King his master very late
To strike at me upon his misconstruction,
When he, compact, and flattering his displeasure, ¹¹⁵
Tripped me behind; being down, insulted, railed,
And put upon him such a deal of man
That worthied him, got praises of the King
For him attempting who was self-subdued,
And in the fleshment of this dread exploit ¹²⁰
Drew on me here again.

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

CORNWALL Fetch forth the stocks!

[Exeunt some servants]

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

KENT Sir, I am too old to learn.

Call not your stocks for me. I serve the King, ¹²⁵
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 *[calling]* Fetch forth the stocks!^{±±}

As I have life and honour, there shall he sit till noon. 130

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 colour
Our sister speaks of.±±Come, bring away the stocks. 135

GLOUCESTER

Let me beseech your grace not to do so.
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.

[They put Kent in the stocks]

REGAN

My sister may receive it much more worse 140
To have her gentlemen abused, assaulted.

CORNWALL Come, my good lord, away!

Exeunt all but Gloucester and Kent

GLOUCESTER

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

KENT

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

GLOUCESTER

The Duke's to blame in this; 'twill be ill taken. 150

Exit

KENT

Good King, that must approve the common say:
Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st
To the warm sun.

[He takes out a letter]

Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,

That by thy comfortable beams I may 155
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,
Who hath now fortunately been informed
Of my obscureÁd course, and shall find time
For this enormous state, seeking to give 160
Losses their remedies. All weary and o'erwatched,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
This shameful lodging. Fortune, good night;
Smile once more; turn thy wheel.

He sleeps

Enter Edgar

EDGAR

I heard myself proclaimed,

And by the happy hollow of a tree 165
Escaped the hunt. No port is free, no place
That guard and most unusual vigilance
Does not attend my taking. Whiles I may scape
I will preserve myself, and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape 170
That ever penury in contempt of man
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf all my hairs in knots,
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky. 175
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars who with roaring voices
Strike in their numbed and mortifieÁd arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary,
And with this horrible object from low farms, 180
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and mills
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers
Enforce their charity. `Poor Tuelygod, Poor Tom.'
That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.

Exit

Enter King Lear, his Fool, and [the First] Gentleman

LEAR

'Tis strange that they should so depart from home 185
And not send back my messenger.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

As I learned,

The night before there was no purpose in them

Of this remove.

KENT (*waking*) Hail to thee, noble master.

LEAR

Ha! Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

KENT

No, my

lord.

FOOL Ha, ha, he wears cruel garters! Horses are tied by 190
the heads, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys by th'
loins, and men by th' legs. When a man's overlusty at
legs, then he wears wooden nether-stocks.

LEAR (*to Kent*)

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

KENT It is both he and she: 195
Your son and daughter.

LEAR No.

KENT Yes.

LEAR No, I say.

KENT

I say yea.

LEAR By Jupiter, I swear no.

KENT

By Juno, I swear ay.

LEAR They durst not do't,
They could not, would not do't. 'Tis worse than
murder,

To do upon respect such violent outrage. 200
Resolve me with all modest haste which way
Thou mightst deserve or they impose this usage,
Coming from us.

KENT My lord, when at their home
I did commend your highness' letters to them,
Ere I was risen from the place that showed 205
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post
Stewed in his haste, half breathless, painting forth
From Goneril, his mistress, salutations,
Delivered letters spite of intermission,
Which presently they read, on whose contents 210
They summoned up their meiny, straight took horse,
Commanded me to follow and attend

The leisure of their answer, gave me cold looks;
And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome I perceived had poisoned mine±± 215
Being the very fellow which of late
Displayed so saucily against your highness±±
Having more man than wit about me, drew.
He raised the house with loud and coward cries.
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth 220
The shame which here it suffers.

FOOL Winter's not gone yet if the wild geese fly that way.
[Sings]

Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind,
But fathers that bear bags 225
Shall see their children kind.
Fortune, that arrant whore,
Ne'er turns the key to th' poor.

But for all this thou shalt have as many dolours for
thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year. 230

LEAR
O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
Histerica 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

[FIRST] **GENTLEMAN** (to Kent)

Made you no more offence but what you speak of? 235

KENT None.

How chance the King comes with so small a number?

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

KENT Why, Fool? 240

FOOL We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee
there's no labouring 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 245
down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but

the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee
after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give
me mine again. I would have none but knaves follow
it, since a fool gives it. 250

[Sings]

That sir which serves and seeks for gain
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begin to rain,
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry, the fool will stay, 255
And let the wise man fly.
The knave turns fool that runs away,
The fool no knave, pardie.

KENT Where learned you this, Fool?

FOOL Not i'th' stocks, fool. 260

Enter King Lear and the Duke of Gloucester

LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick, they are weary,
They have travelled all the night?±±mere fetches,
The images of revolt and flying off.
Fetch me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality of the Duke, 265
How unremovable and fixed he is
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. 270

LEAR
`Informed them'? Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER Ay, my good 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±± 275
`Fiery'? The `fiery' Duke±±tell the hot Duke that±±
No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.

Infirmary doth still neglect all office
 Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves
 When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind 280
 To suffer with the body. I'll forbear,
 And am fallen out with my more headier will,
 To take the indisposed and sickly fit
 For the sound man.±±Death on my state, wherefore
 Should he sit here? This act persuades me 285
 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 290
 Till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER I would have all well betwixt you.

Exit

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, 295
 down!' 'Twas her brother that, in pure kindness to his
 horse, buttered his hay.

*Enter the Duke of Cornwall, Regan, the Duke of
 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. 300

LEAR

Regan, I think you are. I know what reason
 I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad
 I would divorce me from thy mother's shrine,
 Sepulchring an adultress. (To Kent) O, are you free?
 Some other time for that.

[Exit Kent]

BeloveÁd Regan,

305

Thy sister's naught. O, Regan, she hath tied
 Sharp-toothed unkindness like a vulture here.

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

REGAN

I pray you, sir, take patience. I have hope 310
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
She have restrained the riots of your followers, 315
'Tis on such ground and to such wholesome end
As clears her from all blame.

LEAR My curses on her.

REGAN O sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge 320
Of his confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wronged her.

LEAR

Ask her forgiveness? 325

Do you but mark how this becomes the house?
[Kneeling] `Dear daughter, I confess that I am old.
Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.'

REGAN

Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks. 330
Return you to my sister.

LEAR [rising] Never, Regan.

She hath abated me of half my train,
Looked black upon me, struck me with her tongue
Most serpent-like upon the very heart.
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall 335
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!

CORNWALL

Fie, sir, fie.

LEAR

You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes. Infect her beauty,

You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the pow'rful sun 340
To fall and blister.

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

LEAR
No, Regan. Thou shalt never have my curse.
Thy tender-hafted nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness. Her eyes are fierce, but thine 345
Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in. Thou better know'st 350
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
Thy half o'th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endowed.

REGAN Good sir, to th' purpose.

LEAR
Who put my man i'th' stocks?
Tucket within

CORNWALL What trumpet's that? 355
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
This is a slave whose easy-borrowed pride
Dwells in the sickly grace of her a follows.
(To Oswald) Out, varlet, from my sight!

CORNWALL What
means your grace? 360
Enter Goneril

LEAR
Who stocked my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on't. Who comes here? O heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause! Send down and take my part. 365

(To Goneril) Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?
O Regan, will you take her by the hand?

GONERIL

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

LEAR

O sides, you are too tough!

370

Will you yet hold?±±How came my man i'th' stocks?

CORNWALL

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

LEAR

You? Did you?

REGAN

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

375

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,
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, squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom.

380

385

GONERIL

At your choice, sir.

390

LEAR

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad.
I will not trouble thee, my child. Farewell.
We'll no more meet, no more see one another.
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter±±
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore or embosseÁd carbuncle

395

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, 400
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure.
I can be patient, I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN Not altogether so.
I looked not for you yet, nor am provided 405
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so±±
But she knows what she does.

LEAR Is this well spoken?

REGAN
I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers? 410
Is it not well? What should you need of more,
Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How in one house
Should many people under two commands
Hold amity? 'Tis hard, almost impossible. 415

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

REGAN
Why not, my lord? If then they chanced to slack ye,
We could control them. If you will come to me±±
For now I spy a danger±±I entreat you 420
To bring but five-and-twenty; to no more
Will I give place or notice.

LEAR I gave you all.

REGAN And in good time you gave it.

LEAR
Made you my guardians, my depositaries, 425
But kept a reservation to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty? Regan, said you so?

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

LEAR
Those wicked creatures yet do look well favoured 430

When others are more wicked. Not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. (*To Goneril*) I'll go with
thee.

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

GONERIL Hear me, my lord.

What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five, 435
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN What need one?

LEAR

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs, 440
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou, gorgeous, wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need±±
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. 445
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger, 450
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks. No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall±±I will do such things±±
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be 455
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep.
No, I'll not weep. I have full cause of weeping,

Storm and tempest

But this heart shall break into a hundred thousand
flaws

Or ere I'll weep.±±O Fool, I shall go mad!

Exeunt Lear, Fool, Gentleman, and Gloucester

CORNWALL

Let us withdraw. 'Twill be a storm. 460

REGAN

This house is little. The old man and 's 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,
But not one follower.

GONERIL So am I purposed. 465
Where is my lord of Gloucester?

CORNWALL
Followed the old man forth.
[Enter the Duke of Gloucester]

He is returned.

GLOUCESTER
The King is in high rage.

CORNWALL Whither is he going?

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

CORNWALL
'Tis best to give him way. He leads himself. 470

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 475
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.
He is attended with a desperate train,
And what they may incense him to, being apt
To have his ear abused, wisdom bids fear.

CORNWALL
Shut up your doors, my lord. 'Tis a wild night. 480
My Regan counsels well. Come out o'th' storm.
Exeunt