

The Tragedy of King Lear

2.1

Enter Edmond the bastard, and Curan, severally

EDMOND 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.

EDMOND How comes that? 5

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.

EDMOND Not I. Pray you, what are they?

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

EDMOND Not a word.

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

EDMOND

The Duke be here tonight! The better, best.
This weaves itself perforce into my business. 15

[Enter Edgar at a window above]

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.

[Edgar climbs down]

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

EDGAR I am sure on't, not a word.

EDMOND

I hear my father coming. Pardon me.
In cunning I must draw my sword upon you.

Draw. Seem to defend yourself. Now, quit you well. 30
(Calling) Yield, come before my father. Light ho, here!
(To Edgar) Fly, brother! (Calling) Torches, torches!
(To Edgar)

So, farewell.

Exit Edgar

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

He wounds his arm

I have seen

drunkards

Do more than this in sport. (Calling) Father, father! 35
Stop, stop! Ho, help!

Enter the Duke of Gloucester, and servants with torches

GLOUCESTER Now, Edmond, where's the villain?

EDMOND

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?

EDMOND

Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER Where is the villain, Edmond? 40

EDMOND

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

GLOUCESTER

Pursue him, ho! Go after.

Exeunt servants

By no means

what?

EDMOND

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship,
But that I told him the revenging gods
'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
With his prepareÁd sword he charges home

45

50

My unprovided body, latched mine arm;
And when he saw my best alarumed spirits
Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to th'encounter,
Or whether ghasted by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

GLOUCESTER Let him fly far, 55
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
That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks, 60
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMOND
When I dissuaded him from his intent
And found him pitched to do it, with curst speech
I threatened to discover him. He replied, 65
`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±±
As this I would, ay, though thou didst produce 70
My very character±±I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damneÁd practice,
And thou must make a dullard of the world
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spirits 75
To make thee seek it.'

GLOUCESTER O strange and fastened villain!
Would he deny his letter, said he?
Tucket within
Hark, the Duke's trumpets. I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar. The villain shall not scape.
The Duke must grant me that; besides, his picture 80
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have due note of him±±and of my land,
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.

Enter the Duke of Cornwall, Regan, and attendants

CORNWALL

How now, my noble friend? Since I came hither, 85
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
O madam, my old heart is cracked, it's cracked.

REGAN
What, did my father's godson seek your life? 90
He whom my father named, your Edgar?

GLOUCESTER
O lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

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

GLOUCESTER
I know not, madam. 'Tis too bad, too bad. 95

EDMOND
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.
I have this present evening from my sister 100
Been well informed of them, and with such cautions
That if they come to sojourn at my house
I'll not be there.

CORNWALL Nor I, assure thee, Regan.
Edmond, I hear that you have shown your father
A childlike office.

EDMOND It was my duty, sir. 105

GLOUCESTER *(to Cornwall)*
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
Be feared of doing harm. Make your own purpose 110
How in my strength you please. For you, Edmond,

Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours.
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need.
You we first seize on.

EDMOND I shall serve you, sir, 115
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±±
Occasions, noble Gloucester, of some poise,
Wherein we must have use of your advice. 120
Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,
Of differences which I least thought it fit
To answer from our home. The several messengers
From hence attend dispatch. Our good old friend,
Lay comforts to your bosom, and bestow 125
Your needful counsel to our businesses,
Which craves the instant use.

GLOUCESTER I serve you, madam.

Your graces are right welcome.

Flourish. Exeunt