

The History of King Lear

Sc.16

Enter [at one door] Gonoril and Edmund the bastard

GONORIL

Welcome, my lord. I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way.

Enter [at another door] Oswald the steward

Now, where's your

master?

OSWALD

Madam, within; but never man so changed.
I told him of the army that was landed;
He smiled at it. I told him you were coming; 5
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.
What he should most defy seems pleasant to him; 10
What like, offensive.

GONORIL *(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
Which tie him to an answer. Our wishes on the way
May prove effects. Back, Edmund, to my brother. 15
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers.
I must change arms at home, and give the distaff
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
Shall pass between us. Ere long you are like to hear,
If you dare venture in your own behalf, 20
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.

[She kisses him]

Conceive, and fare you well.

EDMUND Yours in the ranks of death. 25

GONORIL My most dear Gloucester.

[Exit Edmund]

To thee a woman's services are due;

My foot usurps my body.

OSWALD

Madam, here comes my lord.

Exit

Enter the Duke of Albany

GONORIL

I have been worth the whistling.

ALBANY

O Gonoril,

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind

30

Blows in your face. I fear your disposition.

That nature which contemns its origin

Cannot be bordered certain in itself.

She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap perforce must wither,

35

And come to deadly use.

GONORIL

No more. The text is foolish.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;

Filth savours but themselves. What have you done?

Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?

A father, and a gracious, age-*Ad* man,

40

Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would

lick,

Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you maddened.

Could my good-brother suffer you to do it $\pm\pm$

A man, a prince by him so benefacted?

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits

45

Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,

It will come,

Humanity must perforce prey on itself,

Like monsters of the deep.

GONORIL

Milk-livered man,

That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;

50

Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning

Thine honour from thy suffering; that not know'st

Fools do those villains pity who are punished

Ere they have done their mischief: where's thy drum?

France spreads his banners in our noiseless land,

55

With plume-*Ad* helm thy flaxen biggin threats,

Whiles thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries

'Alack, why does he so?'

ALBANY See thyself, devil.
Proper deformity shows not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

GONORIL O vain fool! 60

ALBANY
Thou changeÁd and self-covered thing, for shame
Bemonster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend, 65
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONORIL Marry your manhood, mew±±
Enter [Second] Gentleman

ALBANY What news?

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN
O my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead,
Slain by his servant going to put out 70
The other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY Gloucester's eyes?

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN
A servant that he bred, thrall'd with remorse,
Opposed against the act, bending his sword
To his great master, who thereat enraged
Flew on him, and amongst them felled him dead, 75
But not without that harmful stroke which since
Hath plucked him after.

ALBANY This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge. But O, poor Gloucester!
Lost he his other eye?

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN Both, both, my lord. 80
(To Gonoril) This letter, madam, craves a speedy
answer.

'Tis from your sister.

GONORIL *(aside)* One way I like this well;
But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
May all the building on my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life. Another way 85
The news is not so took.±±I'll read and answer.
Exit

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN

No, my good lord; I met him back again.

ALBANY Knows he the wickedness?

90

[SECOND] GENTLEMAN

Ay, my good lord; 'twas he informed against him,
And quit the house on purpose that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I live

To thank thee for the love thou showed'st the King,

And to revenge thy eyes.±±Come hither, friend.

95

Tell me what more thou knowest.

Exeunt