

The Tragedy of King Lear

4.2

*Enter Goneril and Edmond the bastard [at one door]
and Oswald the steward [at another]*

GONERIL

Welcome, my lord. I marvel our mild husband
Not met us on the way. *(To Oswald)* Now, where's
your master?

OSWALD

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

GONERIL *(to Edmond)* 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, Edmond, to my brother. 15
Hasten his musters and conduct his powers.
I must change names at home, and give the distaff
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant
Shall pass between us. Ere long you are like to hear,
If you dare venture in your own behalf, 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 thee well.

EDMOND Yours in the ranks of death. 25

GONERIL My most dear Gloucester.

Exit Edmond

O, the difference of man and man!
To thee a woman's services are due;

My fool usurps my body.

OSWALD Madam, here comes my lord.
Enter the Duke of Albany

GONERIL
 I have been worth the whistling.

ALBANY O Goneril, 30
 You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
 Blows in your face.

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 honour from thy suffering±±

ALBANY See thyself,
 devil. 35
 Proper deformity shows not in the fiend
 So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL O vain fool!
Enter a Messenger

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? 40

MESSENGER
 A servant that he bred, thrilled 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,
 But not without that harmful stroke which since 45
 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?

MESSENGER Both, both, my lord.±±
 This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer. 50
 'Tis from your sister.

GONERIL (*aside*) One way I like this well;
 But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
 May all the building in my fancy pluck

Upon my hateful life. Another way
The news is not so tart.±±I'll read and answer. 55
[Exit with Oswald]

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

MESSENGER

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

MESSENGER

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

ALBANY Knows he the wickedness?

MESSENGER

Ay, my good lord; 'twas he informed against him, 60
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. 65

Exeunt