

The Tragedy of King Lear

4.5

*Enter Edgar disguised as a peasant, with a staff,
guiding the blind Duke of Gloucester*

GLOUCESTER

When shall I come to th' top of that same hill?

EDGAR

You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

EDGAR

Why, then your other senses grow imperfect

5

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

But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks you're better spoken. 10

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

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade! 15

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach

Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque

Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge

20

That on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes

Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,

Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight

Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER

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. 25

GLOUCESTER

Let go my hand.

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 further off. 30
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

Now fare ye well, good sir.
He stands aside

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR (*aside*)

Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER (*kneeling*)

O you mighty gods,

This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off! 35

If I could bear it longer, and not fall

To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,

My snuff and loathe'd part of nature should

Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O bless him!±± 40

Now, fellow, fare thee well.

EDGAR

Gone, sir. Farewell.

Gloucester falls forward

(*Aside*) And yet I know not how conceit may rob

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? 45

(*To Gloucester*) Ho, you, sir, friend; hear you, sir?

Speak.

(*Aside*) Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives.

(*To Gloucester*) What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Away, and let me

die.

EDGAR

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,

So many fathom down precipitating 50

Thou'dst shivered like an egg. But thou dost breathe,

Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.
Ten masts a-length make not the altitude
Which thou hast perpendicularly fell.
Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again. 55

GLOUCESTER But have I fall'n, or no?

EDGAR

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.
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. 60

Is wretchedness deprived that benefit
To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort
When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage
And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR Give me your arm.

Up, so. How is't? Feel you your legs? You stand. 65

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR This is above all strangeness.

Upon the crown o'th' cliff what thing was that
Which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR

As I stood here below, methoughts his eyes
Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
Horns whelked and wave-Ad like the enrage-Ad sea. 70
It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear 75
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die. That thing you speak of,
I took it for a man. Often 'twould say
'The fiend, the fiend!' He led me to that place.

EDGAR

Bear free and patient thoughts.

*Enter King Lear mad, [crowned with weeds and
flowers]*

But

who comes here? 80

The safer sense will ne'er accommodate
His master thus.

LEAR No, they cannot touch me for crying. I am the King
himself.

EDGAR O thou side-piercing sight! 85

LEAR Nature's above art in that respect. There's your
press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-
keeper. Draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse!
Peace, peace, this piece of toasted cheese will do't.
There's my gauntlet. I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up 90
the brown bills. O, well flown, bird, i'th' clout, i'th'
clout! Whew! Give the word.

EDGAR Sweet marjoram.

LEAR Pass.

GLOUCESTER I know that voice. 95

LEAR Ha! Goneril with a white beard? They flattered me
like a dog, and told me I had the 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, 100
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. 105

GLOUCESTER

The trick of that voice I do well remember.
Is't not the King?

LEAR Ay, every inch a king.

[Gloucester kneels]

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! 110
No, the wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight. 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, 115
For I lack soldiers. Behold yon simp'ring 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 120
With a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist
They're centaurs, though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;
Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell, there's darkness,
there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, 125
consumption. Fie, fie, fie; pah, pah! Give me an ounce
of civet, good apothecary, sweeten my imagination.
There's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER 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 130
Shall so wear out to naught. Dost thou know me?

LEAR I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou
squiny at me?
No, do thy worst, blind Cupid, I'll not love.
Read thou this challenge. Mark but the penning of it. 135

GLOUCESTER
Were all thy letters suns, I could not see.

EDGAR (*aside*)
I would not take this from report; it is,
And my heart breaks at it.

LEAR (*to Gloucester*) Read.

GLOUCESTER What with the case of eyes? 140

LEAR O 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 I see it feelingly. 145

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 150
at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER Ay, sir.

LEAR An the creature run from the cur, there thou
 mightst behold the great image of authority. A dog's
 obeyed in office. 155
 Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand.
 Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back.
 Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
 For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the
 cozener.
 Through tattered clothes great vices do appear; 160
 Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
 And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
 Arm it in rags, a pygmy'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 165
 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.

EDGAR (*aside*)
 O, matter and impertinency mixed±± 170
 Reason in madness!

LEAR
 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 175
 We waul and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark.

GLOUCESTER Alack, alack the day!

LEAR [*removing his crown of weeds*]
 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 180
 A troop of horse with felt. I'll put't in proof,
 And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,
 Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!
Enter [two] Gentlemen

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN
 O, here he is. Lay hand upon him. [*To Lear*] Sir,
 Your most dear daughter±± 185

LEAR

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even
The natural fool of fortune. Use me well.
You shall have ransom. Let me have surgeons;
I am cut to th' brains.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN You shall have anything. 190

LEAR No seconds? All myself?
Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
To use his eyes for garden water-pots.
I will die bravely, like a smug bridegroom. What,
I will be jovial. Come, come, I am a king. 195
Masters, know you that?

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

You are a royal one, and we obey you.

LEAR Then there's life in't. Come, an you get it, you shall
get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa!

Exit running [pursued by a Gentleman]

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch, 200
Past speaking in a king. Thou hast a daughter
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

EDGAR Hail, gentle sir.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN Sir, speed you. What's your will? 205

EDGAR

Do you hear aught, sir, of a battle toward?

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

Most sure and vulgar, everyone hears that
That can distinguish sound.

EDGAR But, by your favour,
How near's the other army? 210

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

Near and on speedy foot. The main descry
Stands in the hourly thought.

EDGAR I thank you, sir. That's all.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

Though that the Queen on special cause is here,
Her army is moved on.

EDGAR I thank you, sir.

Exit Gentleman

GLOUCESTER

You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me. 215

Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please.

EDGAR Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER 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
Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand,
I'll lead you to some bidding.

220

GLOUCESTER *[rising]* Hearty thanks.
The bounty and the benison of heaven
To boot and boot.

Enter Oswald the steward

OSWALD A proclaimed prize! Most happy! 225
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou old unhappy traitor,
Briefly thyself remember. The sword is out
That must destroy thee.

GLOUCESTER Now let thy friendly hand
Put strength enough to't.

OSWALD *(to Edgar)* Wherefore, bold peasant, 230
Durst thou support a published traitor? Hence,
Lest that th'infection of his fortune take
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR 'Chill not let go, sir, without vurther 'cagion.

OSWALD Let go, slave, or thou diest. 235

EDGAR Good gentleman, go your gate, and let poor volk
pass. An 'chud ha' been swaggered out of my life,
'twould not ha' been so long as 'tis by a vortnight.
Nay, come not near th'old man. Keep out, 'che vor'
ye, or I's' try whether your costard or my baton be the
harder; I'll be plain with you.

240

OSWALD Out, dunghill!

EDGAR 'Chill pick your teeth, sir. Come, no matter vor
your foins.

[Edgar knocks him down]

OSWALD

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

245

To Edmond, Earl of Gloucester. Seek him out
Upon the English party. O untimely death! Death!
He dies

EDGAR

I know thee well±±a serviceable villain, 250
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire.

GLOUCESTER What, is he dead?

EDGAR Sit you down, father. Rest you.

Gloucester sits

Let's see these pockets. The letters that he speaks of 255
May be my friends. He's dead; I am only sorrow
He had no other deathsman. Let us see.
Leave, gentle wax, and manners; blame us not.
To know our enemies' minds we rip their hearts;
Their papers is more lawful. 260

He reads the letter

`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 jail, from the loathed 265
warmth whereof, deliver me, and supply the place for
your labour.

Your±±wife, so I would say,±±affectionate
servant, and for you her own for venture,
Goneril.' 270

O indistinguished space of woman's will±±
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life,
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 275
With this ungracious paper strike the sight
Of the death-practised Duke. For him 'tis well
That of thy death and business I can tell.

[Exit with the body]

GLOUCESTER

The King is mad. How stiff is my vile sense,
That I stand up and have ingenious feeling 280
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distraught,

So should my thoughts be severed from my griefs,
Drum afar off
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves.

[Enter Edgar]

EDGAR

Give me your hand.

Far off methinks I hear the beaten drum. 285

Come, father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

Exit Edgar guiding Gloucester