

The Tragedy of King Lear

1.5

*Enter King Lear, the Earl of Kent disguised, the
First Gentleman, and Lear's Fool*

LEAR *[to the Gentleman, giving him a letter]* Go you before
to Gloucester with these letters.

[Exit Gentleman]

[To Kent, giving him a letter] Acquaint my daughter no
further with anything you know than comes from her
demand out of the letter. If your diligence be not speedy, 5
I shall be there afore you.

KENT I will not sleep, my lord, till I have delivered your
letter.

Exit

FOOL If a man's brains were in's heels, were't not in
danger of kibes? 10

LEAR Ay, boy.

FOOL Then, I prithee, be merry: thy wit shall not go
slipshod.

LEAR Ha, ha, ha!

FOOL Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly, 15
for though she's as like this as a crab's like an apple,
yet I can tell what I can tell.

LEAR What canst tell, boy?

FOOL She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab.
Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i'th' middle 20
on 's face?

LEAR No.

FOOL Why, to keep one's eyes of either side 's nose, that
what a man cannot smell out, a may spy into.

LEAR I did her wrong. 25

FOOL Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

LEAR No.

FOOL Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a
house.

LEAR Why? 30

FOOL Why, to put 's head in, not to give it away to his
daughters and leave his horns without a case.

LEAR

I will forget my nature. So kind a father!
Be my horses ready?

FOOL Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the 35
seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason.

LEAR Because they are not eight.

FOOL Yes, indeed, thou wouldst make a good fool.

LEAR

To take't again perforce±±monster ingratitude!

FOOL If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten 40
for being old before thy time.

LEAR How's that?

FOOL Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst
been wise.

LEAR

O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! 45
Keep me in temper. I would not be mad.

[Enter the First Gentleman]

How now, are the horses ready?

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN Ready, my lord.

LEAR (to Fool) Come, boy.

[Exeunt Lear and Gentleman]

FOOL

She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure,
Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter. 50

[Exit]