

The History of King Lear

Sc.15

Enter Edgar as a Bedlam beggar

EDGAR

Yet better thus and known to be contemned
Than still contemned and flattered. To be worst,
The low'st and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.
The lamentable change is from the best; 5
The worst returns to laughter.

Enter the Duke of Gloucester led by an Old Man

Who's here? My father, parti-eyed? World, world, O
world!

But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age.

[Edgar stands aside]

OLD MAN *(to Gloucester)* O my good lord,
I have been your tenant and your father's tenant 10
This fourscore±±

GLOUCESTER

Away, get thee away, good friend, be gone.
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

OLD MAN

Alack, sir, you cannot see your way. 15

GLOUCESTER

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. Ah dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abuseÁd father's wrath±± 20
Might I but live to see thee in my touch
I'd say I had eyes again.

OLD MAN

How now? Who's there?

EDGAR *(aside)*

O gods! Who is't can say `I am at the worst'?
I am worse than e'er I was.

OLD MAN

'Tis poor mad Tom.

EDGAR (*aside*)

And worse I may be yet. The worst is not
As long as we can say 'This is the worst.' 25

OLD MAN (*to Edgar*) Fellow, where goest?

GLOUCESTER Is it a beggarman?

OLD MAN Madman and beggar too.

GLOUCESTER

A has some reason, else he could not beg. 30
In the last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more
since.

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods; 35
They kill us for their sport.

EDGAR (*aside*) How should this be?

Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,
Ang'ring itself and others.

[He comes forward]

Bless thee,

master.

GLOUCESTER

Is that the naked fellow?

OLD MAN Ay, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

Then prithee, get thee gone. If for my sake 40
Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain
I'th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love,
And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Who I'll entreat to lead me.

OLD MAN Alack, sir, he is mad.

GLOUCESTER

'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind. 45
Do as I bid thee; or rather do thy pleasure.
Above the rest, be gone.

OLD MAN

I'll bring him the best 'parel that I have,
Come on't what will.

Exit

GLOUCESTER Sirrah, naked fellow!

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold. I cannot dance it farther. 50

GLOUCESTER Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

GLOUCESTER Know'st thou the way to Dover?

EDGAR Both stile and gate, horseway and footpath. Poor
 Tom hath been scared out of his good wits. Bless thee, 55
 goodman, from the foul fiend. Five fiends have been in
 Poor Tom at once, as Obidicut of lust, Hobbididence
 prince of dumbness, Mahu of stealing, Modo of murder,
 Flibbertigibbet of mocking and mowing, who since
 possesses chambermaids and waiting-women. So bless 60
 thee, master.

GLOUCESTER
 Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
 Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
 Makes thee the happier. Heavens deal so still.
 Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man 65
 That stands your ordinance, that will not see
 Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly.
 So distribution should undo excess,
 And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover?

EDGAR Ay, master. 70

GLOUCESTER
 There is a cliff whose high and bending head
 Looks saucily in the confine—Ad deep.
 Bring me but to the very brim of it
 And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
 With something rich about me. From that place 75
 I shall no leading need.

EDGAR Give me thy arm.
 Poor Tom shall lead thee.
Exit Edgar guiding Gloucester