

The History of King Lear

Sc.20

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

GLOUCESTER

When shall we 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

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By your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER

So may it be indeed.

Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st

With 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 the unnumbered idle pebble chafes

Cannot be heard, it's 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 farther off. 30
Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

Now fare you 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

O you mighty gods,

He kneels

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 loatheÁd 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; 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 goss'mer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating 50
Thou hadst 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 fallen, 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 now? Feel you your legs? You stand. 65

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR

This is above all strangeness.

Upon the crown of the 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. A had a thousand noses, 70
Horns whelked and wave'd like the enridge'd sea.
It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who made their 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 would it 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 coining. I am the
King himself.

EDGAR O thou side-piercing sight! 85

LEAR Nature is 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 toasted cheese will do it. There's my
gauntlet. I'll prove it on a giant. Bring up the brown 90
bills. O, well flown, bird, in the air. Ha! Give the word.

EDGAR Sweet marjoram.

LEAR Pass.

GLOUCESTER I know that voice.

LEAR Ha, Gonoril! Ha, Regan! They flattered me like a 95
dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere
the black ones were there. To say `ay' and `no' to
everything I said `ay' and `no' to was no good divinity.
When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to
make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace 100
at my bidding, there I found them, there I smelt them
out. Go to, they are not men of their words. They told
me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.

GLOUCESTER

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

LEAR Ay, every inch a king. 105

[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 for adultery.
No, the wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight. 110

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,
For I lack soldiers. Behold yon simp'ring dame,
Whose face between her forks presageth snow, 115
That minces virtue, and does shake the head

To hear of pleasure's name:
The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't
With a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist
They're centaurs, though women all above. 120
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;
Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell, there's
darkness,
There's the sulphury pit, burning, scalding,
Stench, consummation. Fie, fie, fie; pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, 125
To sweeten my imagination.
There's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER O, let me kiss that hand!

LEAR Here, wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER
O ruined piece of nature! This great world
Shall so wear out to naught. Do you know me? 130

LEAR I remember thy eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny
on me?

No, do thy worst, blind Cupid, I'll not love.

Read thou that challenge. Mark the penning of't.

GLOUCESTER
Were all the letters suns, I could not see one. 135

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?

LEAR O ho, are you there with me? No eyes in your head, 140
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.

LEAR What, art mad? A man may see how the world 145
goes with no eyes; look with thy ears. See how yon
justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark in thy ear:
handy-dandy, which is the thief, which is the justice?
Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER Ay, sir. 150

LEAR An the creature run from the cur, there thou

mightst behold the great image of authority. A dog's
obeyed in office.

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand.

Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back. 155

Thy blood as hotly lusts to use her in that kind

For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the
cozener.

Through tattered rags small vices do appear;

Robes and furred gowns hides all. Get thee glass eyes,

And, like a scurvy politician, seem 160

To see the things thou dost not. No tears, now.

Pull off my boots. Harder, harder! So.

EDGAR (*aside*)

O, matter and impertinency mixed±±

Reason in madness!

LEAR

If thou wilt weep my fortune, take my eyes. 165

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

We wail and cry. I will preach to thee. Mark me.

GLOUCESTER Alack, alack, the day! 170

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

A troop of horse with felt; and when I have stole
upon

These son-in-laws, then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill! 175

Enter three Gentlemen

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

O, here he is. Lay hands upon him, sirs.

(*To Lear*) Your most dear±±

LEAR

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am e'en

The natural fool of fortune. Use me well.

You shall have ransom. Let me have a surgeon; 180

I am cut to the brains.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN You shall have anything.

LEAR No seconds? All myself?

Why, this would make a man a man of salt,
To use his eyes for garden water-pots, 185
Ay, and laying autumn's dust.

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN Good sir±±

LEAR

I will die bravely, like a bridegroom.
What, I will be jovial. Come, come,
I am a king, my masters, know you that?

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

You are a royal one, and we obey you. 190

LEAR Then there's life in't. Nay, an you get it, you shall
get it with running.

Exit running, pursued by two Gentlemen

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking in a king. Thou hast one daughter
Who redeems nature from the general curse 195
Which twain hath brought her to.

EDGAR Hail, gentle sir.

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

EDGAR

Do you hear aught of a battle toward?

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

Most sure and vulgar, everyone hears that 200
That can distinguish sense.

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

[FIRST] GENTLEMAN

Near and on speedy foot, the main; descriers
Stands on the hourly thoughts.

EDGAR I thank you, sir. That's all. 205

[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.
Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please. 210

EDGAR Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER Now, good sir, what are you?

EDGAR

A most poor man, made lame by fortune's blows,
Who by the art of known and feeling sorrows
Am pregnant to good pity. Give me your hand, 215
I'll lead you to some bidding.

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

Enter Oswald the steward

OSWALD A proclaimed prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh
To raise my fortunes. Thou most unhappy traitor, 220
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,
Durst thou support a published traitor? Hence,
Lest the infection of his fortune take 225
Like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

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

OSWALD Let go, slave, or thou diest.

EDGAR Good gentleman, go your gate. Let poor volk pass.
An 'chud have been swaggered out of my life, it would 230
not have been so long by a vortnight. Nay, come not
near the old man. Keep out, 'che vor' ye, or I'll try
whether your costard or my baton be the harder; I'll
be plain with you.

OSWALD Out, dunghill! 235

They fight

EDGAR 'Chill pick your teeth, sir. Come, no matter for
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 240
To Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. Seek him out
Upon the British party. O untimely death! Death!

He dies

EDGAR

I know thee well±±a serviceable villain,
As duteous to the vices of thy mistress
As badness would desire. 245

GLOUCESTER What, is he dead?

EDGAR Sit you down, father. Rest you.

Gloucester sits

Let's see his pockets. These letters that he speaks of
May be my friends. He's dead; I am only sorrow
He had no other deathsman. Let us see. 250
Leave, gentle wax; and manners, blame us not.
To know our enemies' minds we'd rip their hearts;
Their papers is more lawful.

He reads a letter

`Let your reciprocal vows be remembered. You have
many opportunities to cut him off. If your will want 255
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
warmth whereof, deliver me, and supply the place for
your labour. 260

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

O indistinguished space of woman's wit±±
A plot upon her virtuous husband's life, 265
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
With this ungracious paper strike the sight
Of the death-practised Duke. For him 'tis well 270
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
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distraught;
So should my thoughts be fenceÁd from my griefs, 275
And woes by wrong imaginations lose

The knowledge of themselves.

A drum afar off. [Enter Edgar]

EDGAR

Give me your hand.

Far off methinks I hear the beaten drum.

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

Exit Edgar guiding Gloucester