

The Tragedy of King Lear

1.4

Enter the Earl of Kent, disguised

KENT

If but as well I other accents borrow
That can my speech diffuse, my good intent
May carry through itself to that full issue
For which I razed my likeness. Now, banished Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned, 5
So may it come thy master, whom thou lov'st,
Shall find thee full of labours.

Horns within. Enter King Lear and attendants from hunting

LEAR Let me not stay a jot for dinner. Go get it ready.

[Exit one]

(To Kent) How now, what art thou?

KENT A man, sir. 10

LEAR What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with us?

KENT I do profess to be no less than I seem, to serve him truly that will put me in trust, to love him that is honest, to converse with him that is wise and says 15 little, to fear judgement, to fight when I cannot choose, and to eat no fish.

LEAR What art thou?

KENT A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the King. 20

LEAR If thou be'st as poor for a subject as he's for a king, thou'rt poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT Service.

LEAR Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT You. 25

LEAR Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT No, sir, but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.

LEAR What's that?

KENT Authority. 30

LEAR What services canst do?

KENT I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly. That which ordinary men are fit for I am qualified in; and the best of me is diligence. 35

LEAR How old art thou?

KENT Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for anything. I have years on my back forty-eight.

LEAR Follow me. Thou shalt serve me, if I like thee no worse after dinner. I will not part from thee yet. Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave, my fool? Go you and call my fool hither. 40

[Exit one]

Enter Oswald the steward

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD So please you±± 45

Exit

LEAR What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back.

Exit a knight

Where's my fool? Ho, I think the world's asleep.

Enter a Knight

How now? Where's that mongrel?

KNIGHT He says, my lord, your daughter is not well.

LEAR Why came not the slave back to me when I called him? 50

KNIGHT Sir, he answered me in the roundest manner he would not.

LEAR A would not?

KNIGHT My lord, I know not what the matter is, but to my judgement your highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also, and your daughter. 60

LEAR Ha, sayst thou so?

KNIGHT I beseech you pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken, for my duty cannot be silent when I think your highness wronged.

LEAR Thou but rememberest me of mine own conception. I have perceived a most faint neglect of late, which I 65

have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than
as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness. I will
look further into't. But where's my fool? I have not
seen him these two days. 70

KNIGHT Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the
fool hath much pined away.

LEAR No more of that, I have noted it well. Go you and
tell my daughter I would speak with her.

[Exit one]

Go you, call hither my fool. 75

[Exit one]

Enter Oswald the steward [crossing the stage]

O you, sir, you, come you hither, sir, who am I, sir?

OSWALD My lady's father.

LEAR My lady's father? My lord's knave, you whoreson
dog, you slave, you cur!

OSWALD I am none of these, my lord, I beseech your 80
pardon.

LEAR Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?

[Lear strikes him]

OSWALD I'll not be stricken, my lord.

KENT *[tripping him]* Nor tripped neither, you base football
player. 85

LEAR *(to Kent)* I thank thee, fellow. Thou serv'st me, and
I'll love thee.

KENT *(to Oswald)* Come, sir, arise, away. I'll teach you
differences. Away, away. If you will measure your
lubber's length again, tarry; but away, go to. Have 90
you wisdom? So.

Exit Oswald

LEAR Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee.

Enter Lear's Fool

There's earnest of thy service.

He gives Kent money

FOOL Let me hire him, too. *(To Kent)* Here's my coxcomb.

LEAR How now, my pretty knave, how dost thou? 95

FOOL *(to Kent)* Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

LEAR Why, my boy?

FOOL Why? For taking one's part that's out of favour. *(To
Kent)* Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits,

thou'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. 100
Why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters and
did the third a blessing against his will. If thou follow
him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb. (*To Lear*)
How now, nuncle? Would I had two coxcombs and
two daughters. 105

LEAR Why, my boy?

FOOL If I gave them all my living I'd keep my coxcombs
myself. There's mine; beg another off thy daughters.

LEAR Take heed, sirrah±±the whip.

FOOL Truth's a dog must to kennel. He must be whipped 110
out when the Lady Brach may stand by th' fire and
stink.

LEAR A pestilent gall to me!

FOOL [*to Kent*] Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

LEAR Do. 115

FOOL Mark it, nuncle:

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest, 120
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest,
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more 125
Than two tens to a score.

KENT This is nothing, fool.

FOOL Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer: you
gave me nothing for't. (*To Lear*) Can you make no use
of nothing, nuncle? 130

LEAR Why no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.

FOOL (*to Kent*) Prithee, tell him so much the rent of his
land comes to. He will not believe a fool.

LEAR A bitter fool.

FOOL Dost know the difference, my boy, between a bitter 135
fool and a sweet one?

LEAR No, lad. Teach me.

FOOL Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two
crowns.

LEAR What two crowns shall they be? 140
FOOL Why, after I have cut the egg i'th' middle and eat
up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou
clovest thy crown i'th' middle and gavest away both
parts, thou borest thine ass o'th' back o'er the dirt.
Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou 145
gavest thy golden one away. If I speak like myself in
this, let him be whipped that first finds it so.

[Sings]

Fools had ne'er less grace in a year,
For wise men are grown foppish,
And know not how their wits to wear, 150
Their manners are so apish.

LEAR When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?

FOOL I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou madest thy
daughters thy mothers; for when thou gavest them the
rod and puttest down thine own breeches, 155

[Sings]

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep
And go the fools among.

Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach 160
thy fool to lie. I would fain learn to lie.

LEAR An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped.

FOOL I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are.
They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt
have me whipped for lying, and sometimes I am 165
whipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any
kind o' thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee,
nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left
nothing i'th' middle.

Enter Goneril

Here comes one o' the parings. 170

LEAR
How now, daughter? What makes that frontlet on?
You are too much of late i'th' frown.

FOOL Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need
to care for her frowning. Now thou art an O without
a figure. I am better than thou art, now. I am a fool; 175

thou art nothing. *[To Goneril]* Yes, forsooth, I will hold
my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say
nothing.

[Sings]

Mum, mum.

He that keeps nor crust nor crumb, 180
Weary of all, shall want some.

That's a shelled peascod.

GONERIL *(to Lear)*

Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth 185
In rank and not-to-be-endureÁd riots. Sir,
I had thought by making this well known unto you
To have found a safe redress, but now grow fearful,
By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on 190
By your allowance; which if you should, the fault
Would not scape censure, nor the redresses sleep
Which in the tender of a wholesome weal
Might in their working do you that offence,
Which else were shame, that then necessity 195
Will call discreet proceeding.

FOOL *(to Lear)* For, you know, nuncle,

[Sings]

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
That it's had it head bit off by it young;
so out went the candle, and we were left darkling. 200

LEAR *(to Goneril)* Are you our daughter?

GONERIL

I would you would make use of your good wisdom,
Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away
These dispositions which of late transport you
From what you rightly are. 205

FOOL May not an ass know when the cart draws the
horse? *[Sings]* `Whoop, jug, I love thee!'

LEAR

Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings 210

Are lethargied±±ha, waking? 'Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

FOOL Lear's shadow.

LEAR (to Goneril) Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONERIL

This admiration, sir, is much o'th' savour 215
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright,
As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold 220
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
Makes it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy. Be then desired, 225
By her that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train,
And the remainders that shall still depend
To be such men as may besort your age,
Which know themselves and you.

LEAR Darkness and devils! 230

Saddle my horses, call my train together!±±

[Exit one or more]

Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee.

Yet have I left a daughter.

GONERIL

You strike my people, and your disordered rabble
Make servants of their betters.

Enter the Duke of Albany

LEAR Woe that too late repents! 235

Is it your will? Speak, sir.±±Prepare my horses.

[Exit one or more]

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster±±

ALBANY Pray sir, be patient. 240

LEAR (to Goneril) Detested kite, thou liest.

My train are men of choice and rarest parts,
That all particulars of duty know,

And in the most exact regard support
The worships of their name. O most small fault, 245
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,
Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature
From the fixed place, drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall! O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate that let thy folly in 250
And thy dear judgement out.±±Go, go, my people!

ALBANY

My lord, I am guiltless, as I am ignorant
Of what hath moved you.

LEAR

It may be so, my lord.

Hear, nature; hear, dear goddess, hear:
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend 255
To make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility.
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. If she must teem, 260
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits 265
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel±±
That she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child. Away, away!

Exeunt Lear, [Kent, and attendants]

ALBANY

Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this? 270

GONERIL

Never afflict yourself to know more of it,
But let his disposition have that scope
As dotage gives it.

Enter King Lear

LEAR

What, fifty of my followers at a clap?
Within a fortnight?

ALBANY

What's the matter, sir? 275

LEAR

I'll tell thee. (*To Goneril*) Life and death! I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon
thee!

Th'untented woundings of a father's curse 280
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
Beweep this cause again I'll pluck ye out
And cast you, with the waters that you loose,
To temper clay. Ha! Let it be so.

I have another daughter 285
Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable.
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolvisish visage. Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever.

Exit

GONERIL

Do you mark that? 290

ALBANY

I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
To the great love I bear you±±

GONERIL

Pray you, content. What, Oswald, ho!±±
You, sir, more knave than fool, after your master.

FOOL

Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, 295
Tarry, take the fool with thee.
A fox when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter. 300
So, the fool follows after.

Exit

GONERIL

This man hath had good counsel±±a hundred
knights?
'Tis politic and safe to let him keep
At point a hundred knights, yes, that on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike, 305

He may enguard his dotage with their powers
And hold our lives in mercy.±±Oswald, I say!

ALBANY

Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL

Safer than trust too far.

Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken. I know his heart. 310
What he hath uttered I have writ my sister.
If she sustain him and his hundred knights
When I have showed th'unfitness±±

Enter Oswald the steward

How now, Oswald?

What, have you writ that letter to my sister?

OSWALD

Ay, madam. 315

GONERIL

Take you some company, and away to horse.
Inform her full of my particular fear,
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more. Get you gone,
And hasten your return.

Exit Oswald

No, no, my lord,

320

This milky gentleness and course of yours,
Though I condemn not, yet under pardon
You are much more attasked for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness.

ALBANY

How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell. 325
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

GONERIL Nay, then±±

ALBANY Well, well, th'event.

Exeunt