

The History of King Lear

Sc.7

*Enter the Earl of Kent, disguised, at one door, and
Oswald the steward, at another door*

OSWALD Good even to thee, friend. Art of the house?

KENT Ay.

OSWALD Where may we set our horses?

KENT I'th' mire.

OSWALD Prithee, if thou love me, tell me. 5

KENT I love thee not.

OSWALD Why then, I care not for thee.

KENT If I had thee in Lipsbury pinfold I would make thee
care for me.

OSWALD Why dost thou use me thus? I know thee not. 10

KENT Fellow, I know thee.

OSWALD What dost thou know me for?

KENT A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, a base,
proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound,
filthy worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action- 15
taking knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, superfinical
rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be
a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but
the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander,
and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch, whom I will 20
beat into clamorous whining if thou deny the least
syllable of the addition.

OSWALD What a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail
on one that's neither known of thee nor knows thee!

KENT What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou 25
knowest me! Is it two days ago since I beat thee and
tripped up thy heels before the King? Draw, you rogue;
for though it be night, the moon shines.

[He draws his sword]

I'll make a sop of the moonshine o' you. Draw, you
whoreson, cullionly barber-monger, draw! 30

OSWALD Away. I have nothing to do with thee.

KENT Draw, you rascal. You bring letters against the
King, and take Vanity the puppet's part against the

royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so
carbonado your shanks±±draw, you rascal, come your 35
ways!

OSWALD Help, ho, murder, help!

KENT Strike, you slave! Stand, rogue! Stand, you neat
slave, strike!

OSWALD Help, ho, murder, help!

40

*Enter Edmund the bastard with his rapier drawn,
[then] the Duke of Gloucester, [then] the Duke of
Cornwall and Regan the Duchess*

EDMUND *[parting them]* How now, what's the matter?

KENT With you, Goodman boy. An you please come, I'll
flesh you. Come on, young master.

GLOUCESTER Weapons? Arms? What's the matter here?

CORNWALL Keep peace, upon your lives. He dies that 45
strikes again. What's the matter?

REGAN The messengers from our sister and the King.

CORNWALL *(to Kent and Oswald)* What's your difference?
Speak.

OSWALD I am scarce in breath, my lord.

50

KENT No marvel, you have so bestirred your valour, you
cowardly rascal. Nature disclaims in thee; a tailor made
thee.

CORNWALL Thou art a strange fellow±±a tailor make a
man?

55

KENT Ay, a tailor, sir. A stone-cutter or a painter could
not have made him so ill though he had been but two
hours at the trade.

GLOUCESTER Speak yet; how grew your quarrel?

OSWALD This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared 60
at suit of his grey beard±±

KENT Thou whoreson Z, thou unnecessary letter±± *(to
Cornwall)* my lord, if you'll give me leave I will tread
this unbolted villain into mortar and daub the walls
of a jakes with him. *(To Oswald)* Spare my grey beard, 65
you wagtail?

CORNWALL

Peace, sir. You beastly knave, have you no reverence?

KENT

Yes, sir, but anger has a privilege.

CORNWALL Why art thou angry?

KENT

That such a slave as this should wear a sword, 70
That wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues
As these, like rats, oft bite those cords in twain
Which are too entrenched to unloose, smooth every
passion

That in the natures of their lords rebel,
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods, 75
Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught, like dogs, but following.

(*To Oswald*) A plague upon your epileptic visage!
Smile you my speeches as I were a fool? 80
Goose, an I had you upon Sarum Plain
I'd send you cackling home to Camelot.

CORNWALL

What, art thou mad, old fellow?

GLOUCESTER [*to Kent*] How fell you out? Say that.

KENT

No contraries hold more antipathy
Than I and such a knave.

CORNWALL Why dost thou call him knave? 85

What's his offence?

KENT His countenance likes me not.

CORNWALL

No more perchance does mine, or his, or hers.

KENT

Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain:
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stands on any shoulder that I see 90
Before me at this instant.

CORNWALL This is a fellow

Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he.
He must be plain, he must speak truth. 95
An they will take't, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends

Than twenty silly-ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely. 100

KENT

Sir, in good sooth, or in sincere verity,
Under the allowance of your grand aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
In flickering Phoebus' front±±

CORNWALL

What mean'st thou

by this?

KENT To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so 105
much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguiled
you in a plain accent was a plain knave, which for my
part I will not be, though I should win your displeasure
to entreat me to't.

CORNWALL (*to Oswald*)

What's the offence you gave him?

OSWALD

I never gave him any.

110

It pleased the King his master very late
To strike at me upon his misconstruction,
When he, conjunct, and flattering his displeasure,
Tripped me behind; being down, insulted, railed,
And put upon him such a deal of man that 115
That worthied him, got praises of the King
For him attempting who was self-subdued,
And in the fleshment of this dread exploit
Drew on me here again.

KENT

None of these rogues and cowards

But Ajax is their fool.

CORNWALL [*calling*] Bring forth the stocks, ho!±± 120

You stubborn, ancient knave, you reverend braggart,
We'll teach you.

KENT

I am too old to learn.

Call not your stocks for me. I serve the King,
On whose employments I was sent to you.
You should do small respect, show too bold malice 125
Against the grace and person of my master,
Stocking his messenger.

CORNWALL [*calling*] Fetch forth the stocks!±±

As I have life and honour, there shall he sit till noon.

REGAN

Till noon?±±till night, my lord, and all night too.

KENT

Why, madam, if I were your father's dog 130
You could not use me so.

REGAN

Sir, being his knave, I will.

[Stocks brought out]

CORNWALL

This is a fellow of the selfsame nature
Our sister speaks of.±±Come, bring away the stocks.

GLOUCESTER

Let me beseech your grace not to do so.
His fault is much, and the good King his master 135
Will check him for't. Your purposed low correction
Is such as basest and contemneÁd wretches
For pilf'rings and most common trespasses
Are punished with. The King must take it ill
That he's so slightly valued in his messenger, 140
Should have him thus restrained.

CORNWALL

I'll answer that.

REGAN

My sister may receive it much more worse
To have her gentlemen abused, assaulted,
For following her affairs. Put in his legs.

They put Kent in the stocks

Come, my good lord, away! 145

Exeunt all but Gloucester and Kent

GLOUCESTER

I am sorry for thee, friend. 'Tis the Duke's pleasure,
Whose disposition, all the world well knows,
Will not be rubbed nor stopped. I'll entreat for thee.

KENT

Pray you, do not, sir. I have watched and travelled
hard.

Some time I shall sleep out; the rest I'll whistle. 150
A good man's fortune may grow out at heels.
Give you good morrow.

GLOUCESTER

The Duke's to blame in this; 'twill be ill took.

Exit

KENT

Good King, that must approve the common say:
Thou out of heaven's benediction com'st 155
To the warm sun.

[He takes out a letter]

Approach, thou beacon to this under globe,
That by thy comfortable beams I may
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia, 160
Who hath now fortunately been informed
Of my obscureÁd course, and shall find time
For this enormous state, seeking to give
Losses their remedies. All weary and overwatched,
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold 165
This shameful lodging. Fortune, good night;
Smile; once more turn thy wheel.

He sleeps

Enter Edgar

EDGAR I heard myself proclaimed,
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt. No port is free, no place
That guard and most unusual vigilance 170
Does not attend my taking. While I may scape
I will preserve myself, and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury in contempt of man
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth, 175
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair with knots,
And with presented nakedness outface
The wind and persecution of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars who with roaring voices 180
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary,
And with this horrible object from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and mills
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers 185
Enforce their charity. `Poor Tuelygod, Poor Tom!'
That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.

Exit

Enter King Lear, his Fool, and a Knight

LEAR

'Tis strange that they should so depart from home
And not send back my messenger.

KNIGHT

As I learned,

The night before there was no purpose
Of his remove.

190

KENT (*waking*) Hail to thee, noble master.

LEAR

How! Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

FOOL

Ha, ha, look, he wears cruel garters! Horses are
tied by the heads, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys
by th' loins, and men by th' legs. When a man's over-
lusty at legs, then he wears wooden nether-stocks.

195

LEAR (*to Kent*)

What's he that hath so much thy place mistook
To set thee here?

KENT

It is both he and she:
Your son and daughter.

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

LEAR

No, I say.

KENT

I say yea.

LEAR

No, no, they would not.

KENT

Yes, they have.

200

LEAR

By Jupiter, I swear no. They durst not do't,
They would not, could not do't. 'Tis worse than murder,
To do upon respect such violent outrage.
Resolve me with all modest haste which way
Thou mayst deserve or they propose this usage,
Coming from us.

205

KENT

My lord, when at their home
I did commend your highness' letters to them,
Ere I was risen from the place that showed
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post
Stewed in his haste, half breathless, panting forth
From Gonoril, his mistress, salutations,
Delivered letters spite of intermission,

210

Which presently they read, on whose contents
They summoned up their meiny, straight took horse,
Commanded me to follow and attend 215
The leisure of their answer, gave me cold looks;
And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome I perceived had poisoned mine±±
Being the very fellow that of late
Displayed so saucily against your highness±± 220
Having more man than wit about me, drew.
He raised the house with loud and coward cries.
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth
This shame which here it suffers.

LEAR

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! 225
Histerica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow;
Thy element's below.±±Where is this daughter?

KENT

With the Earl, sir, within.

LEAR

Follow me not; stay there.

Exit

KNIGHT (to Kent)

Made you no more offence than what you speak of?

KENT

No. How chance the King comes with so small a train? 230

FOOL

An thou hadst been set in the stocks for that
question, thou hadst well deserved it.

KENT

Why, fool?

FOOL

We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee
there's no labouring in the winter. All that follow their 235
noses are led by their eyes but blind men, and there's
not a nose among a hundred but can smell him that's
stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs
down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it;
but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw 240
thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel,
give me mine again. I would have none but knaves
follow it, since a fool gives it.

[Sings]

That sir that serves for gain
And follows but for form,

245

Will pack when it begin to rain,
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry, the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly.
The knave turns fool that runs away, 250
The fool no knave, pardie.

KENT Where learnt you this, fool?

FOOL Not in the stocks.

Enter King Lear and the Duke of Gloucester

LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They're sick, they're weary?
They travelled hard tonight?±±mere insolence, 255
Ay, the images of revolt and flying off.
Fetch me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality of the Duke,
How unremovable and fixed he is
In his own course.

LEAR Vengeance, death, plague, confusion! 260
What `fiery quality'? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester, I'd
Speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

GLOUCESTER Ay, my good lord.

LEAR

The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands, tends
service. 265

`Fiery'? The Duke?±±tell the hot Duke that Lear±±
No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.

Infirmity doth still neglect all office
Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves
When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind 270
To suffer with the body. I'll forbear,

And am fallen out with my more headier will,
To take the indisposed and sickly fit
For the sound man.±±Death on my state,
Wherefore should he sit here? This act persuades me 275
That this remotion of the Duke and her
Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.
Tell the Duke and 's wife I'll speak with them,
Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me,

Or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum 280
Till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER I would have all well
Betwixt you.

Exit

LEAR O, my heart, my heart!

FOOL Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels
when she put 'em i'th' paste alive. She rapped 'em
o'th' coxcombs with a stick, and cried `Down, wantons, 285
down!' 'Twas her brother that, in pure kindness to his
horse, buttered his hay.

*Enter the Duke of Cornwall and Regan, the Duke of
Gloucester, and others*

LEAR Good morrow to you both.

CORNWALL Hail to your grace.

[Kent here set at liberty]

REGAN I am glad to see your highness. 290

LEAR

Regan, I think you are. I know what reason
I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad
I would divorce me from thy mother's shrine,
Sepulchring an adultress. *(To Kent)* Yea, are you free?
Some other time for that.±±BeloveÁd Regan, 295
Thy sister is naught. O, Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-toothed unkindness like a vulture here.
I can scarce speak to thee. Thou'lt not believe
Of how deplored a quality±±O, Regan!

REGAN

I pray you, sir, take patience. I have hope 300
You less know how to value her desert
Than she to slack her duty.

LEAR My curses on her.

REGAN O sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge 305
Of her confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wronged her, sir.

LEAR Ask her forgiveness? 310

Do you mark how this becomes the house?
[Kneeling] `Dear daughter, I confess that I am old.
Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.'

REGAN

Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks. 315
Return you to my sister.

LEAR [rising] No, Regan.

She hath abated me of half my train,
Looked black upon me, struck me with her tongue
Most serpent-like upon the very heart.
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall 320
On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!

CORNWALL

Fie, fie, sir.

LEAR

You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes. Infect her beauty,
You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the pow'rful sun 325
To fall and blast her pride.

REGAN

O, the blest gods!

So will you wish on me when the rash mood±±

LEAR

No, Regan. Thou shalt never have my curse.
Thy tender-hested nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness. Her eyes are fierce, but thine 330
Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion, to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in. Thou better know'st 335
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
Thy half of the kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endowed.

REGAN

Good sir, to th' purpose.

LEAR

Who put my man i'th' stocks?

[Trumpets within]

CORNWALL

What trumpet's that? 340

Enter Oswald the steward

REGAN

I know't, my sister's. This approves her letters
That she would soon be here. (*To Oswald*) Is your lady
come?

LEAR

This is a slave whose easy-borrowed pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her a follows.
[He strikes Oswald]
Out, varlet, from my sight!

CORNWALL

What means your grace? 345

Enter Gonoril

GONORIL

Who struck my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on't.

LEAR

Who comes here? O heavens,

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause! Send down and take my part. 350
(*To Gonoril*) Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONORIL

Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?
All's not offence that indiscretion finds
And dotage terms so.

LEAR

O sides, you are too tough!

355

Will you yet hold?±±How came my man i'th' stocks?

CORNWALL

I set him there, sir; but his own disorders
Deserved much less advancement.

LEAR

You? Did you?

REGAN

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If till the expiration of your month 360
You will return and sojourn with my sister,
Dismissing half your train, come then to me.
I am now from home, and out of that provision
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.

LEAR

Return to her, and fifty men dismissed? 365
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose

To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,
To wage against the enmity of the air
Necessity's sharp pinch. Return with her?
Why, the hot-blood in France that dowerless took 370
Our youngest born±±I could as well be brought
To knee his throne and, squire-like, pension beg
To keep base life afoot. Return with her?
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter
To this detested groom.

GONORIL At your choice, sir. 375

LEAR

Now I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad.
I will not trouble thee, my child. Farewell.
We'll no more meet, no more see one another.
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter±±
Or rather a disease that lies within my flesh, 380
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, an embosseÁd carbuncle
In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee.
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it.
I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot, 385
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure.
I can be patient, I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN Not altogether so, sir.

I look not for you yet, nor am provided 390
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you are old, and so±±
But she knows what she does.

LEAR Is this well spoken now?

REGAN

I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers? 395
Is it not well? What should you need of more,
Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger
Speaks 'gainst so great a number? How in a house
Should many people under two commands
Hold amity? 'Tis hard, almost impossible. 400

GONORIL

Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants, or from mine?

REGAN

Why not, my lord? If then they chanced to slack you,
We could control them. If you will come to me±±
For now I spy a danger±±I entreat you 405
To bring but five-and-twenty; to no more
Will I give place or notice.

LEAR I gave you all.

REGAN And in good time you gave it.

LEAR

Made you my guardians, my depositaries, 410
But kept a reservation to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five-and-twenty, Regan? Said you so?

REGAN

And speak't again, my lord. No more with me.

LEAR

Those wicked creatures yet do seem well favoured 415
When others are more wicked. Not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. (*To Gonoril*) I'll go with
thee.

Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

GONORIL

Hear me, my lord.

What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five, 420
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN

What needs one?

LEAR

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs, 425
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou, gorgeous, wearest,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need±±
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. 430
You see me here, you gods, a poor old fellow,
As full of grief as age, wretcheÁd in both.

If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger. 435
O, let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall±±I will do such things±±
What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be 440
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep.
No, I'll not weep.

[Storm within]

I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
Or ere I'll weep.±±O fool, I shall go mad! 445
*Exeunt Lear, Gloucester, Kent, [Knight,]
and Fool*

CORNWALL

Let us withdraw. 'Twill be a storm.

REGAN

This house is little. The old man and his people
Cannot be well bestowed.

GONORIL

'Tis his own blame;
Hath put himself from rest, and must needs taste his
folly.

REGAN

For his particular I'll receive him gladly, 450
But not one follower.

CORNWALL

So am I purposed. Where is my lord of Gloucester?

REGAN

Followed the old man forth.
Enter the Duke of Gloucester

He is returned.

GLOUCESTER

The King is in high rage, and will I know not whither.

REGAN

'Tis good to give him way. He leads himself. 455

GONORIL *(to Gloucester)*

My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds

Do sorely rustle. For many miles about
There's not a bush.

REGAN

O sir, to wilful men

The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.
He is attended with a desperate train,
And what they may incense him to, being apt
To have his ear abused, wisdom bids fear.

460

CORNWALL

Shut up your doors, my lord. 'Tis a wild night.
My Regan counsels well. Come out o'th' storm.
Exeunt

465