

The History of King Lear

Sc.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
Thy master, whom thou lov'st, shall find thee full of
labour.

Enter King Lear and servants 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.

LEAR What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with 10
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
little, to fear judgement, to fight when I cannot choose, 15
and to eat no fish.

LEAR What art thou?

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

LEAR If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a king, 20
thou'rt poor enough. What wouldst thou?

KENT Service.

LEAR Who wouldst thou serve?

KENT You.

LEAR Dost thou know me, fellow? 25

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

LEAR What's that?

KENT Authority.

LEAR What services canst do? 30

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.

LEAR How old art thou?

35

KENT Not so young 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.±± 40
Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave, my fool? Go
you and call my fool hither.

[Exit one]

Enter Oswald the steward

You, sirrah, where's my daughter?

OSWALD So please you±±

Exit

LEAR What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back. 45

Exeunt Servant [and Kent]

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

Enter the Earl of Kent [and a Servant]

How now, where's that mongrel?

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

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

50

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

LEAR A would not?

SERVANT My lord, I know not what the matter is, but to
my judgement your highness is not entertained with 55
that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's
a great abatement appears as well in the general
dependants as in the Duke himself also, and your
daughter.

LEAR Ha, sayst thou so?

60

SERVANT 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 purport of unkindness. I will look further into't. But where's this fool? I have not seen him these two days.

SERVANT Since my young lady's going into France, sir, 70
the fool hath much pined away.

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

[Exit one]

Go you, call hither my fool.

[Exit one]

Enter Oswald the steward [crossing the stage]

O you, sir, you, sir, come you hither. Who am I, sir? 75

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 this, my lord, I beseech you pardon me. 80

LEAR Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?

[Lear strikes him]

OSWALD I'll not be struck, my lord±±

KENT *(tripping him)* Nor tripped neither, you base football player.

LEAR *(to Kent)* I thank thee, fellow. Thou serv'st me, and 85
I'll love thee.

KENT *(to Oswald)* Come, sir, I'll teach you differences. Away, away. If you will measure your lubber's length again, tarry; but away if you have wisdom.

Exit Oswald

LEAR Now, friendly knave, I thank thee. 90

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?

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

KENT Why, fool? 95

FOOL Why, for taking one's part that's out of favour. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow hath banished two on's daughters and done the third

a blessing against his will. If thou follow him, thou 100
must needs wear my coxcomb. (*To Lear*) How now,
nuncle? Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters.

LEAR Why, my boy?

FOOL If I gave them my living I'd keep my coxcombs
myself. There's mine; beg another off thy daughters. 105

LEAR Take heed, sirrah±±the whip.

FOOL Truth is a dog that must to kennel. He must be
whipped out when Lady the brach may stand by the
fire and stink.

LEAR A pestilent gall to me! 110

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

LEAR Do.

FOOL Mark it, uncle.
Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest, 115
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest,
Leave thy drink and thy whore, 120
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score.

LEAR This is nothing, fool.

FOOL Then, like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer, you 125
gave me nothing for't. Can you make no use of nothing,
uncle?

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. 130

LEAR A bitter fool.

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

LEAR No, lad. Teach me.

FOOL [*sings*]
That lord that counselled thee 135
To give away thy land,
Come, place him here by me;
Do thou for him stand.

The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear, 140
The one in motley here,
The other found out there.

LEAR Dost thou call me fool, boy?

FOOL All thy other titles thou hast given away. That thou
wast born with. 145

KENT (*to Lear*) This is not altogether fool, my lord.

FOOL No, faith; lords and great men will not let me. If I
had a monopoly out, they would have part on't, and
ladies too, they will not let me have all the fool to
myself±±they'll be snatching. Give me an egg, nuncle, 150
and I'll give thee two crowns.

LEAR What two crowns shall they be?

FOOL Why, after I have cut the egg in the middle and eat
up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou
clovest thy crown i'th' middle and gavest away both 155
parts, thou borest thy ass o'th' back o'er the dirt. Thou
hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou 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 wit in a year, 160
For wise men are grown foppish.
They know not how their wits do wear,
Their manners are so apish.

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

FOOL I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy 165
daughters thy mother; for when thou gavest them the
rod and puttest down thine own breeches,

[Sings]

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep 170
And go the fools among.

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

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

FOOL I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. 175
They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou wilt

have me whipped for lying, and sometime I am whipped
for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind of thing
than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou
hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing in the 180
middle.

Enter Gonoril

Here comes one of the parings.

LEAR

How now, daughter, what makes that frontlet on?
Methinks you are too much o' late i'th' frown.

FOOL Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need 185
to care for her frown. Now thou art an O without a
figure. I am better than thou art, now. I am a fool;
thou art nothing. *[To Gonoril]* Yes, forsooth, I will hold
my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say
nothing. 190

[Sings]

Mum, mum.

He that keeps neither crust nor crumb,
Weary of all, shall want some.

That's a shelled peascod.

GONORIL *(to Lear)*

Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool, 195
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth
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, 200
By what yourself too late have spoke and done,
That you protect this course, and put it on
By your allowance; which if you should, the fault
Would not scape censure, nor the redress sleep
Which in the tender of a wholesome weal 205
Might in their working do you that offence,
That else were shame, that then necessity
Must call discreet proceedings.

FOOL *(to Lear)* For, you trow, nuncle,
[Sings]

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long 210

That it had it head bit off by it young;
so out went the candle, and we were left darkling.

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

GONORIL
Come, sir, I would you would make use of that good
wisdom
Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away 215
These dispositions that of late transform you
From what you rightly are.

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

LEAR
Doth any here know me? Why, this is not Lear. 220
Doth Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargied. Sleeping or waking, ha?
Sure, 'tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am? 225
Lear's shadow? I would learn that, for by the marks
Of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason
I should be false persuaded I had daughters.

FOOL Which they will make an obedient father.

LEAR (to *Gonoril*)
Your name, fair gentlewoman?

GONORIL Come, sir, 230
This admiration is much of the savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
Understand my purposes aright,
As you are old and reverend, should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires, 235
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn, epicurism
And lust make more like to a tavern, or brothel,
Than a great palace. The shame itself doth speak 240
For instant remedy. Be thou desired,
By her that else will take the thing she begs,
A little to disquantity your train,
And the remainder that shall still depend
To be such men as may besort your age, 245

That know themselves and you.

LEAR Darkness and devils!

Saddle my horses, call my train together!±±

[Exit one or more]

Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee.

Yet have I left a daughter.

GONORIL

You strike my people, and your disordered rabble 250

Make servants of their betters.

Enter the Duke of Albany

LEAR

We that too late repent's±±O sir, are you come?

Is it your will that we±±prepare my horses.

[Exit one or more]

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,

More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child 255

Than the sea-monster±± (to *Gonoril*) 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, 260

How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,

That, 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!

Beat at this gate that let thy folly in 265

And thy dear judgement out.±±Go, go, my people!

ALBANY

My lord, I am guiltless as I am ignorant.

LEAR

It may be so, my lord. Hark, nature, hear:

Dear goddess, suspend thy purpose if

Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful.270

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,

Create her child of spleen, that it may live 275

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
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel±±280
That she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.±±Go, go, my people!
Exeunt Lear, [Kent, Fool, and servants]

ALBANY

Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

GONORIL

Never afflict yourself to know the cause, 285
But let his disposition have that scope
That dotage gives it.

Enter King Lear [and his Fool]

LEAR

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

ALBANY

What is the matter, sir?

LEAR

I'll tell thee. *(To Gonoril)* Life and death! I am
ashamed 290
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus,
That these hot tears, that break from me perforce
And should make thee±±worst blasts and fogs upon
thee!

Untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes, 295
BewEEP this cause again I'll pluck you out
And cast you, with the waters that you make,
To temper clay. Yea,
Is't come to this? Yet have I left a daughter
Whom, I am sure, is kind and comfortable. 300
When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
She'll flay thy wolVish visage. Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever; thou shalt, I warrant thee.

Exit

GONORIL

Do you mark that, my lord? 305

ALBANY

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

GONORIL

Come, sir, no more.

±±

You, more knave than fool, after your master!

FOOL Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry, and take the fool
with thee. 310

A fox when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter.
So, the fool follows after. 315

Exit

GONORIL What, Oswald, ho!

Enter Oswald

OSWALD Here, madam.

GONORIL

What, have you writ this letter to my sister?

OSWALD Yes, madam.

GONORIL

Take you some company, and away to horse. 320
Inform her full of my particular fears,
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more. Get you gone,
And after, your retinue.

Exit Oswald

Now, my lord,

This milky gentleness and course of yours,
Though I dislike not, yet under pardon
You're much more ataxed for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness. 325

ALBANY

How far your eyes may pierce I cannot tell.
Striving to better aught, we mar what's well. 330

GONORIL Nay, then±±

ALBANY Well, well, the event.

Exeunt