

The History of King Lear

Sc.2

Enter Edmund the bastard

EDMUND

Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines 5
Lag of a brother? Why `bastard'? Wherefore `base',
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true
As honest madam's issue?
Why brand they us with `base, base bastardy', 10
Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a stale, dull-eyed bed go
To the creating a whole tribe of fops
Got 'tween a sleep and wake? Well then, 15
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate. Well, my legitimate, if
This letter speed and my invention thrive,
Edmund the base shall to th' legitimate. 20
I grow, I prosper. Now gods, stand up for bastards!

*Enter the Duke of Gloucester. Edmund reads
a letter*

GLOUCESTER

Kent banished thus, and France in choler parted,
And the King gone tonight, subscribed his power,
Confined to exhibition±±all this done
Upon the gad?±±Edmund, how now? What news? 25

EDMUND So please your lordship, none.

GLOUCESTER Why so earnestly seek you to put up that
letter?

EDMUND I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER What paper were you reading? 30

EDMUND Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER No? What needs then that terrible dispatch
of it into your pocket? The quality of nothing hath not
such need to hide itself. Let's see. Come, if it be nothing
I shall not need spectacles. 35

EDMUND I beseech you, sir, pardon me. It is a letter from
my brother that I have not all o'er-read; for so much
as I have perused, I find it not fit for your liking.

GLOUCESTER Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND I shall offend either to detain or give it. The 40
contents, as in part I understand them, are to blame.

GLOUCESTER Let's see, let's see.

EDMUND I hope for my brother's justification he wrote
this but as an assay or taste of my virtue.

He gives Gloucester a letter

GLOUCESTER (*reads*) `This policy of age makes the world 45
bitter to the best of our times, keeps our fortunes from
us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find
an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged
tyranny, who sways not as it hath power but as it is
suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. 50
If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should
enjoy half his revenue for ever and live the beloved of
your brother,
Edgar.'

Hum, conspiracy! `Slept till I waked him, you should 55
enjoy half his revenue'±±my son Edgar! Had he a hand
to write this, a heart and brain to breed it in? When
came this to you? Who brought it?

EDMUND It was not brought me, my lord, there's the
cunning of it. I found it thrown in at the casement of 60
my closet.

GLOUCESTER You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMUND If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear
it were his; but in respect of that, I would fain think
it were not. 65

GLOUCESTER It is his.

EDMUND It is his hand, my lord, but I hope his heart is
not in the contents.

GLOUCESTER Hath he never heretofore sounded you in this
business? 70

EDMUND Never, my lord; but I have often heard him maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age and fathers declining, his father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage the revenue.

GLOUCESTER O villain, villain±±his very opinion in the 75 letter! Abhorred villain, unnatural, detested, brutish villain±±worse than brutish! Go, sir, seek him, ay, apprehend him. Abominable villain! Where is he?

EDMUND I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother 80 till you can derive from him better testimony of this intent, you should run a certain course; where if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn 85 down my life for him he hath wrote this to feel my affection to your honour, and to no further pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER Think you so?

EDMUND If your honour judge it meet, I will place you 90 where you shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance have your satisfaction, and that without any further delay than this very evening.

GLOUCESTER He cannot be such a monster.

EDMUND Nor is not, sure. 95

GLOUCESTER To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him±±heaven and earth! Edmund seek him out, wind me into him. I pray you, frame your business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution. 100

EDMUND I shall seek him, sir, presently, convey the business as I shall see means, and acquaint you withal.

GLOUCESTER These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason thus and thus, yet nature finds itself 105 scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities mutinies, in countries discords, palaces treason, the bond cracked between son and father. Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing. Do it carefully. And the noble and 110

true-hearted Kent banished, his offence honesty!
Strange, strange!

Exit

EDMUND This is the excellent foppery of the world: that when we are sick in fortune±±often the surfeit of our own behaviour±±we make guilty of our disasters the 115 sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treacherers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are 120 evil in by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of stars! My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and 125 lecherous. Fut! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star of the firmament twinkled on my bastardy. Edgar . . .

Enter Edgar

and on's cue out he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy; mine is villainous melancholy, with a sigh 130 like them of Bedlam.±±O, these eclipses do portend these divisions.

EDGAR How now, brother Edmund, what serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this 135 other day, what should follow these eclipses.

EDGAR Do you busy yourself about that?

EDMUND I promise you, the effects he writ of succeed unhappily, as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent, death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient 140 amities, divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles, needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

EDGAR How long have you been a sectary astronomical? 145

EDMUND Come, come, when saw you my father last?

EDGAR Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND Spake you with him?

EDGAR Two hours together.

EDMUND Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him by word or countenance? 150

EDGAR None at all.

EDMUND Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him, and at my entreaty forbear his presence till some little time hath qualified the heat of his displeasure, 155 which at this instant so rageth in him that with the mischief of your person it would scarce allay.

EDGAR Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND That's my fear, brother. I advise you to the best. Go armed. I am no honest man if there be any good 160 meaning towards you. I have told you what I have seen and heard but faintly, nothing like the image and horror of it. Pray you, away.

EDGAR Shall I hear from you anon?

EDMUND I do serve you in this business. 165

Exit Edgar

A credulous father, and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy. I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit. 170
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.

Exit