

The Tragedy of King Lear

3.4

*Enter King Lear, the Earl of Kent disguised, and
Lear's Fool*

KENT

Here is the place, my lord. Good my lord, enter.
The tyranny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure.

Storm still

LEAR

Let me alone.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR

Wilt break my heart?

KENT

I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter. 5

LEAR

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin. So 'tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fixed,
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'dst shun a bear,
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea 10
Thou'dst meet the bear i'th' mouth. When the mind's
free,

The body's delicate. This tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there: filial ingratitude.
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand 15
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home.
No, I will weep no more.±±In such a night
To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure.
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all±± 20
O, that way madness lies. Let me shun that.
No more of that.

KENT

Good my lord, enter here.

LEAR

Prithee, go in thyself. Seek thine own ease.
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder

On things would hurt me more; but I'll go in. 25
(To Fool) In, boy; go first. *[Kneeling]* You houseless
poverty±±

Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

Exit Fool

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, 30
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them 35
And show the heavens more just.

*Enter Lear's Fool, [and Edgar as a Bedlam beggar
in the hovel]*

EDGAR

Fathom and half! Fathom and half! Poor Tom!

FOOL Come not in here, nuncle. Here's a spirit. Help me,
help me!

KENT Give my thy hand. Who's there? 40

FOOL A spirit, a spirit. He says his name's Poor Tom.

KENT

What art thou that dost grumble there i'th' straw?
Come forth.

[Edgar comes forth]

EDGAR Away, the foul fiend follows me.

Thorough the sharp hawthorn blow the winds. Hm!
Go to thy cold bed and warm thee. 45

LEAR

Didst thou give all to thy two daughters,
And art thou come to this?

EDGAR Who gives anything to Poor Tom, whom the foul
fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through
ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath 50
laid knives under his pillow and halters in his pew, set
ratsbane by his porridge, made him proud of heart to
ride on a bay trotting-horse over four-inched bridges, to
course his own shadow for a traitor. Bless thy five wits,
Tom's a-cold! O, do, de, do, de, do de. Bless thee from 55

whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking. Do Poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes. There could I have him now, and there, and there again, and there.

Storm still

LEAR

Has his daughters brought him to this pass?

(*To Edgar*) Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou
give 'em all? 60

FOOL Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all
shamed.

LEAR (*to Edgar*)

Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air
Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT He hath no daughters, sir. 65

LEAR

Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.

(*To Edgar*) Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?

Judicious punishment: 'twas this flesh begot 70
Those pelican daughters.

EDGAR Pillicock sat on Pillicock Hill; alow, alow, loo, loo.

FOOL This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDGAR Take heed o'th' foul fiend; obey thy parents; keep
thy words' justice; swear not; commit not with man's 75
sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array.
Tom's a-cold.

LEAR What hast thou been?

EDGAR A servingman, proud in heart and mind, that
curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the lust 80
of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with
her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke
them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the
contriving of lust, and waked to do it. Wine loved I
deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the 85
Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog
in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in
madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes
nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman.
Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, 90

thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.
Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind, says
suum, mun, nonny. Dauphin, my boy! Boy, cessez; let
him trot by.

Storm still

LEAR Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with 95
thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man
no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the
worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool,
the cat no perfume. Ha, here's three on 's are
sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccom- 100
modated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked
animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come,
unbutton here.

Enter the Duke of Gloucester with a torch

FOOL Prithee, nuncle, be contented. 'Tis a naughty night
to swim in. Now a little fire in a wild field were like 105
an old lecher's heart±±a small spark, all the rest on 's
body cold. Look, here comes a walking fire.

EDGAR This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet. He begins at
curfew and walks till the first cock. He gives the web
and the pin, squints the eye, and makes the harelip; 110
mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor creature
of earth.

[Sings]

Swithin footed thrice the wold,
A met the night mare and her nine foal,
Bid her alight 115
And her troth plight,
And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

KENT *(to Lear)*
How fares your grace?

LEAR What's he?

KENT *(to Gloucester)* Who's there? What is't you seek?

GLOUCESTER What are you there? Your names? 120

EDGAR Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad,
the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the
fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats
cawdung for salads, swallows the old rat and the ditch-
dog, drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who

is whipped from tithing to tithing, and stocked,
punished, and imprisoned; who hath had three suits
to his back, six shirts to his body,

Horse to ride, and weapon to wear;

But mice and rats and such small deer

130

Have been Tom's food for seven long year.

Beware my follower. Peace, Smulkin; peace, thou fiend!

GLOUCESTER *(to Lear)*

What, hath your grace no better company?

EDGAR

The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.

Modo he's called, and Mahu.

135

GLOUCESTER *(to Lear)*

Our flesh and blood, my lord, is grown so vile

That it doth hate what gets it.

EDGAR

Poor Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER *(to Lear)*

Go in with me. My duty cannot suffer

T'obey in all your daughters' hard commands.

Though their injunction be to bar my doors

140

And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,

Yet have I ventured to come seek you out

And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

LEAR

First let me talk with this philosopher.

(To Edgar) What is the cause of thunder?

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KENT

Good my lord, take his offer; go into th' house.

LEAR

I'll talk a word with this same learneÁd Theban.

(To Edgar) What is your study?

EDGAR

How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.

LEAR

Let me ask you one word in private.

150

They converse apart

KENT *(to Gloucester)*

Importune him once more to go, my lord.

His wits begin t'unsettle.

GLOUCESTER

Canst thou blame him?

Storm still

His daughters seek his death. Ah, that good Kent,
He said it would be thus, poor banished man!
Thou sayst the King grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend, 155
I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
Now outlawed from my blood; a sought my life
But lately, very late. I loved him, friend;
No father his son dearer. True to tell thee,
The grief hath crazed my wits. What a night's this! 160
(*To Lear*) I do beseech your grace±±

LEAR

O, cry you mercy, sir!

(*To Edgar*) Noble philosopher, your company.

EDGAR

Tom's a-cold.

GLOUCESTER

In, fellow, there in t'hovel; keep thee warm.

LEAR

Come, let's in all.

KENT

This way, my lord.

LEAR

I will keep still with my philosopher.

With him!

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KENT (*to Gloucester*)

Good my lord, soothe him; let him take the fellow.

GLOUCESTER Take him you on.

KENT [*to Edgar*]

Sirrah, come on. Go along with us.

LEAR (*to Edgar*)

Come, good Athenian.

GLOUCESTER

No words, no words. Hush.

EDGAR

Child Roland to the dark tower came,

170

His word was still 'Fie, fo, and fum;

I smell the blood of a British man.'

Exeunt