

# The Tragedy of King Lear

## 4.1

*Enter Edgar as a Bedlam beggar*

**EDGAR**

Yet better thus and known to be contemned  
Than still contemned and flattered. To be worst,  
The low'st and most dejected thing of fortune,  
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.  
The lamentable change is from the best; 5  
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,  
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace.  
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst  
Owes nothing to thy blasts.

*Enter the Duke of Gloucester led by an Old Man*

But who comes

here?

My father, parti-eyed? World, world, O world! 10  
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,  
Life would not yield to age.

*[Edgar stands aside]*

**OLD MAN** *(to Gloucester)* O my good lord,  
I have been your tenant and your father's tenant  
These fourscore years.

**GLOUCESTER**

Away, get thee away, good friend, be gone. 15  
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;  
Thee they may hurt.

**OLD MAN** You cannot see your way.

**GLOUCESTER**

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.  
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen  
Our means secure us, and our mere defects 20  
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,  
The food of thy abuse—Ad father's wrath—  
Might I but live to see thee in my touch  
I'd say I had eyes again.

**OLD MAN** How now? Who's there?

**EDGAR** *(aside)*

O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'? 25  
I am worse than e'er I was.

**OLD MAN** (to Gloucester) 'Tis poor mad Tom.

**EDGAR** (aside)  
And worse I may be yet. The worst is not  
So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'

**OLD MAN** (to Edgar) Fellow, where goest?

**GLOUCESTER** Is it a beggarman? 30

**OLD MAN** Madman and beggar too.

**GLOUCESTER**  
A has some reason, else he could not beg.  
I'th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,  
Which made me think a man a worm. My son  
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind 35  
Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more  
since.  
As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods;  
They kill us for their sport.

**EDGAR** (aside) How should this be?  
Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow,  
Ang'ring itself and others.  
*[He comes forward]*

Bless thee,  
master. 40

**GLOUCESTER**  
Is that the naked fellow?

**OLD MAN** Ay, my lord.

**GLOUCESTER**  
Get thee away. If for my sake  
Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain  
I'th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love,  
And bring some covering for this naked soul, 45  
Which I'll entreat to lead me.

**OLD MAN** Alack, sir, he is mad.

**GLOUCESTER**  
'Tis the time's plague when madmen lead the blind.  
Do as I bid thee; or rather do thy pleasure.  
Above the rest, be gone.

**OLD MAN**  
I'll bring him the best 'parel that I have, 50

Come on't what will.

*Exit*

**GLOUCESTER** Sirrah, naked fellow!

**EDGAR**

Poor Tom's a-cold. (*Aside*) I cannot daub it further.

**GLOUCESTER**

Come hither, fellow.

**EDGAR** (*aside*) And yet I must.

(*To Gloucester*) Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

**GLOUCESTER**

Know'st thou the way to Dover?

**EDGAR** Both stile and gate, horseway and footpath. Poor 55

Tom hath been scared out of his good wits. Bless thee,  
goodman's son, from the foul fiend.

**GLOUCESTER**

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens'  
plagues

Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched

Makes thee the happier. Heavens deal so still. 60

Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man

That slaves your ordinance, that will not see

Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly.

So distribution should undo excess,

And each man have enough. Dost thou know Dover? 65

**EDGAR** Ay, master.

**GLOUCESTER**

There is a cliff whose high and bending head

Looks fearfully in the confine—Ad deep.

Bring me but to the very brim of it

And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear 70

With something rich about me. From that place

I shall no leading need.

**EDGAR** Give me thy arm.

Poor Tom shall lead thee.

*Exit Edgar guiding Gloucester*