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The Tragedy of King Lear

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Act II, Scene 4

Before Gloucester's Castle; Kent in the stocks.

Enter Lear, Fool, and Gentleman.

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

Gentleman. As I learn'd,
The night before there was no purpose in them
Of this remove.

Earl of Kent. Hail to thee, noble master!

Lear. Ha!
Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

Earl of Kent. No, my lord.

Fool. Ha, ha! look! he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied by the head, 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.

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

Earl of Kent. It is both he and she-
Your son and daughter.

Lear. No.

Earl of Kent. Yes.

Lear. No, I say.

Earl of Kent. I say yea.

Lear. No, no, they would not!

Earl of Kent. Yes, they have.

Lear. By Jupiter, I swear no!

Earl of Kent. By Juno, I swear ay!

Lear. They durst not do't;
They would not, could not do't. 'Tis worse than murther

To do upon respect such violent outrage.
Resolve me with all modest haste which way
Thou mightst deserve or they impose this usage,
Coming from us.

Earl of Kent. My lord, when at their home
I did commend your Highness' letters to them,
Ere I was risen from the place that show'd
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,
Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth
From Goneril his mistress salutations;
Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,
Which presently they read; on whose contents,
They summon'd up their meiny, straight took horse,
Commanded me to follow and attend
The leisure of their answer, gave me cold looks,
And meeting here the other messenger,
Whose welcome I perceiv'd had poison'd mine-
Being the very fellow which of late
Display'd so saucily against your Highness-
Having more man than wit about me, drew.
He rais'd the house with loud and coward cries.
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth
The shame which here it suffers.

Fool. Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way.
Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind;
But fathers that bear bags
Shall see their children kind.
Fortune, that arrant whore,
Ne'er turns the key to th' poor.
But for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.

Lear. O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
Hysterica passio! Down, thou climbing sorrow!
Thy element's below! Where is this daughter?

Earl of Kent. With the Earl, sir, here within.

Lear. Follow me not;
Stay here. Exit.

Gentleman. Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

Earl of Kent. None.
How chance the King comes with so small a number?

Fool. An thou hadst been set i' th' stocks for that question, thou'dst well deserv'd it.

Earl of Kent. Why, fool?

Fool. We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no labouring i' th' winter. All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men, and there's not a nose among twenty 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 upward, let him draw 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.
That sir which serves and seeks for gain,

And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins 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;
The fool no knave, perdy.

Earl of Kent. Where learn'd you this, fool?

Fool. Not i' th' stocks, fool.
Enter Lear and Gloucester

Lear. Deny to speak with me? They are sick? they are weary?
They have travell'd all the night? Mere fetches-
The images of revolt and flying off!
Fetch me a better answer.

Earl of Gloucester. My dear lord,
You know the fiery quality of the Duke,
How unremovable and fix'd he is
In his own course.

Lear. Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!
Fiery? What quality? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester,
I'ld speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

Earl of Gloucester. Well, my good lord, I have inform'd them so.

Lear. Inform'd them? Dost thou understand me, man?

Earl of Gloucester. Ay, my good lord.

Lear. The King would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service.
Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood!
Fiery? the fiery Duke? Tell the hot Duke that-
No, but not yet! May be he is not well.
Infirmity doth still neglect all office
Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves
When nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind
To suffer with the body. I'll forbear;
And am fallen out with my more headier will,
To take the indispos'd and sickly fit
For the sound man.- Death on my state! Wherefore
Should he sit here? This act persuades me
That this remotion of the Duke and her
Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.
Go tell the Duke and 's wife I'ld speak with them-
Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me,
Or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum
Till it cry sleep to death.

Earl of Gloucester. I would have all well betwixt you. Exit.

Lear. O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

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

Enter Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester, Servants.

Lear. Good morrow to you both.

Duke of Cornwall. Hail to your Grace!

Kent here set at liberty.

Regan. I am glad to see your Highness.

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 tomb,
Sepulchring an adultress. *[To Kent]* O, are you free?
Some other time for that.- Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here!
[Lays his hand on his heart.]
I can scarce speak to thee. Thou'lt not believe
With how deprav'd a quality- O Regan!

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

Lear. Say, how is that?

Regan. I cannot think my sister in the least
Would fail her obligation. If, sir, perchance
She have restrain'd the riots of your followers,
'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end,
As clears her from all blame.

Lear. My curses on her!

Regan. O, sir, you are old!
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine. You should be rul'd, and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

Lear. Ask her forgiveness?
Do you but mark how this becomes the house:
'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old. *[Kneels.]*
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.
Return you to my sister.

Lear. *[rises]* Never, Regan!
She hath abated me of half my train;
Look'd black upon me; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart.
All the stor'd vengeances of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
You taking airs, with lameness!

Duke of Cornwall. Fie, sir, fie!

Lear. You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the pow'rful sun,

To fall and blast her pride!

Regan. O the blest gods! so will you wish on me
When the rash mood is on.

Lear. No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness. Her eyes are fierce; but thine
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
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,
Wherein I thee endow'd.

Regan. Good sir, to th' purpose.

Tucket within.

Lear. Who put my man i' th' stocks?

Duke of Cornwall. What trumpet's that?

Regan. I know't- my sister's. This approves her letter,
That she would soon be here.
[Enter [Oswald the] Steward.]
Is your lady come?

Lear. This is a slave, whose easy-borrowed pride
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.
Out, varlet, from my sight!

Duke of Cornwall. What means your Grace?

Enter Goneril.

Lear. Who stock'd my servant? Regan, I have good hope
Thou didst not know on't.- 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!
[To Goneril] Art not asham'd to look upon this beard?-
O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

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

Lear. O sides, you are too tough!
Will you yet hold? How came my man i' th' stocks?

Duke of Cornwall. I set him there, sir; but his own disorders
Deserv'd much less advancement.

Lear. You? Did you?

Regan. I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.
If, till the expiration of your month,
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 dismiss'd?
No, rather I abjure all roofs, and choose
To wage against the enmity o' th' air,
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl-
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her?
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took
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. *[Points at Oswald.]*

Goneril. At your choice, sir.

Lear. 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's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague sore, an embossed 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
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.
I look'd not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister;
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so-
But she knows what she does.

Lear. Is this well spoken?

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

Goneril. 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 chanc'd to slack ye,
We could control them. If you will come to me
(For now I spy a danger), I entreat you
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;
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 look well-favour'd
When others are more wicked; not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. *[To Goneril]* I'll go with thee.
Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

Goneril. Hear, me, my lord.
What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

Regan. What need one?

Lear. O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
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 wear'st
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need-
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched 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,
And 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
The terrors of the earth! You think I'll weep.
No, I'll not weep.
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!

Exeunt Lear, Gloucester, Kent, and Fool. Storm and tempest.

Duke of Cornwall. Let us withdraw; 'twill be a storm.

Regan. This house is little; the old man and 's people
Cannot be well bestow'd.

Goneril. 'Tis his own blame; hath put himself from rest
And must needs taste his folly.

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

Goneril. So am I purpos'd.
Where is my Lord of Gloucester?

Duke of Cornwall. Followed the old man forth.
[Enter Gloucester.]
He is return'd.

Earl of Gloucester. The King is in high rage.

Duke of Cornwall. Whither is he going?

Earl of Gloucester. He calls to horse, but will I know not whither.

Duke of Cornwall. 'Tis best to give him way; he leads himself.

Goneril. My lord, entreat him by no means to stay. **1605**

Earl of Gloucester. Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds
Do sorely ruffle. For many miles about
There's scarce a bush.

Regan. O, sir, to wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure **1610**
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 abus'd, wisdom bids fear.

Duke of Cornwall. Shut up your doors, my lord: 'tis a wild night. **1615**
My Regan counsels well. Come out o' th' storm. *[Exeunt.]*

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