

back. [*Exit a Knight.*]—Where's my Fool, ho?—I think the world's asleep.—

Re-enter the Knight.

How now! where's that mongrel?

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

Lear. Why came not the slave back to me when I call'd him?

Knight. Sir, he answered me in the roundest⁷ manner, he would not.

Lear. He would not!

Knight. My lord, I know not what the matter is; but, to my judgment, your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont: there's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also and your daughter.

Lear. Ha! say'st thou so?

Knight. I beseech you, pardon me, my lord, if I be mistaken; for my duty cannot be silent when I think your Highness wrong'd.

Lear. Thou but remember'st me of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very pretence⁸ and purpose of unkindness: I will look further into't.—But where's my Fool? I have not seen him this two days.

⁷ Round is blunt, downright, plain-spoken. So in *King Henry the Fifth*, iv. 1: "Your reproof is something too round: I should be angry with you, if the time were convenient."

⁸ "Jealous curiosity" seems to mean a suspicious, prying scrutiny, on the watch to detect slights and neglects.—*Pretence*, again, for *intent* or *design*.—*Very* in the sense of *real* or *deliberate*.—The passage is rather curious as discovering a sort of double consciousness in the old King.

Knight. Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the Fool hath much pined away.⁹

Lear. No more of that; I have noted it well.—Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her. [*Exit an Attendant.*]—Go you, call hither my Fool.—

[*Exit an Attendant.*]

Re-enter OSWALD.

O, you sir, you, come you hither, sir: who am I, sir?

Osw. My lady's father.

Lear. *My lady's father!* my lord's knave: you dog! you slave! you cur!

Osw. I am none of these, my lord; I beseech your pardon.

Lear. Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?

[*Striking him.*]

Osw. I'll not be struck, my lord.

Kent. Nor tripp'd neither, you base foot-ball player.

[*Tripping up his heels.*]

Lear. I thank thee, fellow; thou servest me, and I'll love thee.

Kent. Come, sir, arise, away! I'll teach you differences: away, away! If you will measure your lubber's length again, tarry: but away! go to; have you wisdom? so.

[*Pushes OSWALD out.*]

⁹ This aptly touches the keynote of the Fool's character. "The Fool," says Coleridge, "is no comic buffoon to make the groundlings laugh,—no forced condescension of Shakespeare's genius to the taste of his audience. Accordingly the Poet prepares for his introduction, which he never does with any of his common clowns and Fools, by bringing him into living connection with the pathos of the play. He is as wonderful a creation as Caliban: his wild babblings and inspired idiocy articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene."

Lear. Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee: there's earnest of thy service. [Giving him money.]

Enter the FOOL.

Fool. Let me hire him too: — here's my coxcomb.¹⁰
[Offering KENT his cap.]

Lear. How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?

Fool. Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.

Kent. Why, Fool?

Fool. Why, for taking one's part that's out of favour. Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits,¹¹ thou'lt catch cold shortly: there, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow has banish'd two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will: if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb. — How now, nuncle!¹² Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

Lear. Why, my boy?

Fool. If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs myself. There's mine; beg another of thy daughters.

Lear. Take heed, sirrah, — the whip.

Fool. Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipp'd

¹⁰ A *coxcomb* was one of the badges of an "allowed Fool." It was a cap with a piece of red cloth sewn upon the top, to resemble the comb of a cock. A small bell was added; so that "cap and bell" was sometimes a Fool's designation.

¹¹ To "smile as the wind sits" is to fall in with and humour the disposition of those in power, or to curry favour with those who have rewards to bestow. The Fool means that Kent has earned the name of fool by not doing this, and should wear the appropriate badge.

¹² A familiar contraction of *mine uncle*. It seems that the common appellation of the old licensed Fool to his superiors was *uncle*. In Beaumont and Fletcher's *Pilgrim*, when Alinda assumes the character of a Fool, she uses the same language. She meets Alfonso, and calls him *nuncle*; to which he replies by calling her *naunt*.

out, when Lady, the brach,¹³ may stand by the fire, and stink.

Lear. A pestilent gall to me!

Fool. Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

Lear. Do.

Fool. Mark it, nuncle:

(Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,¹⁴
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,¹⁵
Set less than thou throwest;
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score.)

Kent. This is nothing, Fool.

Fool. Then 'tis like the breath¹⁶ of an unfee'd lawyer; you gave me nothing for't. — Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

Lear. Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing.

Fool. [To KENT.] Pr'ythee, tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to: he will not believe a fool.

Lear. A bitter Fool.

Fool. Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet one?

¹³ It appears that *brach* was a general term for a keen-scented hound. *Lady* is here used as the name of a female hound.

¹⁴ That is, do not lend all that thou hast: *owe* for *own*.

¹⁵ To *throw* is to believe. The precept is admirable. — *Set*, in the next line, means *stake*: stake less than the value of what you throw *for* in the dice.

¹⁶ *Breath* is here used for that in which a lawyer's breath is sometimes spent, — *words*.

Lear. No, lad; teach me.

Fool. That lord that counsell'd thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
Or do thou for him stand:
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear;
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.

Kent. 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 fool to myself; they'll be snatching.— Give me an egg, nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns.

Lear. What two crowns shall they be?

Fool. Why, after I have cut the egg i' the middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i' the middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back over the dirt:¹⁷ 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 whipp'd that first finds it so.

[Sings.] *Fools had ne'er less grace in a year;*¹⁸

For wise men are grown foppish,

¹⁷ Alluding, no doubt, to the fable of the old man and his ass.

¹⁸ "There never was a time when fools were less in favour; and the reason is, that they were never so little wanted, for wise men now supply their place."

*And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.*

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

Fool. I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers: for when thou gavest them the rod,

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

Pr'ythee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy Fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie.

Lear. An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipp'd.

Fool. I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they'll have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than a Fool: and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; ("thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' the middle.") Here comes one o' the parings.

Enter GONERIL.

Lear. How now, daughter! what makes that frontlet on?¹⁹ Methinks you are too much of late i' the frown.

Fool. Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing.— [To GON.] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my

¹⁹ "What means that frown on your brow?" or, "What business has it there?" The verb to *make* was often used thus. A *frontlet* is said to have been a cloth worn on the forehead by ladies to prevent wrinkles. Of course Goneril enters with a *cloud of anger* in her face. So in *Zepheria*, 1594: "And vayne thy face with *frownes* as with a *frontlet*."

tongue: so your face bids me, though you say nothing.
Mum, mum,

He that keeps nor crust nor crum,

Weary of all, shall want some. —

That's a sheal'd peascod.²⁰ [Pointing to LEAR.

Gon. Not only, sir, this your all-licensed Fool,

But other of your insolent retinue

Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth

In rank and not-to-be-endurèd riots.

Sir,

I had thought, by making this well known unto you,

T' have found a safe redress; but now grow fearful,

By what yourself too late have spoke and done,

That you protect this course, and put it on

By your allowance; ²¹ which if you should, the fault

Would not 'scape censure, nor the redresses sleep,

Which, in the tender of a wholesome weal,²²

Might in their working do you that offence,

Which else were shame, that then necessity

Will call discreet proceeding.

Fool. For you trow, nuncle,

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,

That it had its head bit off by its young.²³

²⁰ Now a mere husk that contains nothing. *Cod*, or *peascod*, is the old name of what we call *pod*, or *peapod*.

²¹ To "put it on by your allowance" is to encourage it by your approval. Put on for *incite* or *set on* was very common. Also *allow* and its derivatives in the sense of *approve*. See *Hamlet*, page 134, note 6.

²² "The tender of a wholesome weal" is the taking care that the commonwealth be kept in a sound and healthy state. To *tender* a thing is to be careful of it. See *Hamlet*, page 73, note 27. *Wholesome* is here used proleptically. See *Macbeth*, page 113, note 11.

²³ Alluding to a trick which the cuckoo has of laying her eggs in the sparrow's nest, to be hatched, and the cuckoo's chicks fed by the sparrow,

So, out went the candle, and we were left darkling.²⁴

Lear. Are you our daughter?

Gon. Come, sir;

I would you would make use of that good wisdom

Whereof I know you're fraught; and put away

These dispositions, which of late transform you

From what you rightly are.

Fool. May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? — Whoop, Jug!²⁵ I love thee.

Lear. Doth any here know me? — Why, this is not Lear: doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his notion weakens, or his discernings are lethargied.²⁶ Ha! waking? 'tis not so. — Who is it that can tell me who I am? —

Fool. Lear's shadow, —

Lear. — I would learn that; for, by the marks of sovereignty, — knowledge and reason, — I should be false persuaded I had daughters.²⁷ —

till they get so big and so voracious as to scare away or kill their feeder. So in *1 King Henry the Fourth*, v. 1: —

And, being fed by us, you used us so
As that ungentle gull, the cuckoo-bird,
Useth the sparrow; did oppress our nest:
Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk,
That even our love durst not come near your sight
For fear of swallowing.

²⁴ To be left *darkling* is to be left in the dark.

²⁵ It does not well appear what is the meaning or purpose of *Jug*. Perhaps it is used as a significant name. Ben Jonson has it as the name of one of his characters in *The New Inn*: "JUG, the Tapster, a thoroughfare of news."

²⁶ *Notion* and *discernings* are evidently meant here as equivalent terms. *Notion* for *mind*, *judgment*, or *understanding*, occurs repeatedly. So that the meaning is, "Either his mind is breaking down, or else it has fallen into a lethargy." See *Macbeth*, page 101, note 16.

²⁷ Here "marks of sovereignty," as I take it, are *sovereign* marks, and

Fool. — which they will make an obedient father.²⁸

Lear. Your name, fair gentlewoman?

Gon. This admiration,²⁹ sir, is much o' the savour
Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you
To understand my purposes aright :
As you are old and reverend, you should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires ;
Men so disorder'd, so debauch'd, and bold,
That this our Court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn. The shame itself doth speak
For instant remedy : be, then, 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,
Which know themselves and you.

Lear. Darkness and devils ! —
Saddle my horses ; call my train together. —
Degenerate bastard ! I'll not trouble thee :
Yet have I left a daughter.

Gon. You strike my people ; and your disorder'd rabble
Make servants of their betters.

Enter ALBANY.

Lear. Woe, that too late repents. — [*To ALB.*] O, sir, are
you come ?

knowledge and reason in apposition with *marks*. So that the meaning is, "For knowledge and reason, which are our supreme guides or attributes, would persuade me I had daughters, though such is clearly not the case."

²⁸ It must be understood, that in the speech beginning "I would learn that," Lear is continuing his former speech, and answering his own question, without heeding the Fool's interruption. So, again, in this speech the Fool continues his former one, *which* referring to *shadow*.

²⁹ *Admiration* in its Latin sense of *wonder*.

Is it your will? Speak, sir. — Prepare my horses. —
(*Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,*)
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster !³⁰

Alb. Pray, sir, be patient.

Lear. [*To GON.*] Detested kite ! thou liest :
My train are men of choice and rarest³¹ parts,
That all particulars of duty know ;
And in the most exact regard support
The worship³² of their name. — O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show !
Which, like an engine,³³ wrench'd my frame of nature
From the fix'd place, drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear !
Beat at this gate that let thy folly in, [*Striking his head.*]
And thy dear judgment out ! — Go, go, my people.

Alb. My lord, I'm guiltless, as I'm ignorant
Of what hath moved you.

Lear. It may be so, my lord. — Hear, Nature, hear !
Dear goddess, hear ! suspend thy purpose, if
Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful !
Dry up in her the organs of increase ;

³⁰ Referring, probably, to the dreadful beast that made such havoc with the virgin daughters of old Troy. Alluded to again in *The Merchant*, iii. 2 : "The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy to the sea-monster." The story is, that the King's daughter, Hesione, being demanded by the sea-monster, and being chained to a rock for his dinner, Hercules slew the beast, and delivered the lady.

³¹ Here the superlative sense in *rarest* extends back over *choice*. We have a like instance in *Measure for Measure*, iv. 6 : "The generous and gravest citizens." The usage was common.

³² *Worship* was continually used just as *honour* is now, only meaning *less*. So "your *Worship*" was a lower title than "your *Honour*."

³³ *Engine* for *rack*, the old instrument of torture.

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,
 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
 How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
 To have a thankless child! — Away, away!³⁴ [Exit.

Alb. Now, gods that we adore, whereof comes this?

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

Re-enter LEAR.

Lear. What, fifty of my followers, at a clap!
 Within a fortnight!

Alb. What's the matter, sir?

Lear. I'll tell thee. — [To *GON.*] Life and death! I am
 ashamed

That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;
 That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
 Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
 Th' untented woundings³⁵ of a father's curse,

³⁴ In Lear old age itself is a character; its natural imperfections being increased by life-long habits of receiving prompt obedience. Any addition of individuality would have been unnecessary and painful; for the relations of others to him, of wondrous fidelity and of frightful ingratitude, alone sufficiently distinguish him. Thus Lear becomes the open play-room of nature's passions. — COLERIDGE.

³⁵ The *untented woundings* are the *rankling* or *never-healing wounds* inflicted by parental malediction. To *tent* is to *probe*: *untented*, therefore, is *too deep to be probed*.

Pierce every sense about thee! — Old fond eyes,
 Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out,
 And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
 To temper clay. — Ha, is it come to this?
 Let it be so: I have another daughter,
 Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable:³⁶
 When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
 She'll flay thy wolfish 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.

[*Exeunt* LEAR, KENT, and Attendants.]

Gon. Do you mark that, my lord?³⁷

Alb. I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
 To the great love I bear you, —

Gon. Pray you, content. — What, Oswald, ho! —
 [To the *FOOL.*] You, sir, more knave than fool, after your
 master.

Fool. Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry, and take the Fool
 with thee. —

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. [Exit.

Gon. This man hath had good counsel: a hundred knights!
 'Tis politic and safe to let him keep
 At point³⁸ a hundred knights: yes, that, on every dream,

³⁶ *Comfortable* in an active sense, as *giving* comfort. Often so.

³⁷ Albany, though his heart is on the King's side, is reluctant to make a square issue with his wife; and she thinks to work upon him by calling his attention pointedly to Lear's threat of resuming the kingdom.

³⁸ *At point* is *completely armed*, and so ready on the slightest notice.

Each buz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy. — Oswald, I say! —

Alb. Well, you may fear too far.³⁹

Gon. Safer than trust too far :
Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be harm'd : I know his heart.
What he hath utter'd I have writ my sister :
If she sustain him and his hundred knights,
When I have show'd th' unfitness, —

Enter OSWALD.

How now, Oswald !

What, have ye writ that letter to my sister ?

Osw. Ay, madam.

Gon. Take you some company, and away to horse :
Inform her full of my particular fear ;
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more.⁴⁰ So get you gone,
And hasten your return. [*Exit OSWALD.*]— No, no, my lord ;
This milky gentleness and course⁴¹ of yours,
Though I condemn it not, yet, under pardon,
You are much more attack'd⁴² for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness.

³⁹ The monster Goneril prepares what is necessary, while the character of Albany renders a still more maddening grievance possible, namely, Regan and Cornwall in perfect sympathy of monstrosity. Not a sentiment, not an image, which can give pleasure on its own account, is admitted : whenever these creatures are introduced, and they are brought forward as little as possible, pure horror reigns throughout. — COLERIDGE.

⁴⁰ That is, make it more consistent and credible ; *strengthen* it.

⁴¹ "Milky and *gentle* course" is the meaning. See page 71, note 8.

⁴² The word *task* is frequently used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the sense of *tax*. So in the common phrase of our time, "Taken to task"; that is, *called to account*, or *reproved*.

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

Gon. Nay, then, —

Alb. Well, well ; the event.⁴³

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V. — *Court before the Same.*

Enter LEAR, KENT, and the FOOL.

Lear. Go you before to Gloster with these letters. Acquaint my daughter no further with any thing you know than comes from her demand out of the letter.¹ If your diligence be not speedy, I shall be there² afore you.

Kent. I will not sleep, my lord, till I have delivered your letter. [*Exit.*]

Fool. If a man's brains were in's heels, were't not in danger of kibes ?³

Lear. Ay, boy.

Fool. Then, I pr'ythee, be merry ; thy wit shall not go slip-shod.⁴

⁴³ As before implied, Albany shrinks from a word-storm with his helpmate, and so tells her, in effect, "Well, let us not quarrel about it, but wait and see how your course works."

¹ This instruction to Kent is very well-judged. The old King feels mortified at what has happened, and does not want Kent to volunteer any information about it to his other daughter.

² The word *there* shows that when the King says, "Go you before to Gloster," he means the town of Gloster, which Shakespeare chose to make the residence of the Duke of Cornwall, to increase the probability of his setting out late from thence on a visit to the Earl of Gloster. The old English earls usually resided in the counties from whence they took their titles. Lear, not finding his son-in-law and daughter at home, follows them to the Earl of Gloster's castle.

³ *Kibe* is an old name for a common heel-sore. In *The Tempest*, ii. 1, Antonio says of his conscience, "if 'twere a *kibe*, 'twould put me to my slipper."

⁴ I do not well see the force or application of this. Perhaps it is, "Thy

Lear. Ha, ha, ha!

Fool. Shalt see, thy other daughter will use thee kindly;⁵ for though she's as like this as a crab is like an apple,⁶ yet I can tell what I can tell.

Lear. What canst tell, boy?

Fool. She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab. Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i' the middle on's face?

Lear. No.

Fool. Why, to keep one's eyes of⁷ either side's nose; that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.

Lear. I did her wrong,⁸—

Fool. Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

Lear. No.

Fool. Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a ouse.

Lear. Why?

Fool. Why, to put his head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

Lear. I will forget my nature. So kind a father!—Be my horses ready?

Fool. Thy asses are gone about 'em. The reason why the seven stars⁹ are no more than seven is a pretty reason.

wit is not in thy heels, and therefore will have no need of slippers"; referring to what the King has just said,—“I shall be there afore you.”

⁵ The Fool quibbles, using *kindly* in two senses; as it means *affectionately*, and like the rest of her *kind*, or according to her *nature*. The Poet often uses *kind* and its derivatives in this sense. See *Hamlet*, page 59, note 18.

⁶ *Crab* refers to the fruit so called, not to the fish. So in Lyly's *Euphues*: “The sower Crabbe hath the shew of an Apple as well as the sweet Pippin.”

⁷ Shakespeare often has *of* where we should use *on*, and *vice versa*; as *on's* in the Fool's preceding speech. See *Hamlet*, page 108, note 38.

⁸ Lear is now stung with remorse for his treatment of Cordelia.

⁹ “The seven stars” are the constellation called the Pleiades.

Lear. Because they are not eight?

Fool. Yes, indeed: thou wouldst make a good Fool.

Lear. To take't again perforce!¹⁰—Monster ingratitude!

Fool. If thou wert my Fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten for being old before thy time.

Lear. How's that?

Fool. Thou shouldst not have been old before thou hadst been wise.

Lear. O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet Heaven! Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!¹¹—

Enter a Gentleman.

How now! Are the horses ready?

Gent. Ready, my lord.

Lear. Come, boy.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A Court in GLOSTER'S Castle.*

Enter EDMUND and CURAN, meeting.

Edm. Save thee, Curan.

Cur. And you, sir. I have been with your father, and given him notice that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan his Duchess will be here with him this night.

Edm. How comes that?

¹⁰ He is meditating on what he has before threatened, namely, to “resume the shape which he has cast off.”

¹¹ The mind's own anticipation of madness! The deepest tragic notes are often struck by a half-sense of the impending blow.—COLERIDGE.

Cur. Nay, I know not. You have heard of the news abroad? I mean the whisper'd ones, for they are yet but ear-kissing arguments.¹

Edm. Not I: pray you, what are they?

Cur. Have you heard of no likely wars toward² 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

Edm. Not a word.

Cur. You may do, then, in time. Fare you well, sir.

[*Exit.*]

Edm. The Duke be here to-night? The better! best!
This weaves itself perforce into my business.
My father hath set guard to take my brother;
And I have one thing, of a queasy question,³
Which I must act: briefness and fortune, work! —
Brother, a word; — descend: — brother, I say!

Enter EDGAR.

My father watches: O sir, fly this place;
Intelligence is given where you are hid:
You've now the good advantage of the night.
Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither; now, i' the night, i' the haste,
And Regan with him: have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?⁴
Advise yourself.

Edg. I'm sure on't, not a word.

¹ "Ear-kissing arguments" are words spoken with the speaker's lips close to the hearer's ear, as if kissing him; *whispers*.

² *Toward* is *forthcoming* or *at hand*. See *Hamlet*, page 231, note 66.

³ "A queasy question" is a matter delicate, ticklish, or difficult to manage; as a queasy stomach is impatient of motion.

⁴ The meaning is, "Have you said nothing *in censure or reproof* of the party he has formed against the Duke of Albany?" — *Advise*, in the next line, is *consider, reflect*.

Edm. I hear my father coming: pardon me;
In cunning I must draw my sword upon you:
Draw; seem to defend yourself: now, quit you⁵ well. —
Yield; come before my father. — Light, ho, here! —
Fly, brother. — Torches, torches! — So, farewell. —

[*Exit EDGAR.*]

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion
Of my more fierce endeavour: [Wounds his arm.

I've seen drunkards

Do more than this in sport.⁶ — Father, father! —
Stop, stop! — No help?

Enter GLOSTER, and Servants with Torches.

Glos. Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

Edm. Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the Moon
To stand auspicious mistress.⁷

Glos. But where is he?

Edm. Look, sir, I bleed.

Glos. Where is the villain, Edmund?

Edm. Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could —

Glos. Pursue him, ho! — Go after. —

[*Exeunt some Servants.*]

By no means what?

Edm. Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;
But that I told him the revenging gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;

⁵ *Quit you* is *acquit yourself*. The Poet has *quit* repeatedly so.

⁶ These drunken feats are mentioned in Marston's *Dutch Courtesan*: "Have I not been drunk for your health, eat glasses, drunk wine, stabbed arms, and done all offices of protested gallantry for your sake?"

⁷ *Gloster* has already shown himself a believer in such astrological superstitions; so that *Edmund* here takes hold of him by just the right handle.

Spoke with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to th' father: sir, in fine,
Seeing how lothly opposite I stood
To his unnatural purpose, in fell motion,
With his preparèd sword he charges home
My unprovided body, lanced mine arm:
But, whêr he saw my best alarum'd spirits
Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to th' encounter,
Or whether gasted⁸ by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

Glos. Let him fly far:
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And, found, dispatch. The noble Duke my master,
My worthy arch⁹ and patron, comes to-night:
By his authority I will proclaim it,
That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

Edm. When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight to do it, with curst speech¹⁰
I threaten'd to discover him. He replied,
*Thou unpossessing bastard! dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, could the reposeure
Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee
Make thy words faith'd? No: what I should deny,—
As this I would; ay, though thou didst produce*

⁸ That is, *aghasted, frightened*. So in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Wit at Several Weapons*: "Either the sight of the lady has *gasted* him, or else he's drunk."

⁹ *Arch* is *chief*; still used in composition, as *arch-angel, arch-duke, &c.*

¹⁰ *Pight* is *pitched, fixed*; *curst* is an epithet applied to any bad quality in excess; as a malignant, quarrelsome, or scolding temper. So in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Catharine is called "a *curst* shrew."

*My very character,¹¹— I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damnèd practice:
And thou must make a dullard of the world,
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spurs
To make thee seek it.*

Glos. Strong and fasten'd¹² villain!
Would he deny his letter? I never got him. [*Tucket within.*
Hark, the Duke's trumpets! I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar; the villain shall not 'scape;
The Duke must grant me that: besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have due note of him; and of my land,
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.¹³

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, and Attendants.

Corn. How now, my noble friend! since I came hither, —
Which I can call but now, — I've heard strange news.

Reg. If it be true, all vengeance comes too short
Which can pursue th' offender. How dost, my lord?

Glos. O madam, my old heart is crack'd, it's crack'd!

Reg. What, did my father's godson seek your life?
He whom my father named? your Edgar?¹⁴

¹¹ *Character* here means *hand-writing or signature*.

¹² *Strong and fasten'd* is *resolute and confirmed*. Strong was often used in a bad sense, as *strong thief, strong traitor*.

¹³ That is, capable of succeeding to his estate. By law, Edmund was incapable of the inheritance. The word *natural* is here used with great art in the double sense of *illegitimate* and as opposed to *unnatural*, which latter epithet is implied upon Edgar.

¹⁴ There is a peculiar subtlety and intensity of malice in these speeches of Regan. Coleridge justly observes that she makes "no reference to the guilt, but only to the accident, which she uses as an occasion for sneering

Glos. O lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

Reg. Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tend upon my father?

Glos. I know not, madam: 'tis too bad, too bad.

Edm. Yes, madam, he was of that consort.

Reg. No marvel, then, though he were ill affected:
'Tis they have put him on the old man's death,
To have the waste and spoil of his revenues.
I have this present evening from my sister
Been well inform'd of them; and with such cautions,
That, if they come to sojourn at my house,
I'll not be there.

Corn. Nor I, assure thee, Regan. —
Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
A child-like office.

Edm. 'Twas my duty, sir.

Glos. He did bewray¹⁵ his practice; and received
This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him.

Corn. Is he pursued?

Glos. Ay, my good lord.

Corn. If he be taken, he shall never more
Be fear'd of doing harm: make your own purpose,
How in my strength you please. — For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours:
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need;
You we first seize on.

Edm. I shall serve you, sir,

at her father." And he adds, "Regan is not, in fact, a greater monster than Goneril, but she has the power of casting more venom."

¹⁵ *Bewray* is nearly the same in sense as *betray*, and means *disclose* or *reveal*. So in St. Matthew, xxvi. 73: "Thy speech *bewrayeth* thee."

Truly, however else.

Glos. For him I thank your Grace.

Corn. You know not why we came to visit you, —

Reg. Thus out of season, threading¹⁶ dark-eyed night:
Occasions, noble Gloster, of some poise,¹⁷
Wherein we must have use of your advice.
Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister,
Of differences, which I best thought it fit
To answer from our home: ¹⁸ the several messengers
From hence attend dispatch. Our good old friend,
Lay comforts to your bosom; and bestow
Your needful counsel to our business,
Which craves the instant use.

Glos. I serve you, madam:
Your Graces are right welcome. [*Exeunt*]

SCENE II. — *Before GLOSTER'S Castle.*

Enter KENT and OSWALD, severally.

Osw. Good dawning to thee, friend: ¹ art of this house?

Kent. Ay.

Osw. Where may we set our horses?

Kent. I' the mire.

Osw. Pr'ythee, if thou lovest me, tell me.

¹⁶ *Threading* is *passing through*. The word *dark-eyed* shows that an allusion to the threading of a needle was intended.

¹⁷ *Poise* is *weight, importance*. — Regan's snatching the speech out of her husband's mouth is rightly in character. These two strong-minded ladies think nobody else can do any thing so well as they.

¹⁸ That is, *away* from our home; from some other place than home.

¹ *Dawning* occurs again in *Cymbeline*, as substantive, for *morning*. It is still so dark, however, that Oswald does not recognize Kent. Kent probably knows him by the voice,

Kent. I love thee not.

Osw. Why, then I care not for thee.

Kent. If I had thee in Finsbury pinfold,² I would make thee care for me.

Osw. Why dost thou use me thus? I know thee not.

Kent. Fellow, I know thee.

Osw. What dost thou know me for?

Kent. A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-liver'd, action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing, superserviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.³

Osw. Why, what a monstrous fellow art thou, thus to rail on one that is neither known of thee nor knows thee.

Kent. What a brazen-faced varlet art thou, to deny thou knowest me? Is it two days since I tripp'd up thy heels, and beat thee, before the King? Draw, you rogue: for, though it be night, yet the Moon shines; I'll make a sop

² *Pinfold* is an old word for *pound*, a public enclosure where stray pigs and cattle are shut up, to be bought out by the owner.

³ *Addition*, again, for *title*, but here put for the foregoing string of titles. A few of these may need to be explained. "Three-suited knave" probably means one who spends all he has, or his whole income, in dress. Kent afterwards says to Oswald, "a tailor made thee." So in Jonson's *Silent Woman*: "Wert a pitiful fellow, and hadst nothing but three suits of apparel." "Worsted-stocking knave" is another reproach of the same kind. "Action-taking" is one who, if you beat him, would bring an action for assault, instead of resenting it like a man of pluck. "One-trunk-inheriting," — *inherit* in its old sense of to *own* or *possess*. *Superserviceable* is about the same as *servile*; one that *overdoes* his service; *sycophantic*. *Lily-liver'd* was a common epithet for a *coward*. See *Macbeth*, page 153, note 5.

o' the moonshine of you.⁴ [*Drawing his sword.*] Draw, you whoreson cullionly barber-monger,⁵ draw.

Osw. Away! I have nothing to do with thee.

Kent. Draw, you rascal: you come with letters against the King, and take Vanity the puppet's part⁶ against the royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado⁷ your shanks: draw, you rascal; come your ways.

Osw. Help, ho! murder! help!

Kent. Strike, you slave! stand, rogue, stand; you neat slave,⁸ strike! [*Beating him.*]

Osw. Help, ho! murder! murder!

Enter EDMUND, Sword in hand.

Edm. How now! What's the matter? [*Parting them.*]

Kent. With you, goodman boy,⁹ if you please: come, I'll flesh ye;¹⁰ come on, young master.

⁴ An equivoque is here intended, by an allusion to the old dish of *eggs in moonshine*, which was eggs broken and boiled in salad oil till the yolks became hard. It is equivalent to the phrase of modern times, "I'll *baste you*," or "*beat you to a mummy*."

⁵ Called *barber-monger* because he spends so much time in nursing his whiskers, in getting himself up, and in being barbered.

⁶ Alluding, probably, to the old moral-plays, in which the virtues and vices were personified. Of course Vanity was represented as a female; and *puppet* was often used as a term of contempt for a woman. Jonson, in *The Devil is an Ass*, speaks of certain vices as "Lady Vanity" and "Olu Iniquity."

⁷ To *carbonado* is to *slash with stripes*, as a piece of meat to be cooked.

⁸ Steevens thought that *neat slave* might mean, "you *finical* rascal, you assemblage of *foppery* and *poverty*." Walker, a better authority, explains it, "*Neat* in the sense of *pure, unmixed*; still used in the phrase *neat wine*." This makes it equivalent to "you *unmitigated villain*."

⁹ Kent purposely takes Edmund's *matter* in the sense of *quarrel*, and means, "I'll fight with you, if you wish it." — *Goodman*, in old usage, is about the same as *master* or *mister*. With *boy*, it is contemptuous. The word occurs repeatedly in the Bible; as "the *goodman* of the house."

¹⁰ To *flesh* one is to give him his first trial in fighting, or to put him to the

Enter GLOSTER.

Glos. Weapons! arms! what's the matter here?

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, and Servants.

Corn. Keep peace, upon your lives;
He dies that strikes again. What is the matter?

Reg. The messengers from our sister and the King.

Corn. What is your difference? speak.

Osw. I am scarce in breath, my lord.

Kent. No marvel, you have so bestir'd your valour. You cowardly rascal, Nature disclaims in thee:¹¹ a tailor made thee.

Corn. Thou art a strange fellow: a tailor make a man?

Kent. Ay, a tailor, sir: a stone-cutter¹² or a painter could not have made him so ill, though they had been but two hours at the trade.

Corn. Speak yet, how grew your quarrel?

Osw. This ancient ruffian, sir, whose life I have spared at suit of his gray beard,—

Kent. Thou zed! thou unnecessary letter!¹³— My lord,

first proof of his valour. So in *1 King Henry IV*, v. 4: "Full bravely hast thou *fleshed* thy maiden sword." A man is also said to be *fleshed* when he has tasted success, and is elated or encouraged thereby; *flushed*, as we say.

¹¹ That is, "Nature *disowns* thee." To *disclaim* in was often used for to *disclaim* simply. Bacon has it so in his *Advancement of Learning*.— It would seem, from this passage, that Oswald is one whose "soul is in his clothes." Hence fond of being barbered and curled and made fine; and hence naturally provoking some of the opprobrious terms explained in note 3.

¹² *Stone-cutter* for *sculptor*, or an artist in marble.

¹³ *Zed* is here used as a term of contempt, because Z is the last letter in the English alphabet: it is said to be an unnecessary letter, because its place may be supplied by S. Ben Jonson, in his *English Grammar*, says, "Z is a letter often heard among us, but seldom seen."

if you will give me leave, I will tread this unbolted¹⁴ villain into mortar.— Spare my gray beard, you wagtail?¹⁵

Corn. Peace, sirrah!

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

Kent. Yes, sir; but anger hath a privilege.

Corn. Why art thou angry?

Kent. That such a slave as this should wear a sword,
Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain
Which are too intrinse t' unloose;¹⁶ smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel;¹⁷
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Reneag, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale¹⁸ and vary of their masters,
As knowing nought, like dogs, but following.—
A plague upon your epileptic visage!¹⁹
Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool?

¹⁴ *Unbolted* is *unsifted*, hence *coarse*. The Poet has *bolted* repeatedly in the opposite sense of *refined* or *pure*.

¹⁵ *Wagtail*, I take it, comes pretty near meaning *puppy*.

¹⁶ The image is of a knot so *intricate*, or so closely tied, that it cannot be untied. The Poet uses *intrinsicate* as another form of *intrinse*, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, v. 2: "With thy sharp teeth this knot *intrinsicate* of life at once untie."

¹⁷ To *smooth* is, here, to *cosset* or *flatter*; a common usage in the Poet's time.— *Rebel* is here used as agreeing with the nearest substantive, instead of with the proper subject, *That*; a thing very common at the time. See *Hamlet*, page 57, note 12.

¹⁸ *Reneag* is *renounce* or *deny*. So in *Antony and Cleopatra*, i. 1: "His captain's heart *reneags* all temper." It is commonly spelt *renege*, and sometimes *reneg*.— The *halcyon* is a bird called the kingfisher, which, when dried and hung up by a thread, was supposed to turn its bill towards the point whence the wind blew. So in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*: "But now how stands the wind? into what corner peers my halcyon's bill?"

¹⁹ A visage distorted by grinning, as the next line shows.