



Downfall

Alternative version of "*King Lear*"

by Christian Lanciai

Preface

The first time I read "*King Lear*" was in summer 1961 in our summer house in the archipelago of Finland. I had neither seen any performance of the play earlier nor heard it on the radio, by which medium though I was already very familiar with the major Shakespeare works, and still the drama made such a deep impression on me, that it is not saying too much, that it's the literary work that perhaps has influenced my life most, stated today 50 years later.

Thus it has always held a unique position in my heart, wherefore I always reacted whenever the play was criticised and faced objections. Among the arguments in this chorus of complaints, there has been allegations, that the play would be unfinished, it has been questioned why the fool disappears after the third act, whereafter he is missed, and above all Leo Tolstoy founded his devastating criticism of Shakespeare on the "unreasonable, foolish and nonsensical" elements of *King Lear*. Few agreed with his unsympathetic criticism, and still you have to give him right to a certain extent, which actually already Samuel Johnson had done long before.

Just like in "*Hamlet*" you can't ignore that "*King Lear*" has some flaws, even though these two works rightly could be considered the poet's greatest and most interesting. "What Shakespeare drama is without weaknesses?" you could also wonder, while perhaps these very "weaknesses" actually contribute to the poet's multiplicity and double depths, – just like already the good Horace observed concerning the greatest poet of all: "*Sometimes the good Homer sleeps.*"

It is difficult to explain the motivation behind this private new interpretation and rendering of "*King Lear*", but the driving force and motivation of the evil characters (Goneril, Regan and Edmund) is as interesting as those of Iago and of Claudius – you never get through with taking the bearings of the unfathomable depths of evil and its origin.

At the same time it was irresistible to defend the poet, especially against critics of "*King Lear*" like Leo Tolstoy (who really himself described something of a parallel destiny in his life) and the objections against the unfinished impression of the work. I have tried to do something about its very weaknesses and flaws, while I haven't

seen any reason for questioning the fool's disappearance after act III. In general I have found the composition and logics of the poet almost perfect and watertight all the way in spite of very complicated and polyphonic intrigues, why the Shakespeare drama principally has been left intact in this personal new interpretation, with just a few extra and almost unnoticeable additions, that should fit rather smoothly into the gigantic architecture of the unassailable wholeness.

Another one who had a special relationship with King Lear was Giuseppe Verdi, who worked for many years on trying to make an opera of the drama. He had already composed music to many of the dramatic world masterpieces, especially Shakespeare, Schiller and Victor Hugo, but with king Lear he struggled in vain. It was for the storm scenes that he lacked a Wagner's talent for dramatic exaggerations, to dare to attack them himself for serious. Still at least a legend came out of the venture.

The legend tells, that Verdi in spite of all finally succeeded in finishing the opera "*Re Lear*" and travelled incognito to Venice with his score, where Wagner lived at the time in 1883, to by a dedication to him offer the score to him as a work of conciliation for their long rivalry, so that they at last could be friends and have a friendly contact with each other. Verdi hesitated long in Venice but dared at last visit the house of Wagner and rang the doorbell. Then he was told that Wagner had just died the other day. Devastated, Verdi scrapped the entire opera.

That's the legend, which Franz Werfel turned into an entire novel. The authenticity of the story is generally doubted and denied, but it can't be proved false, and there is no smoke without fire. However, it's a good story and a worthy extra chapter to the annals of king Lear.

The original version of king Leir sharing his kingdom between his two elder daughters and wronging the third, who proves to be the only faithful one, is from Homeric and pre-roman times according to the sources, when Gaul was divided in ten different kingdoms. His residence would have been in Leicester (Leircester), it's a Celtic story, which though constantly reappears in other folk tales and stories, like for example Cinderella, the most frequently filmed of all stories. Already in the version followed by the poet (Holinshed's chronicles, in which a number of Shakespeare plays have their source,) Cordelia ends up being hanged in prison. So that is no tasteless brutality invented by the poet for theatrical effect. The main reason for the fool's disappearance after the third act appears to have been, that the same actor used to play Cordelia and the fool, which also has led to the confusion between them in the interpretation of Lear's last speech in act V scene 3.

No Shakespeare play has been as abused as King Lear. When the plays were reinstated in the theatres after the restoration 1660, King Lear's woefulness was considered too unpleasant, why a certain Tate reedited the play, excluded the fool, turned Edgar into Cordelia's lover and gave the tragedy a happy ending by a wedding between the two of them and Lear well and healthy as a fresh and happy father-in-law, as if nothing of all the tragic events had taken place. This grotesque comedy version of King Lear was dominating the British stages all the way until the

real version at last was honoured again after the Romanticism in the 1840s after 180 years of mistreatment. The Tate version was never used again except possibly as a farce.

There is a curious passage in the dialogue between the king and fool in act III scene 7:

FOOL Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?

KING LEAR A king, a king!

FOOL No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him.

This is an obvious allusion on Shakespeare's effort to improve his status as a gentleman by a coat of arms, but why would the poet, if he was William Shakespeare, allude to his since a few years deceased father as a madman? No natural son would do a thing like that and least of all in public on stage. There is a similar allusion on Shakespeare's aspirations to established nobility in Ben Jonson's *"Every Man Out of His Humour"* in the dialogue between Puntarvolo and Sogliardo, where Shakespeare (Sogliardo) is downright ridiculed for his vanity. The allusion on the same issue in *"King Lear"* can only be understood as a similar gibe and must add to the arguments against William Shakespeare actually being the poet.

And this curiosity of allusions is not the only one. There is another in act IV scene 6, where Lear at his entry as a full-blown madman has the following first line:

"No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the king himself."

It's the more noteworthy as an opening line, since it's the only instance in the play where anything like coining is mentioned at all, and it is as irrelevant as anything can be – nothing could be more alien to everything that goes on in the play. Why on earth does then the poet provide his main character with such a line at his most theatrical entrance in the whole play?

William Shakespeare never had anything to do with coining, since his entire life only dealt with ready money, but there was one who was involved in coining. Christopher Marlowe was once arrested for suspected coining and was on another occasion reported for it in Thomas Baines' informer's note, in which Baines quotes Marlowe, that he claimed to have "as much right to coin money as the Queen of England". It was in connection with this informer's note that Marlowe shortly afterwards disappeared by the notorious and unknown event at Eleanor Bull's place in Deptford on May 30th 1593.

In our great Shakespeare discussion in *"The Free Thinker"*, which comprised 13 years and tried to collect all the arguments for the different candidates for the real authorship, to get as extensive a survey of the entire problem complex as possible, there was among other active participants Carl Olof Nordling, the actual originator of the debate, suggesting William Stanley, son-in-law of the earl of Oxford, as the poet, John Bede from Ireland first sticking to William Shakespeare himself to later change sides to the party of Sir Francis Bacon, while also Laila Roth embraced the

Oxford-Stanley-line. Both these later converted to Marlowe, who was our preference, who also was the only candidate of John B. Westerberg already from the beginning. In elucidating the case of Marlowe we also examined his unknown family circumstances with a possible connection to William Parr as a natural father, Queen Elizabeth's ballet master and favourite and younger brother of Catherine Parr, Queen Elizabeth's last stepmother. We content ourselves here with just referring to that debate.

The greatest mystery about king Lear is the very subject though and why the poet wrote such a play. Nothing whatsoever in Shakespeare's life indicates any connection with any madness, overwhelming despair of life and anguish, any total disappointment with life or any reason at all for all those outbreaks and accusations of ingratitude that fills the entire play with unlimited rage. In brief, nowhere in Shakespeare's life can any trace be found of any motivation for such a play. Instead you can find such stuff in Marlowe's life.

After king James' accession to the throne in 1603, Francis Bacon pleaded with him among other matters to mind concealed poets. The only answer to that prayer was the king's confinement of Sir Walter Raleigh in the Tower, once Marlowe's mentor, to 15 years later have him executed. Since everything indicates that Marlowe's 'death' in 1593 was faked to let him abscond from arrest and possible execution in consequence of among others things Baines' accusations against him of atheism, homosexuality, blasphemy and coining, it is logical to assume, that Marlowe never lost hope of exoneration, one of the main themes in almost all the Shakespeare plays. By Queen Elizabeth's death and king James' intolerance towards above all such a poet and brilliant Elizabethan as Raleigh, the last of Marlowe's hopes might have died, which could have been given expression and vent to the desperately wild despair in 'King Lear', probably the most desperate and extreme tragedy ever written. Lear's introductory declaration in this his most demonstrative scene and entry, could be seen as a masked last extreme emergency call of despair by the poet with the obvious meaning: "I am Marlowe!" The play was probably written between 'Othello' and 'Macbeth' around 1605.

One of the best essays ever written about 'King Lear' is the one by Helen af Enehjelm called "Shakespeare's madmen" in the collection "Longing for Home" from 1946. The American author demonstrates in it an impressively thorough understanding of Lear's and the poet's personal philosophy with a psychological investigation tour in these extreme circumstances of utterly mixed contraries of illness and wisdom, beauty and grotesqueness in the wildest exaggerations mixed up together, that probably neither Jung nor Freud could have surpassed her in, while at the same time they offer a splendid insight in the most fascinating aspects of this unsurpassed dramatic poet's human orientation.

Dramatis Personae:

Earl of Kent
Earl of Gloucester
Edmund, his bastard son
King Lear
his daughters Goneril,
Regan
and Cordelia
Duke of Albany
Duke of Cornwall
King of France
Duke of Burgundy
Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son
Oswald, Goneril's servant
The fool
A knight in Lear's service
Curan
A doctor
Knights and servants
Officers and soldiers

The action is in the south of England.

Act I scene 1. King Lear's court.

Kent, Gloucester, Edmund.

Kent I thought the king preferred the Duke of Cornwall to Albany.

Gloucester We all thought so, but now when he intends to shift the kingdom it is not at all clear whom he values most, since the qualities are so equal that no curiosity can be sure as to assess the details.

Kent The only certain thing about his affections is I gather that his youngest daughter is his favourite.

Gloucester But she is unmarried. She can't inherit any part of the kingdom without a marital status.

Kent But she has two powerful suitors.

Gloucester But both are abroad. Politically she is excluded, if she marries any of them.

Kent Isn't this your son now, Sir?

Gloucester I am responsible for his upbringing and education. So often I have been embarrassed by having to acknowledge him that I now have to force myself to it. Do you see any irregularity?

Kent The mistake can't be undone now when the result is so definite.

Gloucester But I have a son somewhat older than he who although legitimate is not dearer to me, although this lad arrived somewhat prematurely, if though his mother was beautiful enough. Do you know this worthy gentleman, Edmund?

Edmund No, father.

Gloucester The Earl of Kent. Keep him in your mind as my honourable friend.

Edmund (with a slight bow) I am at my lord's disposal.

Kent I must learn to like you and to know you better.

Edmund Sir, I will strive for deserving it.

Gloucester He has been gone for nine years and will soon be gone again. I think the king is approaching.

Kent With all his family and the court. Now we shall see how he will shift the realm.

Lear (enters with following, Cornwall, Albany, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia)

Gloucester, may I ask you to bring in our lords of France and Burgundy.

Gloucester As you wish, my king. (*leaves with Edmund*)

Lear In the meantime we shall explain our intentions. Give me the map over there. Be it known, that we have shared our kingdom in three parts and that it is our intention to liberate our whitening age from all duties and worries to transfer them to younger energies while we must focus on our course towards death. Our stepsons of Cornwall and Albany, we wish to make our daughters' dowries quite clear to avoid and from the beginning eliminate all possible future strife. Our princes of France and Burgundy have long been rivals about our youngest daughter's favours and have now been summoned here for a settlement. Now tell me, my daughters, who of you loves me the most, since we will share our responsibilities and interests of the state justly, so that the greatest part will be given to the worthiest of the challenge. Goneril my oldest daughter, you may speak first.

Goneril I love you more than words can tell and beyond everything that could be measured in riches or preciousness, as much as a child ever could love a father, with a love which no breath is sufficient for nor words could describe. I love you beyond all measures.

Cordelia (aside) And what could Cordelia do? Love in silence.

Lear Then I can with lightness of my heart leave all these counties with their rich forests and pastures and rivers for you and your duke of Albany with your house, and so be it for good. What does our second daughter Regan have to say, our beloved queen of Cornwall? Speak, my heart.

Regan I am made of the same gold as my sister and count myself her like in everything. She has taken my words out of my mouth, and I have only this to add, that she comes short only in one matter, as I count all other joys worthless in comparison with that I count myself happy in my father's love.

Cordelia (aside) And what will then poor Cordelia say, when I know that my love transcends any testimony and any insufficient assertion?

Lear A third of my realm may then rightly come to you, no less and no worse than your sister's share. Then we have our youngest daughter, who has been so

assiduously courted by both France and Burgundy, what have you to demonstrate for deserving an even better share than both your sisters?

Cordelia Nothing, my father.

Lear Nothing?

Cordelia Nothing.

Lear Nothing will get you nothing. Try again.

Cordelia My father, I can't pretend and say more than what I feel. My honesty can not distort my feelings. I love you as I should, no more and no less.

Lear That will not do, Cordelia. It is not enough. Elucidate, so that you may not be lacking.

Cordelia My father, you gave me life and brought me up with love. All that I can return to you as befits a good and dutiful daughter is always to obey you and honour you, but if my sisters assert that they love you more than everything, why then do they have husbands? When I get married my husband will then have the right to half my life, my love and my duties, but I could never like my sisters marry and still retain all my love for you.

Lear Are you speaking from your heart?

Cordelia I am honest and sincere by heart.

Lear So much youth and beauty, and so little tenderness?

Cordelia So much truth. I can but stick to truth.

Lear Then truth shall be your share, and you will do without my fatherly love and all the rest. I don't know this daughter any more and deny her all right of any inheritance. You have denied yourself every possibility of love, which so generously was proved to me instead by your sisters, why they instead shall rightly have your part. The love you owed me you have instead replaced by proud detached estrangement. I don't recognize you and can no longer acknowledge you as my daughter.

Kent One word, my king.

Lear No, you keep quiet. Don't get between the dragon and his wrath. I loved her most and trusted her tenderness the most. Get out of my sight! Thus I will rather settle with the grave and its peace and offer them my heart, which I must deny her. Let France take her. Or Burgundy. Who calls them? Cornwall and Albany, add to my two daughters' dowries this third part, and let her satisfy herself with her cheap pride. You get all I have, my command and titles, royal authorities and everything appertaining to the royal privileges. We only intend to keep a hundred men to every second month visit you, relying on your obligatory esteem and respect. We only keep our name while the crown now is yours, shared between the two of you.

Kent With all respect, my king, whom I always honoured as such, like my father always did...

Lear The decision is settled and final.

Kent Let it rather fall flat to earth than it should so mortally wound and pierce my heart! May Kent fall foul and misbehave if Lear goes mad! Old man, what are

you doing? Do you mean that the honesty of duty shouldn't dare to speak when power bows to flattery? Honour descends to simplicity when the majesty submits to folly. Retract the decision and consider its terrible rashness! Let me answer with my life for my judgement, your youngest daughter is not without love and does not love you less, and her simple truthfulness is not just hollow emptiness!

Lear By your life, Kent, speak no more.

Kent My life was never more worth than as a pawn against your enemies. I never feared losing it for your safety.

Lear Get out of my sight! It is enough!

Kent Open your eyes, and let me remain your clairvoyance!

Lear You go too far. (*lays his hand on his sword*)

Albany Sir,...

Cornwall Control yourself.

Kent Yes, strike down your doctor, and let your illness pay the bill! Retract your decision, or I can promise you it will only lead to evil!

Lear Listen to me, miserable rebel! A king's word and decision cannot be retracted, and your opposition must face the consequences. You have five days to make preparations for your exile. On the sixth you must leave our country. If you after ten days still are found in the country you are dead. Get out of my sight now! A king's word can never be retracted.

Kent Farewell then, king. Since that's the way you want it, all freedom is gone from here, while outlawed and exiled lawlessness now governs. (*to Cordelia*) May providence protect you, my lovely maid, for you have only thought and said what was right. (*to Goneril and Regan*) And may you stand by what you have said so that the word of love may give good results. Thus bids Kent all of you here his farewell in an effort to find better ways in another country. (*leaves*)

Gloucester (*enters with the princes of France and Burgundy*) France and Burgundy at your service, my liege.

Lear My duke of Burgundy, I then first turn to you. What is the least dowry you expect in your pursuit of love's happiness?

Burgundy I expect no more than what you already promised.

Lear I am sorry, dear Burgundy, she was the dearest for us, but her price has fallen. She is now no more than what she is where she stands, the little thing, and can have no more to her dowry than our disdain. Take her for nothing or leave her. She is yours.

Burgundy I am speechless.

Lear What does that mean? Do you take her for what she is and has, our division among other weaknesses, adopted by our loathing, loaded by our curse as her only dowry and banished by our damnation, or do you reject her as effectively as we do?

Burgundy Sir, you will have to excuse me, but such premises give me no choice.

Lear So you leave her as the worthlessness she is. Then my next offer goes to you, my French royal colleague. I give you the same advice and offer: look

elsewhere, if you want something better than what even nature is ashamed of to acknowledge any kinship with.

France I find it strange, that she who still was the apple of your eye, so sincerely and devotedly praised and favoured by yourself, now is fallen, as if she had committed an heinous crime to so cruelly deserve such an atrocious condemnation. It does not fit. I can't think anything so evil about her which you seem to accept as something obvious that has possessed her.

Cordelia I only ask you for one thing, my lord king, to at least give me that acknowledgement, that there is no crime or any dishonour that has bereft me of your grace, but only that I was scant of speech when I was requested to only stick to a pleasing speech in accordance with the fawning and hypocrisy of common ingratiation than any serious sincerity of personal honesty. Not what I did or said but only what I didn't do and couldn't say has bereft me of my father's grace.

Lear It would have been better if you never had been born than that you so displeased me by your loveless reservation.

France So it is only the slowness of speech and shyness that caused this displeasure? Burgundy, are you serious? Love is not love if its motivation is united with other intentions than love. She is her own dowry. Do you mean to say that you renounce her?

Burgundy O king Lear, grant her just a morsel of the dowry you promised her, and she will be my duchess of Burgundy.

Lear She gave nothing and will have nothing. My decision stands.

Burgundy I must regret then, Cordelia, that the loss of your father must mean that you will have no husband.

Cordelia Peace be with you, Burgundy, and your love and its happiness, which then will not be love without success.

France Dearest Cordelia, you who now are the poorest are the richest, who rejected and despised, yes, even trampled down, still are the jewel of all virtue, which I claim and will take care of. May what the world so rejects and so shamelessly throws away in its ignorance then be legitimate to pick up and care for, you royal daughter without a dowry, as queen of the milder and more loving France. Not all the dukes of Burgundy in the world nor better countries could buy or claim the fallen daughter of a selfish and conceited king of England, who doesn't grasp the obvious stellar brilliance in the night, when it blazes in nobility and self-sacrifice. Bid your court farewell, Cordelia, for it was not worthy of you. You have lost a forlorn homeland but become queen of a better country instead.

Lear She is yours, cousin of France, use her as you please, for she has nothing more to do with us. We are finished with her and boast of never again having to see her. She has only insulted us and her sisters and made herself impossible for all future. Come, my dear friend duke of Burgundy. (*exeunt all except France, Cordelia, Goneril and Regan*)

France Say goodbye to your pungent sisters.

Cordelia I leave you not without the salt of tears in my eyes, for I fear the development of this and your prevalent vanity, which now provided you with so much power. I know you, but will not acknowledge you. I can only hope that you meant something by your words of love, and that you will live up to them, but I fear, that he will now stick to you with poor comfort as a result. And still I preferred him to any regal throne.

Regan You don't have to admonish us. We know our duties.

Goneril Devote yourself now to that king you won into the bargain and your throne in what perhaps is a better country. Here all your assets of trust are consumed, and there is nothing more for you here.

Cordelia Time will show what this undesired separation will lead to, but nothing can be hidden without in time becoming known. You may envy me, but I don't envy you. Make the best of it, sisters, as long as it is possible.

France Come, my dearest and most beautiful Cordelia. (*leaves with her*)

Goneril So we have the power now, my sister, but also the duty to care for our ageing father.

Regan He will rest with you the first month.

Goneril And next month with you. We already notice how his ageing is obviously marking him. He loved our sister most, and that he now has disowned her, there is nothing else than senility.

Regan He will become a burden and the more so with time.

Goneril The uneasiness of impatience and the squeamishness of ageing might import disturbances with time.

Regan The banishment of Kent is a precarious prelude. He will probably become more and more incalculable.

Goneril What luck then that he gave us all his power before going too gaga.

Regan I am afraid that France and its new queen will not altogether let him out of sight.

Goneril We will have to be prepared for action.

Regan And to strike, if necessary.

Scene 2. The castle of the Earl of Gloucester.

Edmund (with a letter) Why would I be of less worth than my brother, just because I was born twelve or fourteen months from my father's marriage? Am I less of a human being than he? Is then the bastard quality something you inherit and choose? No, it's all about formalism. I am no less a human being than my elder brother, although I am illegitimate, though we have the same father, which he acknowledges. So I have the right to claim my right of you, Edgar, although you are legitimate and I am not. I am only demanding my right of nature, and nature has no scruples.

Gloucester (enters, upset) Kent banished and declared an outlaw! And France has left in anger with a dishonoured Cordelia declared disinherited! And the king has

relinquished all power and responsibility and turned in! And all these strokes of lightning in just one moment! Edmund! Are you here? Well, what news?

Edmund No news, Sir. (*conceals his letter*)

Gloucester And why are you hiding a letter from me with such a serious outlook?

Edmund It's no news, Sir.

Gloucester What was the letter you read?

Edmund Nothing.

Gloucester Nothing? And why then hide it with such haste? Nothing needs no haste to hide. Let me see it. If it's really of no value, I will not need my glasses.

Edmund I beg of you, excuse me. It's a letter from my brother which I haven't yet had time to finish reading, and what I read is not worth any attention from you.

Gloucester Give me the letter then, so I may see how worthless it is.

Edmund It will vex you, whether I hide it or let you read it. Blame it on the contents.

Gloucester That only makes it the more interesting.

Edmund I hope for my brother's sake that he only wrote it to test me and my honour.

Gloucester (*reads*) "This compliance with its false fawning on age and its rights no matter how incapable and declining it is, makes me somewhat bitter and disappointed with our time and world. I feel aged tyranny as something of a masochistic thralldom of passivity and enforced obligatory dullness. Come to me, so that we may talk more about this. If father should sleep until I woke him up, I would give you half of his heritage for always, and you would always live as loved by your brother, Edgar."

This is a conspiracy! "If he should sleep until I woke him up..." my son Edgar! Is he really the one who has written this? Is that his heart speaking with his upbringing? When did you receive this? Who gave it to you?

Edmund No one, my father. Someone left it anonymous on my window pane, as if he had thrown it in.

Gloucester Do you recognize the handwriting as that of your brother?

Edmund I could swear on it being his but would rather think it wasn't.

Gloucester It is his.

Edmund It may be his, but I hope his heart isn't written therein.

Gloucester Has he expressed such thoughts earlier?

Edmund Never, but I often heard him maintain, that a father's duties should be like those of a guardian for his son and as such stay in the background and let the son mind his work and activities.

Gloucester That's exactly what he expresses in the letter! Oh, what a villain! What a false, unnatural and fallen son! Go and find him! I will settle with him! Where is he?

Edmund I don't really know. If you could raise your indignation against him until you obtain more certainty about his intentions, you will find a safer course, while if you apply forceful action and misunderstand his meaning, it could be a black hole in

your honour and shatter his loyalty to you. I can offer my life as a pawn for him, that he only wrote this to test my affection for you.

Gloucester Do you think so?

Edmund If you find it suitable, I could arrange an interview with him with you positioned to be able to hear all we say without being noticed, to make sure where he stands, already tonight.

Gloucester He can't be such a monster.

Edmund And isn't, I am sure.

Gloucester An insidious traitor against his own father, who so tenderly always loved him! It can't be true. There is something amiss here. Edmund, examine the matter, and get him to me, I beg you. I give you free hands. Myself, I can't do anything, for I am tottering by an abyss, and if I take a single step, I can only fall.

Edmund I will take care of it, father, and tell you everything that happens. He does trust me though, and I can easily handle the matter correctly, as long as I can keep his confidence.

Gloucester Very well, my son. Handle it correctly and properly. But many signs are against us. This eclipse of the sun and moon bodes nothing good, and even if nature is universally wise and all powerful in its own way, it is powerless against the particular wicked play of human presumption. Love will cool down, friendships are broken, and brothers turn each other's enemies. In towns there are riots and revolts, in the country civil wars may start with implacability, in the castles and palaces of rulers there are treasons by some inexplicable enigmatic cultivation, and the most sacred bond between son and father is brutally interrupted and cut off. All evil fears and prophecies come true, here is a son a traitor against his own father, the king falls by some strange twist of nature to morbidity, everything seems run over and lost, and ahead of us is only abominable plots and intrigues, superficiality and inexplicably cruel treason, decline to disorder, destruction and devastating perdition that overwhelms us by a growing escort to the grave. Investigate the villain, Edmund, do it with caution and discretion, and nothing of your cause will be lost. And Kent's banishment into exile! His crime was only honesty. It is all too strange and incomprehensible, to say the least. (*leaves*)

Edmund So the world willingly deceives itself, where the last idiot never is born, that when we get into trouble, often by our own fault and mistake, we blame it on the artificial absurdity of astrological tables, as if it was the sun, the moon or some alien star that caused the misfortune of our adversity, as if we were villains by predestination, condemned slaves under the force of destiny and heaven, traitors and murderers and thieves by random motions of unknown planets, liars and rapists, impostors and drunkards by the force of the silent movements of heavenly bodies, and that we were evil by having been ordained so by some higher power, – but here is Edgar, like a disaster in the comedy. My cue shall be melancholy, with a sigh like by some miserable inmate in some madhouse. – Alas, it is these ominous heavenly eclipses that prompt these tragedies!

Edgar How sad and serious you look, as if you were burdened by dire troubles and worries! What has happened?

Edmund I am only contemplating evil prophecies founded on the latest eclipses.

Edgar Are you engaged in such matters?

Edmund I warrant, that these omens don't disperse by a shrug of your shoulder, since they foretell rebellion, dissolution, civil war and death, when children will rise against their fathers and everything will perish in anarchy, when the king will be overthrown, friends driven into exile and marriages are dissolved by crime and tragedy.

Edgar How long have you been an astronomic secterist?

Edmund When did you last see your father?

Edgar Last night.

Edmund And you spoke with each other?

Edgar Indeed, for two hours.

Edmund Did you part in concord? You found no trace of disgrace in his attitude towards you?

Edgar None at all.

Edmund Search how you could have angered him, and try to keep away from him until I have succeeded in damping the heat of his displeasure, which now is raving in his heart so uncontrollably, that your sight would only make matters worse.

Edgar Then someone has done me wrong.

Edmund That's just what I fear. I beg you to be patient until the wrath has passed or calmed down. Follow me now to my home, where I will protect you and keep you well informed about the development, until you may show yourself to your father again. Here is the key. Do not go out unarmed.

Edgar Armed?

Edmund I think of what is best for you. Keep armed. I am no honest man if I deny that there are ill intentions against you. I told you something of what I have heard but far from the entire picture of the terror.

Edgar So I will hear from you soon?

Edmund I am your helper in this matter. Hurry home to my place now. (*Edgar leaves.*)

A credulous father and a noble brother, who is as incapable of doing anything evil as of even suspecting anything such, which offers the perfect ground for my plans! I see fantastic prospects of possibilities! If I can't take what is rightly due to me by the right of the formalities of birth, I could get it by cunning, and nothing shall be forbidden or alien in the freedom of thought in contriving intrigues and ingenious conspiracies to boost my will and desire.

Scene 3. The castle of the duke of Albany.

Goneril Did my father strike my servant for annoying his fool?

Oswald Yes, madam.

Goneril He keeps abusing me day and night. Every hour there is some new unpleasant incident that vexes us all. This won't do any more. His knights misbehave, and he only keeps criticising and complaining about the smallest detail. When he returns from his hunt I will refuse to see him. Tell him that I am ill. If you fail in your duties to him, you will do well. I will take the consequences. (*horns*)

Oswald He is on his way, madam. I hear him.

Goneril Use any tired negligence you wish for a mask, you and your friends. I want it to show. If it raises his displeasure, let him go to my sister, who thinks the same way as I, who as little as myself can stand bullying manners. Poor old miserable fool of outdated senility, who still pretends to have claims on the authority he gave away! It's true, that old fools become like babies again and have to be soothed with flattering caresses when they feel neglected. Mark my words!

Oswald As you wish, madam.

Goneril And be colder in your attitude to his men. It doesn't matter what they may think of it. Counsel your friends thus. I will provoke confrontations. I will immediately visit my sister to confer with her about our policy towards this constantly more enervating old man of pathetic recklessness and decay. Make dinner ready in the meantime. (*leaves*)

Scene 4. The same.

Kent (in disguise) May I be unrecognizable and my language altered to a baser mouth, so I with my lost identity and banishment still may stay at home and remain in the service of the one I love, by the crisis of old age severely threatened and maybe already stricken but still my only noble king.

(*Horns. Enter Lear with knights and following.*)

Lear We will not stay here an hour more! Make ready! This is too much for an old man, to be harassed and subjected to daily humiliations! (*a servant leaves*) And who are you? You seem familiar, but I have never seen you before.

Kent An ordinary man, Sir.

Lear Just that? What can you do? What do you want with us?

Kent I don't pretend to be more than I seem and wish only to honestly serve the one who trusts me, whom I will then affectionately stick to as honour demands, to converse with him in a civilized way but not say too much, to fear judgement and retaliation, to fight but only when I have to, and to refuse eating fish.

Lear What kind of a knave are you?

Kent An honest soul like the king and equally poor.

Lear If you are as poor a citizen as he is as king, you are poor enough. What do you want?

Kent Serve.

Lear Serve whom?

Kent You.

Lear Do you know me then, you prick?

Kent No, Sir, but there is something of a lord over you.

Lear What's that?

Kent Authority.

Lear What can you do then?

Kent I can give and hold good counsel, ruin a good story by telling it, run, ride and deliver news and messages even if they are terrible. It behoves good men to be able, and of that I am able, and diligent at that.

Lear How old are you?

Kent Neither so young that I could fall in love with a woman for the sake of her singing voice, nor so old that I could be duped by her for nothing. I am aged up to forty-eight.

Lear That's enough. Make us company. If am not less fond of you after dinner, I don't want to be without you. It's time for dinner. Hallo there, let's have some dinner! Where is my fool? You there, get me my fool!

(a servant leaves. Enter Oswald.)

Well, Sir, where is my daughter?

Oswald If it may please you. *(leaves)*

Lear What does he mean? Get that blackguard back! *(exit a knight)* Where is my fool? It seems to me the whole world is asleep. *(knight returns)* Well, what happened to him?

Knight He says, Sir, that your daughter is not feeling well.

Lear Why didn't he come back when I called on him?

Knight He answered rudely, that he didn't want to.

Lear What does he mean? Didn't want to?

Knight My lord, I don't know what is going on, but it seems to me that his majesty is not treated with the courtesy he is used to. This strong decline in both your daughter's and her husband's kindness to you is also evident in all the servants.

Lear What do you mean?

Knight Pardon me, Sir, if I am mistaken, but I can't keep silent when it is obvious how badly you are treated.

Lear You only express what I observed myself. I seem to be intentionally neglected of late, which I first thought was the subjective prejudice of my jealousy rather than real condescending unkindness, but there are obvious reasons now to investigate the matter. But where is my fool? I haven't seen him the last two days.

Knight Since our young lady left for France he has lost much of his old mad enthusiasm.

Lear I noticed that all too well. *(to a servant)* Go to my daughter and tell her that I wish to speak with her. *(exit servant. Oswald returns.)*

There you are. Who am I, Sir? Who do you think you are?

Oswald You are the father of my lady, whose servant I am.

Lear "The father of your lady", you stuck-up scoundrel!

Oswald No, I am not.

Lear Are you impertinent as well, you rascal! *(hits him)*

Oswald Not at all, Sir, and I will not tolerate that you hit me.

Kent Do you answer the king with such insulting arrogance?

Lear I thank you, my friend. You are my man.

Kent (to Oswald) Away with you, miscreant! You are no good for dealing with, for you are snooty. Get lost! *(drives him out)*

Lear Thank you, my good friend. Here is for your service. *(gives him money)* I need you.

Fool (enters) Let me employ him also! Here is my honorary title. *(gives him his fool's cap)*

Lear Well, there you are at last, my gallant knave! How do you do?

Fool (to Kent) You had better take over my cap.

Kent Why, fool?

Fool Because you are betting on the wrong horse and are aware of it. Since you don't turn your coat to the wind you must get you yourself a cold. Here, take my fool's cap. This old man has disowned two of his daughters and made the third one a major service against his own will. If you will follow him you have to be a fool. Do you hear, uncle? I wish I had two fool's caps and two daughters.

Lear Why, my boy?

Fool If I gave them all my livelihood I would still retain the fool's cap. Here is mine, ask the other one of your daughters.

Lear Don't be too impertinent. Think of the lash.

Fool The truth is a dog that must be chastised. He must be lashed when the bitch stands stinking by the stove.

Lear That's what I deserved.

Fool I will teach you an adage.
Have more than you show,
Talk less than you know,
Lend less than you own,
Ride more than you walk,
Learn more than what you find,
And you will have more
than twelve for a dozen.

Kent This is nonsense, fool.

Fool Then it's like the unpaid attorney's volubility. You gave me nothing for it. Can't you make use of nothing, uncle?

Lear Of course not. Out of nothing you can't make anything.

Fool (to Kent) Tell him, that that's what he gets paid for his lands. He doesn't believe a fool.

Lear A bitter fool!

Fool Do you know what the difference is between a bitter fool and a good fool?

Lear No, fool. Tell me.

Fool The lord that advised you
to give away all your lands,
put him here beside me
while you may vouch for him;
the good and the bitter fool
will eventually come by,
one with this cap of bells here,
the other one standing up to trial there.

Lear Do you take me for a fool?

Fool You gave away all your other titles, while you were born a fool.

Kent There is something in it, Sir.

Fool But they don't give me right therein. If my monopoly were known they would all want a share in it, and even the ladies, who couldn't do without a fool, they would all start thieving. Give me an egg, uncle, and I will give you two crowns.

Lear What kind of crowns?

Fool After having cut the egg in the middle and eaten its contents, there are two crowns remaining. When you cut your crown in the middle and gave away both parts, you carried your donkey across the ditch. You didn't have much sense left in your bald crown when you gave away the one that was of gold. If I speak for myself in this, let him be lashed who first realizes it.

Fools were never seen so often,
for wise men have grown so supercilious
and don't quite know how to carry their wisdom
since they only copy each other.

Lear Since when have you been so crowded with bad verse?

Fool Ever since you made your daughters your mothers, for when you gave them the lash you let down your own pants.

Then they suddenly cried for joy
while I sang but of sorrow
that such a king would turn into such a fool
that he sought their company and became like one of them.

I beg you, uncle, get me a tutor who can teach me how to fool. I would like to learn to be wrong.

Lear And if you fool me, you will be lashed.

Fool (indicates Lear) I am amazed at what kind of people you and your daughters are. They would lash me for speaking the truth, you would have done it for my having fooled you, and sometimes I am also lashed for keeping quiet. I would rather be anything but a fool, and still I would never be in your place, uncle, for you have

consumed yourself in both directions and have nothing left in the middle for yourself. Here is now one of the pawnbrokers. (*enter Goneril*)

Lear Goneril! What is this? What's the meaning of this sinister front? Methinks you have taken on too much severity lately.

Fool You had no problem with the attitudes of others while you were king. Now you are a zero and dependent on them. I myself have a higher status than you, for I am at least a fool, but you are nothing. (*to Goneril*) Yes, I will shut up, for that's what you seem to say although you say nothing.

He who neither saves his crust of bread or crumbs
shall when he gets tired out of everything need some.

(*indicates Lear*) There's an empty sheathe for you.

Goneril Not only this impertinent lunatic of a fool let loose, but all your men are constantly making only trouble, disorder, worries and irritation by quarrels and fights. Sir, I would have hoped that you would heed my warnings, but I fear that you not only ignore them but also encourage your men to recklessness and violations. We find no other end to the trouble than the necessity to take action.

Fool For you must know, uncle, that the little sparrow fed the young cuckoo too long, so that he finally bit off the little sparrow's head. Thereby the light was put out, but at least we still had the darkness.

Lear Are you my daughter?

Goneril My good Sir, you should make better use of all that wisdom you acquired during that long life of yours and lay off these jarring bullying manners, which put you out of joint with time and your balance and your real self.

Fool May a donkey not know when a cart pulls a horse?

Lear Does no one recognize me here any more? Is this not Lear? Is it not Lear standing here and speaking? Does he not see with his own eyes? Either his sense is weakened or his power of observation reduced and slowed down. Who can tell me who I am?

Fool His shadow.

Lear I must learn to understand that, for all earlier signs by knowledge, sense and dignity that testified to me having daughters seem completely lost and gone.

Fool They want a humiliated and obeisant father.

Lear Do I know your name, my dear lady?

Goneril It pleases you to joke and banter according to the raillery of your other manners. Understand me correctly, you should be able to do that who is of a respectable age and therefore should be wise. Here you keep a hundred knights and comrades so undisciplined and coarse that my court with their infections mostly seems like a troubled inn, where your reckless way of life gives it more the character of a tavern or brothel than of a knight's castle. The reckless licentiousness of your unbridled behaviour demands a halt. It would be proper for the flock of your followers to be cut in half and that the half then remaining would be worthy and honourable men, who could give your respectability some honour and credit and not shame you.

Lear By the darkness of all devils! Saddle my horses, and bring my men together! You degenerate bastard of a false illegitimate daughter! I have another though. I will not trouble your disobligingness any more.

Goneril You hit my men, and your unruly brutal gang of followers make better men to slaves, grooms and swineherds to the barbarity of your hoodlums. (*enter Albany*)

Lear Woe to him who repents too late. (*to Albany*) Alas, Sir, are you coming now at last? It is too late. We are saddling our horses. Stonehearted wretch of a daughter lost in disgrace, your ingratitude is the worse for having yet been my child if though you were a monster!

Albany Patience, my lord!

Lear It is too late! (*to Goneril*) You rotten dragon, you are wrong, you are lying, for my people belong to the best men in the world, dutiful to the most extreme and noble loyalty! Alas, you small want, how you blotted out the perspective for me by your overwhelming imposture to my poor Cordelia, twisting my mind away from its natural nest to replace the love of my heart with unreasonable bitter gall! O you old fool Lear, break the gate that let in this madness! (*hits his head*) At the same time dispersing my judgement! Away, my people!

Albany My lord, I am without guilt and don't know what so has angered you.

Lear So let it be. Listen then! Listen, goddess and nature! If you intended to make this creature the least happy or fertile, change your plans then and fill that shrew's heart with sterility and dry out every organ of that bitch! May she never bring any child to the earth, and if she must, let it then be some slimy disgusting disfigured monster of abhorrence like she is herself, who could torture her all her life by gradually increasing abomination and cruelty! May it carve deep wrinkles in her youth by hollowed out furrows of tears constantly dug deeper by terrible incessant flows! May she all her life feel how much sharper the gnawing curse of ingratitude is than any snake tooth poison stinging repeatedly again and again! Away! (*out*)

Albany How on earth could this happen?

Goneril Don't bother. He is just old, and his gaga has bolted with his dementia beyond repair. He hardly understands what he is saying.

Lear (re-enters furious) What is this? You have taken fifty men away from me only in two weeks!

Albany What is it now?

Lear Only that your bitch is taking everything away from me! Is there no end to your humiliations? Well, I have another daughter, and when she hears about the disgrace you caused by the heartlessness of devilish intrigues and dirty tricks to debase me by spreading rumours and plots apart from evil designs, she shall tear the heart out of you, flay your wolf's face with her nails and give me back everything you took away from me! I shall resume all my power and former position! (*leaves in anger with Kent and following*)

Goneril Well, my husband, what do you say?

Albany I can't be anything but totally partial when it comes to you, my love.

Goneril Well, here is Oswald. And you, fool, why don't you run after your master?

Fool (hurries along) Uncle, stay! Wait for me! Your fool is all you have got! (*out*)

Goneril A hundred men indeed! With such a lawless following he could get everyone in his power and calmly infest every castle by general abuse and plunder! He will not hesitate to criticize and have complaints about the least and only cause quarrels and division wherever he enters. Let him be kept outside. May no one let him in any more, to let him quarrel by himself and to scold all those men who voluntarily desert him. Thus can his dementia and madness only consistently accelerate and grow worse. Oswald!

Albany Perhaps you went too far with him.

Goneril Rather than coming too short with him. We have nothing to fear of his wild and hysterical curses. I know his heart all right. There is only emptiness and empty words coming from the consumed pretension of a vain power. I have written everything down to my sister. She has been warned. If she receives his hundred men and entertain them against better knowledge and warnings, I can't help her any longer. Well, Oswald, have you written down my letter to sister Regan?

Oswald Yes, my lady.

Goneril Bring some company with you and ride to her with my letter. Inform her of the scandal here, and make it better by expounding on what you have seen yourself. Hurry, and then hurry on also with your return. (*exit Oswald*)

(*to Albany*) Your soft way of diplomacy and obsequious submission does not work here. I can't condemn your method, but you are rather censured for your lack of wisdom than famous for damage by mildness.

Albany I can't correctly assess your sharpness of judgement, but by trying to make everything better we more often than not cause lasting harm.

Goneril I try to repair damages, not worsen them.

Albany So far I am with you.

Goneril Well then.

Scene 5. The yard outside.

Lear Go in advance to the earl of Gloucester with these letters. Don't say anything more to my daughter than what she asks for after having read my letter. If you don't hurry I will get there before you.

Kent I shall not sleep until I have delivered your letter. (*exit*)

Fool If a man's sense were in his heels, would he not then run the risk of getting sore?

Lear Indeed.

Fool Don't worry then, for you run no such danger.

Lear You mean, that my sense is not in my heels?

Fool Even better. You have no sense. You don't have to worry.

Lear Ha-ha-ha!

Fool Let's see what your other daughter will amount to, for even if she is different as a crab is unlike an apple, I could suggest a thing or two.

Lear What do you suggest?

Fool She will taste like any other crab. Do you know why you have the nose in the middle of the face?

Lear No.

Fool To keep the eyes on different sides of the nose, so that you could espy what you can't smell.

Lear I did her wrong.

Fool Do you know how an oyster makes its shell?

Lear No.

Fool Neither do I, but I can tell you why a snail has a house.

Lear Well?

Fool To put his head into instead of giving it to his daughters, so that his home will not be without protection.

Lear I forget myself. Was I not a food father? Are my horses ready?

Fool Your donkeys are working on them. The reason why the seven stars are not more than seven is reason enough.

Lear For not being eight?

Fool Exactly. You would make a good fool.

Lear To take everything back! Monstrous ingratitude!

Fool If you were my fool, uncle, I would beat you up for having grown old in advance.

Lear Why so?

Fool You shouldn't have grown old before you grew wise.

Lear Alas, don't let me go mad, dear heaven! Let me keep myself, let me not out of my mind by madness! (*enter a knight*) Are the horses ready?

Knight They are ready, Sir.

Lear Come, my boy. (*exeunt*)

Act II scene 1. The castle of Gloucester.

Edmund Greetings, Curan.

Curan And you, Sir. I have been with your father and told him that the duke of Cornwall and his consort Regan will be with him here tonight.

Edmund How so?

Curan I don't know. Have you heard the rumours? I mean the whispered ones, for so far they are only ear kisses.

Edmund No, what about?

Curan Haven't you heard about the probable war between the dukes of Cornwall and Albany?

Edmund Not one word.

Curan Then you will surely hear about it. Farewell, Sir. (*leaves*)

Edmund The duke here tonight? So much the better! Perfect! This suits my plans. My father has issued the order of my brother's arrest, and I have a delicate mission to perform. Work fast, my happiness! Brother, a word, I beg, come down.

(*enter Edgar*)

My father is watching us, I beg of you, my brother, escape this place, for it has become known where you have hidden. You now have the advantage of the night on your side, haven't you spoken something against the duke of Cornwall? He is coming here now for the night in all haste, and Regan is with him. Have you spoken anything in their interest against the duke of Albany? Examine yourself.

Edgar Not one word in any direction, I am sure.

Edmund I hear my father coming, excuse me, but for show, I have to pull my weapon against you. Pull your own and try to seem to defend yourself, there, that's good, surrender! Let my father see you! Lights, more lights in here! Run, my brother! Bring torches! So, farewell. (*Edgar escapes.*) Some blood will do fine and make the situation more credible. (*wounds himself*) I have seen drunkards doing it better than this. Father, father! Stop! No help?

(*enter Gloucester with servants and torches*)

Gloucester Well, Edmund, where is the villain?

Edmund He was here with me in the dark with his sword mumbling evil spells, invoking the moon as guiding ruler.

Gloucester But where is he?

Edmund Look, Sir, I bleed!

Gloucester Where is the villain, Edmund?

Edmund He ran away that way, when he in no way could...

Gloucester After him! (*to the servants*) Hurry! (*some servants leave*) Couldn't what?

Edmund Persuade me to murder you, but I asserted that the avengers of parricides were relentless, and that there were no bond stronger than between father and son, and when I refused to cooperate he attacked me and wounded me. When I then raised my voice and made noise he suddenly escaped.

Gloucester Let him go far. In this country he will be arrested and dealt with. My noble lord the duke will come here tonight. With his authority I will announce, that the one who catches him will be rewarded by our gratitude, so that we get the murderous coward to the stake, while anyone who hides him will have nothing but death to expect.

Edmund When I tried to dissuade him from his intentions and found him adamant, I threatened to expose him. Then he answered, "You conceited bastard, do you think you would have any credibility if I appeared against you? I would deny everything and assign all talk about plots and intrigues to your conspiracy fancies, no one would believe you, and they would see my death as a motive for your selfish ambitions."

Gloucester What an infernally accomplished villain! And would he then even deny what he himself has written? I never could get him. (*trumpets at some distance*) Ah,

the duke is here. I don't know why he has pleased to come. I will close all the gates to the castle, if he still is here he will not get away. The duke shall be my witness to this affair. I will also issue that he is wanted all over the country by sending around his portrait. Everyone shall know what kind of person he is, and I will work for furthering you instead.

(enter Cornwall, Regan and attendants)

Cornwall My noble friend, all since I arrived here I have only heard the strangest rumours.

Regan If it is true, no retaliation is enough to punish the perpetrator. Are you well?

Gloucester Alas, my lady, my heart is irrevocably broken, totally hopelessly broken!

Regan Did really my father's godson try to take your life, your own son, your Edgar?

Gloucester O my lady, the extreme outrage only wishes to be hidden and forgotten!

Regan Wasn't he with the licentious knights that my father kept for company?

Gloucester That I know not of, my lady. I know nothing except that it is absolutely horrendous.

Edmund Yes, my lady, he belonged to that company.

Regan No wonder then that he was subject to some bad influence. It must be they of course who incited him to take the life of the old man to get at his riches and estates to lay them waste and consume them. I had this evening a letter from my sister who relates and explains everything by warnings, so that if they came to my court, I should not be present.

Cornwall And neither I, my dear Regan. Edmund, I heard that you to your father proved yourself to be of the most commendable service and power of initiative.

Edmund I only did my duty.

Gloucester He exposed the intrigue and received this damage for his trouble as you see in his effort to stop him.

Cornwall Is a reasonable hunt taken up for him?

Gloucester Of course.

Cornwall If he is caught there will be no more reason to fear him. Decide his sentence yourself, and we will carry it through. And you, our Edmund, have in this crisis proved such honour and commendable initiative, that you are now one of us. We will have need of such true faithfulness and reliable loyalty.

Edmund Then I will serve you by all means.

Gloucester We thank your lordship for your grace towards him.

Cornwall You don't know yet why we have come to visit you.

Regan Completely out of season and in darkness, since circumstances demand, noble Gloucester, of a man with such moral distinction some advice in sensitive issues. Our father and our sister have written to us about critical differences, which we found it safest to take a stand to at some distance from our home. The different messengers are here waiting for answers to carry on, and that is why we decided to find you as best possible counsellor in the matter.

Gloucester You are welcome, and I will help you in any possible way. (*lets them liberally and generously in his home*) My home is yours, it is a safe environment absolutely ideal for sensitive conferences in delicate matters, no one will hear us except ourselves, and you are more than secure here.

Regan Thank you. An inspiring environment is just what we need. (*takes gratefully a seat*)

Scene 2. Outside Gloucester's castle.

Oswald Good morning, my friend. Do you belong here?

Kent Yes.

Oswald Where can we leave our horses?

Kent In the mud.

Oswald I pray, if you care for me, please tell me.

Kent I don't care for you.

Oswald Then you can go to hell.

Kent And you as well.

Oswald Why are you so unfriendly? I don't know you.

Kent But I know you.

Oswald How do you know me?

Kent I know that you are a bloody knave and bastard.

Oswald How do you know that, when you never knew me?

Kent How can you deny that you know me? It is only two days since I beat you up in front of the king and chased you off for your dirty tricks and condescending insults. I can't tolerate bullies, especially not when they are lackeys. Defend yourself, miserable wretch, for even if it is dark there is moonlight, and I will make you into a moon stew, you swine! (*pulls his sword*)

Oswald I have nothing to do with you.

Kent Then stand up for your defence! You come with letters against the king and dance the puppet dance of lackeys that fawn to his wicked daughters. If you don't get lost I will beat you up anyway! (*strikes him straight*)

Oswald Help! Help! He is murdering me!

Kent Fight for yourself, or I will! (*beats him up*)

Oswald Murder! Murder!

(*enter Edmund with his sword ready, Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester and servants*)

Edmund What is this? Separate them!

Kent Come on, all of you! I can take you all on!

Gloucester Weapons drawn in my own house! What is this?

Cornwall Hold your peace, for your lives' sake, or you lose them! What is the matter?

Regan It is our messenger from our sister and from the king.

Cornwall What are you fighting about? Speak!

Oswald I have no breath left, your honour.

Kent No wonder, the way you consumed all your honour, you damned coward, who nature herself denies for your falsity!

Cornwall How then has he offended you?

Kent He is the false servant of the lie of treacherous intrigues!

Cornwall And what says the other part?

Oswald This old bellicose berserk, whose life I spared only for the sake of his grey hairs...

Kent You miserable wretch, is then grey hairs synonymous with helplessness unto imbecile senility, to feel sorry for and despise?

Cornwall Peace, I beg you, gentlemen! You spiteful aggressive old fighter, have no proper respect for the messenger of authority?

Kent Yes, but anger has its privilege.

Cornwall And why are you angry?

Kent That this simple slave should walk around with a sword who has no honour, smiling of obsequious flattery and self-satisfied submissiveness to established corruption and abominable conceit, with his cloak constantly adjusted to the wind or to the calculating hypocrisy of insidious opportunism! I can't stand such outrageously winning cheats! Are you smiling at me, as if I was something of a jester? Do you wish me to beat you to death, since you are asking for it?

Cornwall Are you mad, poor old man?

Gloucester How did your quarrel start? Explain that at least!

Kent I can't bear with such cajoling poisonous vampires in disguise.

Cornwall Why do you call him a vampire? What has he done? What is your case against him?

Kent I can't stand him.

Cornwall Your wrath is of such a kind that it would hardly be able to stand anyone.

Kent Sir, I am an honest man, and honestly speaking, I have seen better and more honest faces than those I am seeing now.

Cornwall This is a man who can't pretend or say anything else than his honest opinion and who in the name of honesty ruthlessly violates all borders of propriety without worrying about what corpses he leaves behind on the way.

Kent I know, I am no flatterer and can't conceal my brutal but honest ways to settle with lies of control.

Cornwall (to Oswald) What reasons did you give him for your quarrel?

Oswald None at all, as far as I know. When I was beaten up and humiliated in front of the king, this man turned up and made me trip, which raised the king's liking and encouragement, so that he was taken up among the quarrelsome king's first men, and when he found me here again he immediately started harassing me for nothing.

Cornwall So he is just then an old quarrelsome grumbler and noisy troublemaker. Put him in the stocks! That should teach him manners!

Kent My lord, I am too old to be able to learn any manners any more. I am in the service of the king by whose wish I was sent here to you. If you treat his trusted servant so meanly he will not receive it well but perhaps take it personally.

Cornwall You should have thought of that before starting your quarrel. Put him in the stocks! He will sit there until noon.

Regan Until noon! All night until noon!

Kent My lady, you would not treat me so badly if even I was the king's hand.

Regan Well, now you are not but just another of his hoodlums.

Cornwall He is just such a hooligan that sister Goneril describes in her letter. You will not get away from it, old devil of a bully! *(The stocks are brought in.)*

Gloucester I ask you not to act like that. He has committed a fault, and the king will lecture him for it. You give punishment to the lowest thieves and bandits. The king would receive it worse than a gross personal insult, if his trusted servant was subjected to such an offensive treatment.

Cornwall That will be on my responsibility.

Regan My sister could receive it even worse that a servant of hers is thus scolded, boxed and maltreated just for obeying her command. Put his legs in it. *(Kent is put in the stocks.)* Come, my lord, we have nothing more to do here. *(exeunt all except Kent and Gloucester)*

Gloucester I regret this, my friend, it's the duke's pleasure, whom the world knows never to accept resistance and protests. I will plead to him for you.

Kent I pray you do so. I have been travelling for long and am tired and will probably just sleep away from it. I can amuse myself occasionally when I am awake by whistling or singing me back to sleep.

Gloucester The duke is to blame. It can't lead to anything good but only exacerbate what was already critical enough. *(leaves)*

Kent In the meanwhile I can goad myself in the sun while it lasts and now at last take part of the letter that I received from Cordelia, who has been informed of my case and how I spited destiny by remaining in the saddle. We are fallen, broken and wounded but are still alive and can fight on against the inevitability of the cruelty of the destiny of the superior power, until we don't have any strength left to fight any more. *(sighs and tries to make himself comfortable with Cordelia's letter.)*

Scene 3. In the forest.

Edgar I heard that I had been outlawed, declared wanted and sentenced to death, but I managed to evade every hunting patrol. No harbour is free and open, extra guards have been placed everywhere with sharpened surveillance, and I can only manage by being constantly on the run. My best refuge should be disguised as the most despised, contemptible and revolting person as a bedlamite in stinking torn rags and crawling in the ditches, in the mud and rubbish-heaps. I will smear myself in dirt and excrements, and the hair I will make tangled enough, so that not even my

father would recognize me any more, and will live wildly and lecherously exposed outdoors to be hardened under the sound and bare ruthlessness of the heavens in storm and hails, like another outcast escaped and mad poor devil unrecognizable to the world. In nakedness I will challenge the world and my destiny and only live for finding out what intrigues robbed me of my life. Edgar is annihilated, Edgar is no more, he has been expelled from the human community, and all that's left of him is poor naked Tom, a madman, who has forgotten himself and who he was, an undesirable shadow of a fallen man, a freezing beast of a mad beggar, who only is good for scaring people to death out of the establishment and order of society, scaring normal bores out of their wits by infernally screaming out his agony and dreadful woe of a damnation of the entire established human world.

Scene 4. At the castle of Gloucester. Kent in the stocks.

Lear, the fool and a knight

Lear How strange that they left thus without notice and without returning my servant with an answer.

Knight I heard something about that they left like that intentionally.

Lear But why?

Kent Hail, my ruler!

Lear Ha! Are you sitting here to amuse yourself?

Kent No, my lord, this shame is not very funny.

Fool Ha-ha! He has obtained some terrible garters! Horses are bound around their heads, dogs and bears by the neck, monkeys by the waist, and men are tethered by the legs; when the man gets too active in the lower part of the body, he gets wooden stockings.

Lear Who has so misunderstood you to place you like this?

Kent Both he and she, your son and your daughter.

Lear No.

Kent Yes.

Lear No, it can't be true.

Kent It is true.

Lear They can't do that.

Kent They have done it.

Lear It's impossible!

Kent Is it? Look for yourself!

Lear They would never dare. They can't, it's worse than murder to violate dignity by such recklessness. Didn't you say that you were in my royal service? The king's nearest man?

Kent If I did!

Lear Quickly explain to me what made them so preposterously humiliate me and you, and how they considered you deserving of it.

Kent My lord, I had barely brought them your letters, when another breathless messenger arrived here from your other daughter with another letter, which they immediately perused, and then decided to immediately leave this castle to go home to her, whereupon they ordered me to follow to receive their answer later on, wherewith they gave me some sharp and cold glances. When this second messenger appeared here, I recognized him as the blackguard you yourself had beaten up, and since he had poisoned my letter and my arrival by his message and his venomous presence, I could do nothing but pull my sword against him. He didn't want to fight, as would have befitted any honourable man, but called out for help and woke up the entire house with his coward yelling. Your son-in-law and daughter found that reason enough to put me in the stocks to shame me, and I warned them well enough that they would thereby also shame and dishonour our king.

Fool The winter hasn't passed yet,
if the wild geese are flying south.
Fathers who wear rags
raise terror in the children,
but if they give them money,
the children will ask for more.

But for all that you give your daughters, you will get as many sorrows as you can stand counting for a year.

Lear Alas, how the mean passions of evil start welling up and overflowing my heart! Down, passions, down, you horrible grief, you belong to the underworld! Where is then this wry and misled daughter?

Kent With the earl in there.

Lear Don't follow me, but stay here.

Kent I can't do otherwise.

Knight Didn't you do anything else than what you told me?

Kent Nothing. How is it then that our king comes here with only half a following?

Fool If you had been put in the stocks for that question, you would have deserved it.

Kent How so, fool?

Fool The gentleman looking for his fortune
and only looks for his own profit,
will start packing his things when it starts to rain
and not hesitate to leave you in the storm,
but I will stay, the fool is always left
and lets wisdom out and fly as he will;
thus he is a knave who escapes a fool,
but the fool will never be a knave.

Kent Where do you get it all?

Fool Never in the stocks, you fool.

(Lear returns with Gloucester)

Lear They refuse to speak with me. Are they ill? Are they tired? So they travelled all night? That's only excuses and evasions. Get me a better answer than these all too obvious indications of obstinacy, revolt and ill will.

Gloucester You know, my dear lord, how impossible the duke is when he has decided and ordered something. Nothing can make him change his mind.

Lear Revenge! God's death! Damnation! What do they mean? What do you mean? How can they turn me down? Am I not related with them? I must be allowed to speak with them!

Gloucester I told them so.

Lear You told them? Do you understand what I am saying?

Gloucester I understand you, Sire.

Lear The king wishes to speak with his daughter! The king wishes to speak with his son-in-law the duke of Cornwall to meet him or at least see him! And they are informed of this but will not react? This is too much. No, it is impossible. There must be something wrong with them. Perhaps they are ill. Perhaps the duke is ill. There can be no other kind of explanation. We are not quite ourselves when nature is harmed and forces the mind and awareness to slavery and submission under the imperfection of the body. I will endure and try to control my terrible temper and lack of patience and tolerance – I am far more headstrong and obstinately resolute than the duke and will accept their indisposition with the explanation that they are out of form. But why is this one sitting here? (*of Kent*) That action is more obvious than any lack of action and only betrays a wicked mentality and bad intent. Send my servant in to them. I demand to speak with them, or else I will beat the drum outside the door behind which they sleep, until I die.

Gloucester I just hope it will all be settled between you in good order and peace.
(*leaves*)

Lear O my heart, remain in my body, don't bolt as yet and run amuck with me! Calm down, my upset soul!

Fool That's right, old man, call for it to stay down, as that cook did to the eels she put down in the pasta alive, she hit them with a dipper and called to them: "Down with you into the paste, you dissolute herrings!" It was her brother who from sheer goodness smeared his hay for his horde with butter.

(*enter Cornwall, Regan, Gloucester and servants*)

Lear Good morning to you all.

Cornwall Hail your highness. (*Kent is released.*)

Regan It gives me pleasure to see you.

Lear I believe so, and I have good reasons to believe that to be the case. If you weren't glad, I would have torn myself out of my mother's womb and buried a faithless slut! (*to Kent*) Are you set free? Good. We'll come to that later. – Dear Regan, your sister is lost. Alas, Regan, she has set the sharpest vulture's tooth here to gnaw at my heart. (*points at his heart*) I can hardly speak about it, because it causes so much pain. You can't believe with what depraved insensitivity she – o Regan!

Regan Take it easy, have patience, I pray, Sir. It seems that you didn't correctly realize her qualities but rather noted that she didn't live up to her duties.

Lear What do you mean?

Regan I can't imagine that Goneril in any way could have neglected her duties. If she checked the excesses of your company, it was just a reasonable action with good results, which absolves her from all guilt.

Lear She is damned!

Regan You are old, Sir. Nature is with you on the border of its end, and you should submit to some guidance or care that better could guide your sense than what you can do yourself. I therefore ask you to return to my sister, and tell her as it is, that you have done her wrong.

Lear Apologise to her and ask her of forgiveness? Do you realize what you are asking? What would it look like? (*kneels and pretends*) "Dear daughter, I confess that I have grown old, old people are redundant and have no right to exist as superfluous parasites, so I beg you to show mercy by providing me with clothes, food and a bed!"

Regan This does not befit you, my good man. You are pretending. Have the goodness to return to my sister. You still have some of your reserved month under her roof.

Lear (rising) Never, Regan. She has taken half of my comrades away from me and regarded me with dark looks, hit me like a snake with a mean cloven tongue and wounded me deep at heart with its poison. May all towering retaliation strike her tenfold from heaven for her ingratitude! Strike her progeny, revenging spirits, with paralysis, invalidity and deformed impotence!

Cornwall Fie, my lord! You forget yourself and don't know what you are saying!

Lear Strike her with blindness, lightning of destiny, pierce the disdain of her cruel scorning eyes with the painfulness of the annihilating consumption of sharp devouring flames, and infect her beauty with the stinking rot of lethal mists, so that she will rot herself and fall with her pride!

Regan O gods! Thus he would condemn me also if he felt like it!

Lear No, Regan, you shall never meet with my damnation, your tenderness is another matter that never will give in to inhumanity. She has a sharp and threatening glance, but your eyes do not burn but only comfort. It's not in your nature to remove my joy, amputate me of my men, waste words on abusive quarrel and hardness, ration away my maintenance and close the door to me. You know nature better and its duties, the resulting obligations of childhood, the laws of politeness and what belongs to gratitude. You have not forgotten that I gave you half the kingdom.

Regan And what is your point?

Lear Who humiliated my man by shamefully putting him in the stocks?

(*horns outside*)

Cornwall Who is coming now?

Regan It is my sister's herald. It confirms her letter, that she will soon be here.
(*enter Oswald*) Has my sister arrived?

Lear This is a slave, whose vanity of presumption is based in the fickle grace that he serves. Get out, servile worm brood, of my sight!

Cornwall What do you mean?

Lear He was the one who sent my nearest servant in the stocks! Regan, I hope you didn't know anything about it. But who is coming here? O heavens, (*enter Goneril*) if you love old men and honour obedience as a virtue, if you are aged yourselves, then make my cause your own, confess yourselves and take my side!
(*to Goneril*) Are you not ashamed to face this grey beard? O Regan, can you accept her hand?

Goneril Why not? How have I caused any offence? Everything is not indecency that is nominated thus by imprudence and senility.

Lear O heart, can you stand the thrusts? Can you hold together? How was my man put in the stocks?

Cornwall I put him there myself as a logical consequence of his lack of self control.

Lear You did?

Regan I beg you, father, since you seem perilously on edge and weak, please calm down. If you stay with my sister until the end of the month and relinquish half of your men, you can then come to me. At the moment I am not at home and can't supply you with your needs.

Lear Return to that reptile after she has taken fifty men away from me? No, I would rather renounce every roof and choose the heaven's lack of protection and constant attacks and harassment to join and become comrade and one with the wolf's howling and the owl's hooting and every animal of the night in sinister necessity! You ask me to return with that presumptuous magpie? You could as well have asked the irate king of France, who married my youngest daughter without a dowry, to renounce his whore, go for a pension and start wandering around as a barefoot despicable beggar! You ask me to return to that greedy dragon's nest? Rather persuade me to serve that idiot's groom and slave! (*indicates Oswald*)

Goneril As you please, Sir.

Lear I beg of you, my daughter, don't drive me mad. Rest assured that I will not trouble you, my child: farewell. We shall not meet or see each other again. Still you were and remain my flesh and blood, my daughter, or some other affliction in my flesh, that I was compelled to accept as mine. You are a rash, a carbuncle, a severely consuming boil of pestilence in my contaminated blood. But I will not reproach you. Let the shame come when it chooses, I will not call for it, I don't invoke thunder gods and devils to assist me in your destruction, but I am not of that kind but will grant you time to improve. I can show patience though, and I can stay here until further with Regan with my following of a hundred faithful men.

Regan It's not that simple. You were not expected yet, and I don't have means to welcome you. Listen to my sister, for those who can reason and experience your

passion can only arrive at the conclusion that you are old, and then – she knows herself what she knows.

Lear Is this kindly spoken?

Regan It is reasonable. Are fifty followers not enough? What more do you need? That is already too many, for how could such a following under two commands keep peace and together? It will be difficult if not impossible.

Goneril Why can't you make yourself respected and understood and obeyed by her servants or by mine?

Regan Yes, tell us why, my lord. If they would make trouble we can chastise and admonish them. If you now come home to me, I see an impending danger and must ask you to only bring twenty-five. I cannot entertain and take responsibility for any more.

Lear I gave you everything!

Regan In the nick of time.

Lear I made you my guardians and regents with unlimited authority with only the reservation that I would myself keep and hundred men. You now demand that number to be cut down to twenty-five. Do you really mean that, Regan?

Regan I stick to it. I can't entertain any more.

Lear Evil creatures could though appear as better ones at the manifestation of greater evil. To not be the worst could thus be praiseworthy to some extent. (*to Goneril*) I follow you. You still allow me fifty though, which is the double of your sister's hard bargain of twenty-five. Your love weighs double against hers.

Goneril Why should you have any at all to follow you at any court, where there are more than the double number to serve you?

Regan Quite right. You don't even need one.

Lear It's not about the need. Our lowest beggars are superfluous in their extreme humility. Don't give nature more than what she needs – man's life is as cheap as any animal's. You are a lady; if just being dressed warm would be wonderful, then you would not need all these sumptuous dresses and shabracks that don't even warm you. But concerning the need – give me patience, my pressing need of patience! You look here in front of you, mighty gods, a poor old man with as many heavy sorrows as years, equally miserably poor in both capacities! If you were the ones who turned the hearts of these daughters against their father, then don't do me the injustice that I would easily carry it, rather fill me with sacred ire, and don't let any water drops of female weapons tarnish my cheeks! No, you unnatural harpies, I will take such a revenge on you that the world shall – what I will bring about – I don't know yet, but there will be some terror across the world. You think I shall weep, no, I shall not weep. I will have reason enough to weep, but my heart will then sooner burst in its seams in a hundred thousand fragments before the hurricanes of tears will break forth. O fool, it seems I am actually going quite mad! (*exit with Gloucester, Kent and the fool.*)

Cornwall There will be a storm. Let us retire. (*thunder*)

Regan My house has limited facilities. The old man and his people cannot be housed.

Goneril It's his own fault. He has forfeited himself and should later on have the taste of the result of his folly.

Regan For his sake I would gladly receive him but not one of his men.

Goneril That's how I feel also. Where is then our earl of Gloucester?

Cornwall He followed the old man out. Here he is now. (*enter Gloucester*)

Gloucester The king is furious.

Cornwall Where is he going?

Gloucester He is calling for his horse, but no one knows where he will go.

Cornwall It's best for him to have his way. He knows best where he will go.

Goneril I beg you not in any way to ask him to remain.

Gloucester Alas, the night is coming, and the winds are menacingly increasing. There is hardly even any bush for miles in any direction...

Regan My lord, self-willed men are best brought up and chastised by the damages they cause themselves. Close and lock your gate and all doors. He is accompanied by a gang of loose people who in unrestrained desperation could undertake anything. What they could incite him to by their unsound influences may be shunned by all wisdom and shut out from a world of reason and order.

Cornwall Close your gates, noble Gloucester. The night will run wild. My Regan's advice is clearly the only right one. Let's lock the storm out and keep it there and ourselves in protection from it.

Act III scene 1. The moor. Kent and the knight, from different directions.

Kent Who is present, except the bad weather?

Knight An equal to the terrible weather, extremely disturbed.

Kent I know you. Where is our king?

Knight Fighting the storm wind, commanding the wind to blow the earth down the sea, or the sea to overwhelm the earth, wishing for a doomsday, an end to everything by cataclysms, under heart-rending screams and tearing his white hair, which the wind grabs hold of and tousele in a chaos, while he tries to excel the conflict of the rain storm with the wind by even greater wrath and fury in his little one man's world, which he pretends to furiously command, conduct and wreak the universe in havoc to collapse in.

Kent Is there no one with him?

Knight No one but the fool, who makes efforts to fool away his storm of heartaches by silly jokes.

Kent Sir, I know you and dare to confide in you. There is a conflict going on, although it so far is concealed by the mendacity of false diplomacy, between the dukes of Albany and Cornwall, who keep servants who are paid by France, who carefully watches and follows how the old king is being treated. It is to be supposed

that there will soon be an invasion here from France to restore order. Therefore I come to you. If you take care of my information and dare to believe in me and go down to Dover, you will there find grateful ears for what news you can tell from here, especially how unnaturally the king has been treated and practically been driven in exile from his mind and from reality, of which he has reason enough to complain indeed. I am myself a nobleman of highest birth and education and therefore want to trust you with this possibility of advancement and general welfare.

Knight We will discuss this further.

Kent No, it is not necessary. For confirmation of where I stand, take this purse and what it contains. If you see Cordelia, which I have reason to believe you will, show this ring, and she shall know and tell you who I am, which you don't know as yet. The devil take this storm! I go to find the king.

Knight Give me then your hand at least as a sign that we understand each other. Have you anything more to say?

Kent Only, that he of us who first finds the king may cry it out, so that the other also easily could find him. Let us search for him in different directions. (*they separate*)

Scene 2. Another part of the moor.

Lear Blow, winds, and burst your powers! Rage and blow your fury around the world! You cataracts and hurricanes, spray and sprout, flush until you drowned us with our towers and castles, let all the world drown in your ravaging fury of open gates of heaven to all the floods in the world! You sulphur-spewing and momentously annihilating fire-throwers and masters of effectiveness in cleaving oaks like any piece of wood, come on and aim at my skull to make it burn! Hit the round world flat to the ground like a pancake, you magnificent thunder and lightning! Split all the forms of nature and crush and smother man in the prototype of her inhuman embryo, which only made her absolutely perfect as a monster of ingratitude!

Fool O uncle, holy water indoors in all its dryness is much better than this reckless squalling by the ruthless floods of the rain! Let's retire indoors and beg your daughters' graceful blessing, for this night is the top of all disgrace towards both all wise men and fools.

Lear Rumble all your rage from the bottom of hell! Sprout, fire, and overflow the earth with drenching rains! Neither whirlwinds, thunders or rains even come close to the horrific terror of my daughters! I will not burden you, all bolting elements let loose, with accusations of unkindness or meanness, for I never gave you any kingdom or called you children, you don't owe me anything to the least, so just let yourselves out with all your terrors; here I am, your slave, a poor, despised, weak old man without any means! And still I call you serviceable ministers uniting with my two horrendous daughters in limitless and total war against this old white head,

which can't muster anything for its defence except encourage and heighten all the world's frenzy, agreeing fully with it all along in blowing everything to hell! Oh, this is too terrible!

Fool The one who has a house to put his head in always has something left in his head.

Lear No, I have nothing left in my head, for everything I had is blown away in a cleansweep by my daughters, who swept away my lifelong love like a mouldy cobweb in the way. All I have left in my head is cobwebs and empty horrors.

Kent (showing up) Who is there?

Fool A wise man and his fool.

Kent Alas, Sir, are you here then? Not even all that could love nights would love a night like this, the angry skies make sure that wanderers go astray and under in their darkness strewn with lethal traps, and you had better stick to caverns. I have never during all my time experienced such infernal thunderstorm weather with such explosive outbursts in horrifying enlightenment by terror fireworks, such cascades of horizontal rainstorms and lashing tempest gusts. Man's nature cannot bear such fear enforced by such demonstrations of a black hole of bottomless unfathomable wrath let loose by the darkest forces of the universe.

Lear Let the gods now search out their enemies. Tremble, villain, who walks around with crimes that never were shed light on! Hide, gang of thieves, perjurers, pretenders and ravagers of children! Everything will be exposed that got away, for no one can hide to the naked sky when it is roused in terrific anger! I call for all retaliation, all doomsdays, all crimes committed by damned people and the wickedness of all humanity! Cleansweep the house! Wipe humanity down to hell! For I am right, for I was wronged and more so than I wronged others!

Kent Alas, bareheaded, almost without clothes, untouched and insensitive to the cold murderous hand of the earthshaking terror of the storm! My dear lord, there is a shed close by, that at least could give you shelter for the storm. Rest there, while I will go to the hard house of inhumanity, the stones of which aren't so hard as the hearts of granite of its people, who refused me access just because I was outrageous enough to ask for you. But I will return there and force them to let you in.

Lear It is of no avail, for my mind is still gone. Are you well, my boy? Are you cold? I am cold myself. Where is there any hay, my friend? Necessity is a strangely changeable figure; the most ignominiously banal things could suddenly become vitally important to life. Welcome, shed. Poor fool and knave, I still have something in my heart that could feel some pity for you.

Fool He who only has some small sense left,
for heigh and ho and let it rain,
he still should be content with what he has,
since he will always still have left the rain.

Lear Very true, my boy, very true. Come, let us visit this old shed. (*exit Lear and Kent*)

Fool Before I vanish, let me prophesy:
When the priest is more devoted to his words than action,
And when brewers dilute malt with water,
When noblemen are tutors to their tailors,
When heretics are no longer burnt but only fancy women's suitors,
When every process has an outcome of some justice,
When no one is in debt and there is no poor warrior,
When slander isn't being spread by tongues,
When pickpockets no longer visit crowds,
Then there will be general disorder all over Albion,
For then the time will come that everyone is waiting for,
When people will start walking with their feet.
This was a prophecy by Merlin once,
That was expressed far in advance before himself by me,
For I am way ahead in time before him
And therefore know that he once will predict it. (*exit*)

Scene 3. Gloucester's castle.

Gloucester Alas, Edmund, I don't like this unnatural process. When I wished them to be gone, so that I mildly could take care of the old king, they took away from me the keys to my own house and expropriated it, ordering me neither to speak any more for him, plead for his cause nor in any way support him.

Edmund How extremely unkind and unnatural!

Gloucester Say nothing about it. There is a division growing between the dukes and even worse things developing. I had a letter this night, a dangerous letter, that I locked up in my wardrobe. This persecution that the king suffers will definitely avenge itself in time, there is a power growing for his defence, and we must join it. I will look him up and privately in secret restore him. Entertain the duke in the meantime, so that my mercy will not be observed. If he asks for me, I am sick in bed. If I must pay with my life for this matter, which is dangerous enough, then the king, my old master, must be informed. There are strange events astir pointing at some gradual upheaval, my Edmund. Take care! (*leaves*)

Edmund This I will naturally immediately inform my duke of and also of the clandestine letter. This appears to me like a gift by destiny, for this will get me everything that my father now relieves himself of. When the old fall down, the young ones will rise. (*exit*)

Scene 4. The moor by the shed.

Lear, Kent and the fool.

Kent Here is the place, my good Sir, please, welcome inside. The unspeakable fury of the hard black night of nature is more than nature herself could bear with. *(The storm carries on.)*

Lear Leave me alone.

Kent I ask you kindly to step inside.

Lear Do you want to see my heart broken?

Kent I would rather break my own. I beseech you, here is peace and quiet.

Lear That's what you think. There never existed any peace and quiet in this world. Everything is only unblessed disquiet and unrest, and there are no oases, only mirages. You think the storm is tormenting us, besetting us and invading our hearts, and maybe it's like that for you, but where a greater evil rules, the storm is hardly noticed. When the mind and consciousness is free and well the body is in good order, but the storm in my mind outranges all other feelings and utterly darkens the mind except for this exposed sick point, which attracts all fixation and attention. It's called a fixed idea, such a mental illness, when there is only one thought remaining of injustice, humiliations and their hurricane of completely justified vengefulness and harm in unbearable association with endless sorrow and pain. The ingratitude of daughters! How can it be so outrageous? Isn't it as if the mouth desired to tear asunder the hand because it carries food up to it? But I shall live to punish. No, I will no longer cry. To lock me out thus in this night! If they hadn't done it there would most probably not have been such a storm raised, but in the very moment when the daughters denied and excluded their father, there was a cosmic thunderstorm breaking all gates to decency, endurance and what a man can take from nature, and it will as truly as I live go on for long. There is my madness. I can't feel anything else than my heart's storm, that encompasses and lashes all the world.

Kent Please, Sir, enter for your protection and cover.

Lear Enter yourself and find your own security and comfort. There is no such thing for me any more, and all the universe bears stormy testimony of that. But I will obey you anyway. You first, my boy, enter the almshouse of homelessness. I will follow, and I will then try to sleep. *(Fool enters.)* Poor miserable miscreants, wherever you are, that endure the beatings of such a relentless and abominable storm, how could possibly your starved insides and homeless heads find any defence against cataclysms like this? Alas, I never thought of that. Learn from your new position, your stuck-up inflatedness, and expose yourself to what the miserables must endure, so that you then can shake off all your extravagance on them, to make it more equally shared.

Edgar (inside) Damn you all and damnation, what are you doing here? This is the refuge and home of poor Tom!

Fool (comes flying out) Don't go in there, Sir! There lives an unblessed spirit. Help us and protect us and save us, good fortune!

Kent Give me your hand. Who is there?

Fool A spirit, an unblessed spirit! And he says that his name is poor Tom.

Lear As if there weren't unblessed spirits enough already. How can you be surprised at having met with one?

Kent Who are you in there grumbling in your hay? Come out!
(*enter Edgar, disguised as a madman*)

Edgar Away with you! I am persecuted by evil spirits and possessed! Here are only cold beds without blankets.

Lear Did you give it all over to your daughters? And are your present circumstances the consequence of that?

Edgar Who will give anything to poor Tom, whom wicked enemies have led through fire and flames, through whirlpools and rapid torrents, across swamps and treacherous bogs, who keeps knives under his pillows and places rat's poison by his porridge and hunts his shadow to bring him down for his eternal persecution on his heels... I am cold. Beware of whirlwinds, shooting stars and treasons! Show Tom a morsel of mercy to provoke his enemies! They could have caught up with me long ago, but I found a safe refuge in my madness, for no one will voluntarily recognize a madman, since they are better at reflecting people's true minds.

Lear Did his daughters bring him to this? Couldn't you have saved anything of what you were and what you owned?

Fool At least he saved a blanket to cover something with, or else he would have shamed us all by just standing there.

Lear May all the most infamous pains and tortures attack and afflict your bitches of whoring daughters!

Kent He has no daughters, Sir.

Lear God's death, traitor! Nothing could have brought him so low in such a bottomless humiliation except unkind daughters. Is it fashionable now that fathers should suffer such minimal mercy as rejected and outcast fathers, that they from now on may appear only as threadless beggars and maniacs? That's what I call exemplary justice! Such processes need no judges. The processes will take care of the downfall and bolting derailment all by themselves. Only the execution may wait until later.

Fool This cold night will remake us all into professional madmen, beggars and fools.

Edgar Beware of the invisible grotesque enemy, be obedient to your parents, keep your given word, don't swear, and don't dress up in grotesque costumes of extravagance. Poor Tom is cold.

Lear What have you been once?

Edgar A civil servant who lived well and was content with it to some presumption, when I curled my hair and walked with elegant gloves in my hat and swore as much as I talked and broke every oath quite openly to heaven. I loved all good things, like dice and wine and women, was rather easy about love, used to keep under the influence, bloodied my hands, was a swine of indolence, a fox for slyness, mad as a dog and like a lion when hunting. Don't let the squeaking of the

shoes and the rustle of silk expose your sensitive heart to a woman. Keep your pen off borrowed books, and meet the foul enemy with permanent spite.

Lear That doesn't say much. You would be better in your grave than to answer the wrath of your heaven with such an uncovered body. Is man no more than this? Consider your situation. You don't owe the worm any silk, the animal any skin, the sheep any wool or the cat any smell. That makes you enviable. The perfect man is no more than this naked, poor, destitute creature that we see here. I must become like you. Away with all vanity, presumption and extravagance! Help me to unbutton this straitjacket. *(tears off his clothes)*

Fool I beg you, uncle, slow down and calm down, for this night is not kind and easy to play with and swim through. A small fire in this dark wilderness would still be a sparkle while everything would remain cold anyway. But here is now a wandering flame.

(enter Gloucester with a torch)

Edgar It's the cruel enemy himself. He starts at the first watch and then goes on until dawn collecting caterpillars, cobwebs and worms, spiders and all possible creepers to his decoctions to poison the world with by so called magic but only succeeds in frightening the children.

Kent How do you do, Sir?

Lear What kind of a bloke is that?

Kent Who goes there? What are you looking for?

Gloucester Who are you? Tell me your names!

Edgar Poor Tom, who eats frogs, toads, beetles and lizards, when he doesn't gorge in cow puddings and swallow old rats and dogs in the ditch, drink green and mouldy water, whipped, thrown in prison and the stocks, who once had six shirts and three costumes, but since seven years is only eating rats and mice, small cute raw animals.

Gloucester Has your lordship no better company?

Edgar The prince of darkness is a gentleman who conceals himself in the dark not to show his nobility.

Gloucester Our own flesh and blood, Sir, has now turned so revolting to us that it hates what it gets.

Edgar Poor Tom is cold.

Gloucester Come in with me. My sense of duty can't suffer to have to obey the hard command of your daughters. Although they now threaten to lock my doors and force you to exposure of this terrible night, I dared to venture outside to try to find you and ask you to come in where food and heart will be at your royal disposal.

Lear Let me speak a little first with my philosopher here. Why is it thundering so heavily?

Kent Please, Sir, accept his gentle offer. Go with him inside.

Lear I must have a word first with this learned Greek. What are you studying?

Edgar How to check your enemy and unvenom poison.

Lear Let me ask you privately a small matter.

Kent Try again, Sir, to make him come. He can't quite rely any more on his senses.

Gloucester Is that so strange? His daughters want him dead. Alas, the good Kent! He predicted that this could happen, the poor unjustly banished man! You say our king is on the verge of madness. I tell you, that I am almost mad myself. I had a son, who now is outlawed and disinherited, for he wished to take my life, but only lately. I did love him highly and dearly, my friend, no father could have loved him more, and this sorrow has blanketed my brain in darkness. Sorrows can have a paralyzing effect and partly force the soul out of the body and at least to some dangerous and precarious detachment from it, so that you feel alienated from life and reality and tend to disappear into a world of your own of mirages and the fickle dreams of illusions, which seduce you to more and more disappear out from the life of senses. But what an infernal night this is! I beg of you once more, your highness.

Lear I beg you, dear noble philosopher, to keep me company.

Edgar Poor Tom is cold and freezing.

Gloucester Get in, my good man, into the shed over there and keep warm.

Lear Let all come in and join us.

Kent My lord, this way.

Lear I will stick to him, this good philosopher. He is my friend.

Kent Good, my lord, comfort him. – Let him have his friend.

Gloucester Bring him along.

Kent Come in, Sir, join us.

Lear Come, my noble Athenian.

Gloucester Just be quiet. Not a word.

Edgar And then Childe Harold came to the dark tower,
and he only heard the word:
"Here is the smell of a British man by the blood!
Let's go in to sup by the great table."

Fool We shall see. I fear worse mischief than what the bloodthirst of meat-eating giants incur. As our uncle said, the storm in all its terrible outrage is nothing to what the bolting chain reactions of ungrateful daughters may lead to, and he is only mad already.

Edgar We still have far to go to that madness, for we are novices. He is old.

Fool Wisdom is never madder than when it matures to the insight that you have to resort to madness to endure reality.

Edgar Only then it really becomes wise.

Fool And we have the privilege to be able to follow the royalty of this wisdom.

Edgar After you, my good fellow student in the wisdom of madness.

Fool At least we know what we have to follow.

Scene 5. Gloucester's castle.

Cornwall and Edmund

Cornwall I will have my revenge before I leave this castle.

Edmund I suggest, that nature here has treacherously enough given way to the power of loyalty.

Cornwall Now I can better understand your brother Edgar's rebellion and treason. He must have realized that the father changed to the wrong party and thus united a good initiative and intention with the unnatural betrayal and rebellion of a son against the father.

Edmund What an irony of destiny that I would have to regret being fair! Here is the letter he talked about, which clearly confirms that he has been selected a spy for France to further the interests of France. Oh, you heavens, that this treason didn't have to occur and that I didn't have to be the one to reveal it!

Cornwall Come with me to the duchess.

Edmund If this letter is true and its contents fit, you will have a great deal to do.

Cornwall No matter how much or how little in it that fits, and I fear it is much, it will make you earl of Gloucester. Find your father, so that he can be taken care of.

Edmund (aside) If I find him consoling the old king it will further confirm his compromise. – I will try to preserve my loyalty, although the conflict between it and the blood will become difficult for me.

Cornwall I trust you, and you shall in me find an alternative and better fatherly love.

Scene 6. A room in a small cabin close to the castle.

Gloucester, Lear, Kent, fool and Edgar.

Gloucester You have it much better here than out in the fresh air. Make yourselves calmly at home. I will see what I can do to improve the situation for you even more. I will not be gone for long.

Kent All his intellectual capacity has stranded on his accumulated stress of upsets about heartrending disappointments. The shock has buried his senses in the storms of his heart and inner frictions. May God reward all your kindness. (*Gloucester leaves.*)

Fool I pray you, uncle, tell me if the madman is a yeoman or a gentleman?

Lear A king, a king!

Fool No, he is a yeoman and has the gentleman for his son, for he is a mad yeoman if he makes his son a gentleman and not himself.

Lear To surprise them with a thousand glowing and sharpened crowbars...

Edgar I feel insidious enemies all around us.

Fool He is mad who relies on tame wolves, the horse's health and a boy's love.

Lear It must be executed. I will arrange it presently.

(*to Edgar*) Come here and take your seat, my learned judge, (*to the fool*) and you, my witness, take your seat here. And now to you, hyenas!

Edgar Look how he stands and staring blindly, gorging and revelling in all human misery! Would you like to see a trial, madam? Come over here...

Fool She dares not,
for her boat is leaking
and therefore she can't come over...

Edgar The foul enemy is haunting poor Tom with the voice of the nightingale. Don't quake, black angel. I have no food for you.

Kent How are you, Sir? You stand so tense and tight for nothing. Won't you lie down and rest on these cushions?

Lear I have to go through with the trial first. Bring forth the evidence! (*to Edgar*) Take your place, you cloaked judge, (*to the fool*) and you, his equal, bench yourself by his side, (*to Kent*) and you are the jury. Please take your seats.

Edgar Let us run this correctly. Nothing is missing here.

Lear First comes Goneril. I swear to this most honourable assembly, that she has kicked, the poor king, her father.

Fool Come forth, lady Goneril. Is your name Goneril?

Lear She cannot deny it.

Fool By Jove, I mistook her for a broken chair.

Lear And here is another, whose Medusa locks boast of what her heart is all about. Arrest her at once! Weapons, weapons, sword and fire! The corruption is loose in the palace! False court usher, how could you let her run away?

Edgar Your poor senses!

Kent Please, somebody! Sir, where is now your great and famous patience, which you always were careful about keeping up?

Edgar I get too deeply moved by his decay and case and get engaged in his tragedy. That harms the masquerade.

Lear It's their dogs that now bark me off.

Edgar I will chase them away. Shoo! You must not blow off a wobbling rickety king, although he has poisoned poisonous daughters by their marriage, for every tooth that bites is a venom tooth, especially if they belong to a daughter.

Fool While dogs still bark better than they bite.

Lear Daughters bite better than they bark, for they keep biting at the heart, and it hurts if they are poisonous.

Edgar Poor Tom, your horn is empty.

Lear So let me then anatomize Regan. Look here what is growing around her black heart. Is there anything in nature that could harden hearts into such hardness? (*to Edgar*) You I will entertain instead of the hundreds that were taken away from my company, but I don't like your sumptuous attire. Change into something simpler.

Kent I beg of you, Sir, to take it easy and to comfortably lie down.

Lear Make no noise, pull the curtains, and I will go to dinner tomorrow morning.

Fool Then I will go to bed at breakfast in the evening.

Gloucester (returns) Come here, my friend. Where is our king?

Kent He is here, but try to avoid disturbing him. His senses are completely lost.

Gloucester My friend, I beg you to take him away from here. They intend to murder him. Carry him in your arms out to the stretcher that I brought here outside. Lay him there, and bring him to Dover, where you will be well received by welcoming protection and friends. You had better leave with him at once, for just an hour's delay could mean the end of his life and the lives of all of us who still are faithful to him. Follow me, and I will try to get you some provisions for the journey. We had better hurry.

Kent He is now immersed in the brave sleep of the defeated warrior after having lost everything. This sleep could have cured and repaired something of the damages that so urgently demand care and rehabilitation. (*to the fool*) Come, help me carry away your master, for you must not remain.

Gloucester Come, hurry. (*exeunt all except Edgar*)

Edgar When we see how our elders care for us we hardly consider our worries as an enemy. But he who suffers alone suffers most in his mind and forgets all about free and happy events; but when his mind gets over this and then finds other suffering companions, so that he can share them, how easy the pain then becomes to bear when the same that broke me down made the king bow down. He became like a child, and I became like a father. Tom, you are finished. Observe what is happening, and be on your way, when false assumptions, that smeared thee with injustice, are refuted by clear evidence that will lead to reconciliation. What more could happen tonight, except that our king manages to escape to land softer in the right hands? You had better constantly keep watch.

Scene 7. Gloucester's castle.

Cornwall, Goneril, Regan, Edmund and servants.

Cornwall Hurry to your husband immediately, Goneril, and show him the letter. The French army has already landed. Gloucester must immediately be arrested as a traitor. (*exit some servant*)

Regan Hang him at once.

Goneril Pluck out his eyes.

Cornwall Leave him to my proper treatment. Edmund, make our sister company. The actions of revenge that we intend to subject your father to are hardly fit for you to see. Instruct the duke where we now intend to give battle to the enemy in hasty preparation, so that we can coordinate ourselves. We must keep in continuous active touch. Farewell, my sister-in-law. Farewell, my dear earl of Gloucester.

(*enter Oswald*) Where is the king?

Oswald Our lord Gloucester has brought him away from here with an escort of about thirty-five men, who earlier belonged to the king. They are now on their way to Dover, where they claim they have a number of armed associates.

Cornwall Give your mistress horses at once.

Goneril Farewell, my dear sister and my duke.

Cornwall Farewell, my faithful Edmund. (*exit Goneril with Edmund and Oswald*)

Find our traitor at once, bind him like a thief and bring him to me. (*several servants out*)

If though we cannot take his life, for that we need a trial, we could still prevent him from causing any further damage, and it is no more than right that he should feel our righteous anger. Who is there? Have you got the traitor? (*enter the servants with Gloucester*)

Regan Ungrateful vicious viper! It is he.

Cornwall Pinion his arms.

Gloucester What do you mean? You are my guests! Do you answer hospitality and friendship with violence and violation? My friends, desist from such foul play.

Cornwall Pinion him, I said! (*He is pinioned.*)

Regan Pinion him hard! The dirty traitor!

Gloucester I am not, even if you are a merciless lady.

Cornwall Bind him to the chair. Villain, you have acted behind our backs!

(*Regan pulls his beard.*)

Gloucester It is not very kind to pull my beard, and most improper for a lady.

Regan So white and aged in his maturity, and such a cunning traitor!

Gloucester My lady, the white hairs that you with such cruelty pluck from my chin will accuse and accompany you to your grave. I am your host, but you have requited my hospitality with the violence and violation of thieves and criminals. What do you mean?

Cornwall Confess, Sir. What letter did you receive from France?

Regan Answer the question simply and straight, for we already know the truth.

Cornwall And what is your alliance with the traitors that have landed in Dover?

Regan To whom have you dispatched the incalculable maniac, who still believes he is the king and imagines he is competent enough for it?

Gloucester You are paranoid. I had a letter that is completely neutral and unpolitical with no conspiracy at all.

Cornwall Clever.

Regan And he is lying.

Cornwall Where did you send the king?

Gloucester To Dover.

Regan And why to Dover? Did you not have orders to keep him here?

Cornwall First answer, why to Dover.

Gloucester I am at your mercy, and I have nothing to hide. You will do with me what you will anyway.

Regan Why to Dover?

Gloucester Because I did not want to see how you with your predatory nails tore out his eyes, or how your hard sister set her fangs in his flesh to tear his heart out, which already was broken enough by sorrow.

Regan Listen to that soft pathetic and miserable comforter of maniacs, as if they were worthy of any ridiculous form of pious mercy and could feel gratitude for such grace!

Gloucester My lady, the storm that raged tonight was enough to devastate an entire continent and put out all its hearths besides all brilliance of the stars, but he stood up and helped the heavens to rain. If at this hour a flock of wolves had been howling at your gate, you would have ordered them to be let in to mitigate their terror of the nightmare storm, only him you would have insisted on leaving locked out and abandoned to all the wrath of the universe, but such a course of action is doomed to meet with some reciprocation.

Cornwall You will never live to see that. Hold the chair! I will stamp out all lights from these eyes.

Gloucester If anyone here thinks he will live to get old, he should interfere before worse atrocities are committed.

Regan Let him writhe in grievous pain as the trampled worm he is! Make the pains as cruel and inhuman and prolonged as possible, for they can never be enough anyway as punishment for his treason against us. He will never be back alive to the life that he forfeited by insidious treason.

Cornwall Your revenge will be anticipated by our own retribution. You stand no chance. (*gouges out one of his eyes.*)

Servant Get back, Sir! I have served you all since I was a child, but I never did you greater service than when I now ask you to withhold.

Regan You wretched dog, how dare you?

Servant Decency demands it together with all sense and policy. You don't know what you are doing.

Cornwall You take sides with the villain!

Servant Come on, then, if you choose hopelessness for your cause! (*they pull their weapons and fight*)

Regan Give me a sword. A serf has no right of self-expression. (*cuts him down from behind*) Your services are no longer required.

Servant Alas, thus I am killed by a woman from behind! You still have an eye, my lord, and you have seen what has happened here. (*dies*)

Regan Now tear the next one out as well, before he sees anything more.

Cornwall (*tears it out*) What do you see now, when you have been relieved of a white jelly ball that was in the way? It blotted your sight. Do you see any better now? At least you should have a better insight to your own good.

Gloucester Where is my son, my Edmund? Everything is dark forever. My Edmund, where are you when these so recklessly outrage your own father for no reason? Interrupt this nightmare demonstration, if you are still alive!

Regan Ha, you pitiable naïve and credulous traitor! It was he who informed us of your treason. He only hates you. He received your title as a reward. He is now the only legitimate earl of Gloucester!

Gloucester My God! And he made me reject my only true son! Such a calculating premeditated evil stratagem is not human!

Regan Just keep on complaining. No one hears you. No one feels sorry for you. You are a dead man who has received a worse punishment than death, namely the sentence of having to stay alive for a life of only scorn and humiliation!

Gloucester O Edgar! Forgive me! I was blinded by the horrendously egoistic intrigues of an infernal stratagem, but now I see everything clearly, too late, when I have been bereft of my eyes, my life and everything. May the heavens protect him!

Regan Cast him out into the dung outside his gate, and let him crawl around there stinking as a continuous warning of his despicable treason. Let him crawl to Dover, if he can. (*Gloucester is released and taken out.*) How are you, my husband? Are you well?

Cornwall I was wounded by that upstart of a slave. Follow me out, my lady. Drive away that eyeless villain! Throw this false servant into the dung of excrements! Let him rot into manure! Regan, I am bleeding hard. That damage came most inappropriately.

Regan We have gone too far and can never turn back. I am with you all the way. All we can do is to be consistent. (*helps out Cornwall*)

Servant 2 If that man ends well, then evil must prevail.

Servant 3 If she lives long and meets with a natural end in peace and quiet in bed, all women will be monsters.

Servant 2 Let's follow this old earl and engage the mad Tom for his eyes to maybe be able to lead him all the way to Dover. If a madman shows the way to a blind, no one will disturb them on the way.

Servant 3 You are right. My poor honest master! How is it possible, that thus honour is ruthlessly slaughtered everywhere and scorned as a ridiculous weakness, while cruelty and presumption with hearts of stone and spreading death is permitted to successfully overrun everything that yet used to be good?

Servant 2 Ask king Lear. He is still alive.

Servant 3 But if I understand his case correctly, there is not much left of him.

Servant 2 Still he survives and manages.

Servant 3 Against his will and only for his own increasing suffering.

Servant 2 It's an abyss.

Servant 3 What?

Servant 2 Life is but an abyss of endless bottomless suffering.

Servant 3 The villains don't think so, who are riding on it.

Servant 2 Just you wait. Even they will be thrown off their saddles.

Act IV scene 1. The moor.

Edgar Better then to know that you are despised and condemned than to live with constant flattery on a throne unaware of the disdain, the hate, the envy and all the rest. To stand at the bottom as the most rejected, discarded and exposed of human undesirables and indigent creeps is better than to be established and have the abyss ahead of you with its fall, for even he who stands at the bottom or lies wrecked in the ditch still has some hope and lives not in fear. The transition is more difficult from the top and best of everything to dishonour and degradation. Therefore I bid you welcome, you naked air and hard earth, you wild hardening nature and all things free and poor. The miserable wretch that you have blown down to the bottom of human misery is after all free and without debt and has nothing on his conscience and actually no sorrows and worries. But who is coming here?

(Gloucester is led in by an old man.)

My father led as if he was a poor blind invalid? O world, what is the meaning of this? But even if the infamous injustice of your hard reality teaches us to hate you, life will not give in for only growing older, more tired and more sorely tried.

Old man My good sir, I have been a servant with you and with your father all these forty years.

Gloucester Away with you, my good friend, get lost. Your comfort only makes things worse and is no comfort at all but gives me only pain.

Old man But you can't find your way.

Gloucester There is no way for me, and therefore I will not even need eyes. I stumbled when my eyesight was intact, then I saw nothing, and now at least I see everything important just because I have no eyes. It is often the case, that the very thing we lack and want will be what will lead us forward. O my beloved son Edgar, who became such a target for the blind wrath of a deceived father! If only I could live to recognize you once again, I would pride myself of having regained my sight.

Old man Who's there?

Edgar (aside) O gods! What can I say? And who can claim, that now things are at their worst, when you constantly are being surprised by how everything only is getting even worse?

Old man It's the poor mad Tom.

Edgar The worst is never at hand as long as we can believe and say with confidence, that we are now at the worst.

Old man Where are you going?

Gloucester Is it a beggar?

Old man A beggar and madman.

Gloucester Then he must have some sense left, or else he would not be able to beg. I saw such a man in the storm last night, who made me compare man with something of a lower animal, a worm and not a man. Then my son entered my thoughts, and still I was no friend of him yet in my thoughts. Since then much has happened. We are like flies to naughty boys. They pluck them of their legs and

wings for fun while they are still alive, and thus are we being handled also by the gods and destiny.

Edgar (aside) How shall we manage this? It is no honorary business to act the fool to sorrow and renew it and bring others to it, but I must begin somewhere. – God bless you, Sir.

Gloucester Is it that naked boy?

Old man Yes, Sir.

Gloucester Then you can vanish. He will take over, for he is more suitable for company than an honest normal man. But if you would catch up with us on the way to Dover, then bring a blanket to this poor naked soul, and he will find it worth leading me on.

Old man Alas, Sir, he is mad.

Gloucester Yes, that's just what he is, and therefore it is so very fitting that he should lead me, for the times are mad, and I am a victim to them. Do as I ask, or let it be. I would rather confide myself to a true madman than to this unreal world of madness.

Old man I will get you the best I can find, even if it will involve a risk. (*leaves*)

Gloucester Right'o, my good man. If we want to live we have to take risks. – Well, you poor madman, come to me, so that I may get to know you.

Edgar I am freezing. (*aside*) That's all I can say.

Gloucester Come closer then.

Edgar (cautiously) Bless your good eyes. But they are bleeding.

Gloucester Yes, they are, although they aren't any more, but to the point. Do you know the way to Dover?

Edgar Both by foot and by carriage, riding and by shortcut, but there are also byways and other ways.

Gloucester The straight road is good enough, without roundabouts.

Edgar Be blessed, Sir, for I have suffered severely and am still haunted by all the devils and demons and phantoms in the world, evil spirits, ghosts and even more unblestness.

Gloucester Leave them aside now for a while, for here you have another who is worse off, and you will not be rid of me now for some time. And you may feel comforted by the fact that I have fared so much worse than you, if it could be of any comfort. Look, here is my purse, you can have it for nothing, for I will not need it. I am bereft of both land and glory, castle and property, titles and everything but my sorrow, which was given me when it was taken away from me by force. So you are familiar with Dover?

Edgar Yes, my lord.

Gloucester There is a rock, that rises high towards the sky by a precipice that is so steep that you get dizzy. Bring me to that brim, and I will reward you for your trouble with some riches. And after that I will no longer need you.

Edgar My lord, take my arm. Poor Tom will lead you. (*exeunt*)

Scene 2. By the castle of the duke of Albany.

Goneril and Edmund.

Goneril Welcome, my good friend. I am surprised that my husband didn't meet us on the way. (*enter Oswald*) Well, my Oswald, where is the duke?

Oswald Madam, he is in there, but he is changed and no more what he was. I told him about the fleet and the army that had invaded us, and he only smiled. I told him that you were on your way, and he only said: "So much the worse." At Gloucester's treason and his son's commendable action by the revelation of the conspiracy he turned angry and called me a fool and said that I had turned the wrong side out. What most should irritate him brings him pleasure, while good news bring him down.

Goneril (to Edmund) Then you shall not enter with me. He is in one of his moods of coward doubtfulness and brooding, but it will pass. Go back to Cornwall and my sister, Edmund, hurry on their mobilization and motivate him by your guidance. I must arm myself here at home and get my husband out of his lethargy. This reliable servant shall be our contact, which we will keep on a regular daily basis as long as possible. Consider yourself a favoured ward here with me. (*gives him a token*) You are my favourite.

Edmund I belong to you and will gladly sacrifice my life for you.

Goneril My dear stalwart Gloucester, young dashing nobleman and earl! (*exit Edmund*) O, what difference between man and man! A woman serves her right man by careful services, which he inspires her to, but my fool of my husband only keeps abusing my body.

Oswald My lady, here he is.

Goneril I have lived up to our project.

Albany O Goneril, you are not worth the dust that blows in your face. You appal me. The nature that turns against its own origin and herself can never control herself. Your self-destruction has so run amuck with you that you no longer are aware of the perdition you are pursuing.

Goneril You talk only nonsense.

Albany That's how the fool considers the speech of the wise man, and it is well known through all of history, that politicians have refused to listen to warning voices, bad prophecies, realistic admonitions and soothsayers' inspirations by visions of the future, which always anyway came true and brought the political world leaders to piteous shame, from Nebuchadnessar to Belsassar and the Roman Caesars and ourselves. What have you done? I bore you by my speech but only because I speak the truth. You are wild tigers, no daughters, the way you keep raging in berserk fury like possessed death goddesses. An old harmless man of a father, whom a bear by sheer instinct would lick from natural veneration, you have driven out of his mind by depraved barbarity! Could my brother-in-law bear what you did? A man, a duke and a prince so elevated and generously honoured! If not heavens themselves quickly interfere and correct these abominable derailments, then all humanity must turn to self-destruction and commence a general human self

consumption, like cannibals and monstrous reptiles of the darkest depths, so that the whole world would end up like a snakepit.

Goneril What ails you, poor weakened milksop? Are you not a man? You talk like an old spinster with gout, plaintive by pure self-sufficiency. Don't tell me that you also feel sorry for that old mad piteously demented ridiculously pathetic yokel, who because of some reasonable unexpected protests goes hysterical and off his head and starts howling like a Nebuchadnessar, not transformed into some werewolf but to a sentimental sheep indeed. I thought better of you, poor man, if though I suspected you were worthless. Have you no manhood left in your body? France has spread its banners all along the coast, and you sit here rolling your thumbs chewing the cud by sickly self-reproaches for nothing and can but pity yourself. What kind of a wretched coward are you? You are no good in bed, but out of it without sexual comfort you are even sloppier.

Albany You inhuman devil, study yourself in the mirror! Ordinary deformity is not so horrendous as when it appears in the soul of a woman.

Goneril I have the power of initiative. You don't.

Albany Who are you? How did you turn into a monster? Are you still a daughter of the old pious king, whose reign now appears as an original golden age of Arcadia in comparison with the dark age which you mean sisters by hatred and egoism have plunged our Albion into, or has the fact that you together with your sister scrapped your father turned the two of you into perfect inhuman freaks that belong nowhere in nature? Only one thing saves you from being reasonable and justly massacred, and that is that you after all are beautiful women, how ever someone could make you that with such reptile hearts and infernal souls.

Goneril You are still a man. You must love woman no matter how she is. It's too touching. You just have to respect her, only because she is a woman.

(*a messenger*)

Albany What news?

Messenger The duke of Cornwall is dead.

Albany How come! Was he murdered?

Messenger Wounded by his servant who wouldn't be part of tearing out the eyes on the earl of Gloucester.

Albany Gloucester's eyes!

Messenger A servant of Gloucester's interfered, there was a fight, he wounded his duke but was killed himself. But the duke was still mortally wounded.

Albany This proves there is in spite of all another justice than all that falsity that incompetent senseless people fabricate to further egoistical interests at the cost of good faith and innocence. Poor Gloucester! And it was the duke who cruelly cut out his eyes? Was he not a guest of Gloucester's?

Messenger I have a letter for you, my lady, from your sister, which should properly explain everything.

Goneril (aside) In one way I could only like all this, but since she is a widow and with the young handsome Gloucester at her side, this only arises an abyss of hatred and

envy in me. She can only comfort herself by him, and he is a better man and younger at that, a young and dashing and irresistible warrior without scruples, who can do anything if you but ask him and flatter his still budding but ambitious vanity.

– I will read the letter and give you an answer. (*leaves with the letter*)

Albany Where was his son when they cut out his eyes?

Messenger He came there together with your wife.

Albany He is not here.

Messenger No, my lord, he was sent back to lady Regan. I met him on the way.

Albany Does he know about this outrage?

Messenger Of course, for he was the one who informed against his father and denounced him. He left his father's house on purpose to give them free hands to let them do what they wanted.

Albany Gloucester, I will live to thank you for all the love and loyalty you showed your king and to avenge your eyes. Come, my friend. Tell me more about what you have learned. (*lays his arm around him, and they go out together.*)

Scene 3. The French camp close to Dover.

Kent Why did the French king suddenly get in such a hurry to return to his country?

Knight There was something that had to be arranged. Such a large realm must constantly be subject to crises.

Kent Who has he left in charge as general?

Knight The marshal of France, Monsieur le Far.

Kent Did your letters have any effect on the queen?

Knight Indeed they had. She read them in my presence, and the tears started running down her delicate cheeks. She controlled herself though, she was a queen and ruler of her passion, but she had obvious difficulties in controlling it.

Kent Then she was moved.

Knight But not to anger. Patience and sorrow were most prominent as expressions of her feelings. You have seen rain and sunshine alternate. Her smiles and tears were finer but in that direction. Those happy smiles that played so tenderly on her lips didn't seem to be aware of what guests haunted her eyes, which left them like pearls dropping out of diamonds. In brief, that sorrow would be warmly loved and worshipped by all as a rarity, if all equally anxiously could harbour it.

Kent Did she ask no questions?

Knight Now and then she could not repress a sigh when the name of the father forced its way through by some panting, as if it squeezed her breast, but also other exclamations were heard: "Sisters! What kind of ladies are you? Exposed to the storm in the middle of the night! Alas, where had all normal human mercy gone? What did he do to deserve to be treated like lethal vermin?" Then the sacred water

was shaken out of her heavenly blue eyes, whereupon she, like arming herself, left to more deeply submerge into sorrow in her loneliness.

Kent It must be the stars who can give two so completely different daughters to the same couple. There is no other possible explanation. You spoke no more with her?

Knight No.

Kent Was that before the king returned?

Knight No, afterwards.

Kent Well, the poor disturbed and confused king Lear is now in town and could perhaps, when he gets better, remember what is going on and try to see his daughter again.

Knight What is keeping him?

Kent His own imprudence. Remember, that all these sad complications started with his rejection of his youngest daughter for a trifle, a glimpse of insufficiency, which every woman must suffer from. Now it is this that most of all is tormenting him, his qualms of bad conscience, and therefore he is ashamed and shies to the prospect of seeing the only one again who did not let him down.

Knight Alas, poor old man of honour!

Kent Do you know anything about the forces that Albany and Cornwall are mustering?

Knight I only know that they are mobilizing.

Kent Well, I will as soon as possible reunite you with Lear, when he at last has returned to the reality that he lost, and then leave you with him to take care of together with others. I will have some things to do in the meantime. When I get exonerated, you will not regret that you knew me. Come with me, my dear friend, I beg. (*exeunt together.*)

Scene 4. Dover. A tent.

Enter Cordelia and a doctor with soldiers.

Cordelia Alas, it must be him, irreducibly changed in character, nothing is left of the one I once knew as my father, instead a perfect storm of madness, so wild and raging and loose like an ocean in storm, and at the same time so blessed in his freedom – they say he wanders singing along the road, like a jester in a happy mood, with flowers in his hair in sumptuously coloured wreaths, sweeping like an elvan king in his own Dover – alas, my heart was broken into pieces at once when I heard about it. Was that madman then my father, a king, the wisest and best organized of his age, so lost to exaggerated and extreme senility, if that is what they call it, I know not what else... Can he be restored? Is there any hope for him? Will he even ever manage to recognize me?

Doctor Nature is our mother, and she can always cure everything. What he needs is a great and wholesome rest. He has been overstrained by the force of his worries and frustrations and also hard pressed by a shock, as possibly some result of

some bleeding in his head. But there is always hope for the soul. It is always basically and wholly sound and well.

Cordelia Do anything, my good man, when he at last arrives into our care. We must find him first of all, which shouldn't be too difficult, if he just avoids concealing himself. You give me hope, and everything is possible, and you know the secrets of nature with the healing powers and miraculous cures of its herbs with perhaps even one or other magic trick.

Doctor We will indeed do everything we can, if only we can find the lost and wayward soul and man who wandered off reality, and I have only the best of hopes. He certainly will be restored. All he needs is complete freedom from all stress and human pressure in absolute peace and calm in abundance. (*enter a messenger*)

Messenger Madam, I bring news. The British army is marching towards us.

Cordelia That is no news. We stand expecting them since long. It's only for my father's sake that we are here. All France watched their queen with compassion when she cried so uncontrollably for her father's sake that nothing could stop the rivers from her eyes, and for the decency that France is well known for, an army was sent over here just to mitigate the sorrow of a French queen. There are no military ambitions here, only love and mercy and the wish to assuage and redeem a profoundly painful suffering. I go in arms to battle only for the sake of my love and soon only to have his soul and heart reconnected with me.

Doctor We shall surely succeed in bringing him back to a better reality than the one that destroyed and ravaged him, for which he was too good and sensitive. He will probably quite voluntarily wander home to us and into your bosom.

Scene 5. Gloucester's castle.

Regan and Oswald

Regan But are my sister's forces ready and on their way?

Oswald They are on their way.

Regan And is he personally himself with them?

Oswald With some difficulty. Your sister is the more energetic soldier of them.

Regan Did lord Edmund talk with your master?

Oswald No, my lady.

Regan What meaning could my sister's letter have to him?

Oswald I have no idea.

Regan It is important that he holds his position here. We ran a risk after having put out old Gloucester's eyes when we allowed him to stay alive. Wherever he now appears, he will turn all hearts against us. I presume that lord Edmund left only to finish the old man's heartrending and dangerously upsetting life out of compassion to shorten his sufferings. He is to us the worst possible publicity, which Edmund is aware of, and will settle the problem, perhaps also to spy out the enemy.

Oswald I must go after him with my letter.

Regan Too many letters are being written here. They cross each other resulting in confusion and double messages, besides causing misunderstandings. We will get moving tomorrow. Stay here with us, for the roads are dangerous.

Oswald Unfortunately I cannot, my lady. Your sister was explicit concerning my mission.

Regan Why does she write to Edmund? Can't you forward her message by mouth? Do you know what it is about? No, you don't. You are too obedient and loyal. Let me see it. It's on my responsibility that the seal is broken.

Oswald My lady, I would rather...

Regan I know. Your duchess does not love her husband. That is rather certain, and when she was here she gave most expressive eyes to the young handsome Edmund. I know that you also are a favourite of hers.

Oswald I, madam?

Regan Don't you know that I see it? I can see through such things. I am sure of my case and what I feel and know. I advise you therefore to be open and observe, that my husband is dead. Edmund and I are in agreement, that it is more suitable that he is with me than with your lady. You shall know some more. If you find him, give him then this word, that when your lady hears so much of you, then ask her to do as well as she can and everything she can for the cause. Thereby I bid you farewell. And if anyone would happen to come across the blind outlawed traitor, then he will be rewarded with some privileges if he cuts off his life.

Oswald I wish I could meet him myself, madam! Then I would demonstrate on which side I stand.

Regan That's good. Farewell.

Scene 6. By the cliffs above Dover.
Gloucester and Edgar dressed as a peasant.

Gloucester When do we reach the top of this hill?

Edgar It's a strenuous ascent, but like all ascents there is an end to it.

Gloucester Methinks the ground is too even.

Edgar You lack some patience. Of course it's uphill all the way. Can you hear the sea?

Gloucester (tries to listen) No, I hear nothing.

Edgar Then also other senses of yours have been impeded besides your sight.

Gloucester Are you pulling my legs? Hearing is sharpened when the sight is lost. And your voice is different. You speak clearer now and use a better language.

Edgar You are mistaken. Nothing has changed about me except the clothing.

Gloucester But you do speak better and more clearly.

Edgar Here we are now. Stand still. What a precipice we are facing! To look down into the deep causes an irresistible suck that turns you giddy, so that you feel compelled to use force on yourself to keep you from throwing yourself out and

down... The birds and the gulls among the rocks are not even like beetles in size, and down there the fishermen move with their gear like tiny mice. You can't hear the sea as we are too far up. I can't look down any more, since I then run the risk and the temptation of throwing myself blindly down into the abyss of these whirling and frothing but lovely breakers so far down...

Gloucester Put me where you are standing.

Edgar Give me your hand. You are now but a foot from the brink of this precipice. For everything that is under the sun and moon I would not dare to drop...

Gloucester Let go of my hand. Look here, my friend, my last friend and escort to my liberation. Here is another purse. There is a jewel in it well worth a lifetime that could maintain you for as long as you please. May the gods and elves protect you and grant you progress and welfare! Now move farther away, bid me farewell, and let me hear you leave.

Edgar I hope you will fare well, Sir.

Gloucester I hope so for you with all my heart.

Edgar (aside) Thus I play with his despair but only to heal him.

Gloucester (falls down on his knees) O gods! I denounce this world and call you here as witnesses that I renounce all my suffering. If I would bear it any longer and continue to constitute a burden of awkward painfulness under constant conflicts with cruel authorities and with trouble and quarrels with the scorn and disdain of the world around, I would just torture myself for nothing. If Edgar lives, may then the gods protect him and help him through all this. – My last friend and worthy escort to my redemption – farewell. *(throws himself forward)*

Edgar Gone, Sir. Farewell.

(aside) And still I know not how fancy could be bereft of the treasure of life, when life itself agrees to its bereavement. If he had stood where he believed he was standing, he would not need to bother any more. Dead or alive? Sir! Hear me! Speak, my friend! He seems almost all gone. Still he is awakening and starts moving. What are you, Sir?

Gloucester Go away and let me die. How can you trick an invalid so cruelly? How can you pull the legs of someone blind? What do you mean? Who are you?

Edgar I am not the one you think. I have been sent to your assistance to help you return to your life.

Gloucester I have no life. You know that. Look at me. I am a worm and not a man, a trampled and dishonoured burden to the tyranny that now rules the world and who therefore quite naturally wants to have nothing to do with it any more.

Edgar Have you then no family? A son?

Gloucester I don't know if he is alive.

Edgar Then live at least for finding that out.

Gloucester I have no longer any eyes to use for any such required purpose.

Edgar Let me then be your eyes.

Gloucester You, a stranger who constantly shifts personality and takes on a new character, who tricks me to believe that I could kill myself and who in the cruellest

manner play jokes on me to the scorn of death? But there is something in your method. I confess you are somehow right. Now when I actually voluntarily and by my own effort have died and survived my own death, I see some meaning in living after all. You are a most unusual guide. Well, since you practically insist, I will let you have your way. Carry on as my eyes.

Edgar Give me your hand and rise up. There! (*helps him up*)

Gloucester Still I found some joy in leaving this vale of tears and spite the tyranny of cruelty by the greatest demonstration that life makes it possible for you to protest mightily against an unacceptable insufferability with.

Edgar How are you? Are you strong enough to stand on your legs? You are not trembling and shaking any more.

Gloucester I am too well. I should be much worse.

Edgar You have outwitted and conquered death.

Gloucester No, you led me through it. And still I am left in the very same position but as a totally different man.

Edgar You are welcome.

Gloucester Say that again. Who are you? What is your name?

Edgar Just an impoverished unhappy beggar.

Gloucester That is well advanced, for it is way far beyond me and my present devastated position, in the reduction of which only death was missing, but by you I have managed to go through it and further on and thus landed even more beyond the outside.

Edgar Something tells me that we not only go well together but are made for each other.

Gloucester You don't talk about your sufferings, which should be similar to mine, but let's continue wandering together to find out where this remarkable journey backwards and downwards through society may lead us. Perhaps you know something about my son?

Edgar Who is this coming here?

(enter Lear fantastically dressed and arrayed in wild flowers)

Gloucester Some dangerous stranger?

Edgar No, a sight that I am glad that you won't have to see.

Lear No, they can't even arrest me for coining money, for I am the king himself.

Edgar O most supreme heartrending pathetic absurd apparition!

Lear Nature fortunately is above human pettiness like criminality and politics, especially when they have joined hands together. Therefore I am now king of nature.

Gloucester I recognize that voice.

Lear Ha, Goneril, you condemned me to be brandished for senility too early! No one will stop me now, for nothing human can stop nature, and I am in command now as ruler of all nature! From here I will settle with all humanity and this abyssal

pit of generations of vipers, who only poison each other in their wayward loss in straying away from nature.

Gloucester Isn't it the king?

Edgar A king to every inch, and even more so now in these new strange circumstances when everything has gone wrong and the king as the most lost and twisted of all still emerges as the wisest.

Lear Sir, don't quake before me, even if I must condemn you. I forgive you. What was your crime? Infidelity? You don't have to die. No one shall die for infidelity, for all people are doomed to fall for their infidelity, and Gloucester's illegitimate bastard of a son was kinder to his father than my cursed daughters.

Gloucester O, let me kiss this tender father's hand!

Lear Let me wipe it first, or else it will smell of mortality.

Gloucester O ravaged glory and raped superiority! Thus seems the crown of all creation now have been trampled by the swine who wallow in ruining the course of the world! Say, do you recognize me?

Lear I remember those eyes very well. Tell me, are you squinting at me? They seem to regard me with some kind of introverted reflections of afterthought. Can you see me? I can see you, but you don't seem to be able to or wish to meet my gracious eye. What's the matter with you? Am I to ask that, who don't even know what is the matter with me? But read this proclamation to me. It seems to have something to say about us.

Gloucester Alas, I couldn't even read it if all the letters were suns.

Edgar This is too unbearable. – Don't force him, Sir. He has no eyes any more to be able to read. Can't you see that?

Lear No, for my eyes are too blurred and only have the second sight. Therefore even someone blind should be able to see better than I. Hasn't he even then his eyes with him? Has he forgotten his spectacles? I cannot see that he makes use of any glass eyes. So at least he must then have some foresight. Please read.

Gloucester With my empty eye sockets?

Lear For example. Have you nothing in your head? There is no excuse for having nothing to blame. Empty eye sockets is no excuse for being blind. You are not convincing. Every blind knows, that a blind sees better than anyone who walks around with empty eyes. A blind if anyone is seeing like a madman if anyone is wise enough to realize that the world is mad, in contrast to the world, where all who share it are hopelessly disturbed and mad. So admit, poor minister, that you can see indeed although only such matters that others cannot see.

Gloucester I see what I see with my feelings.

Lear That's what I mean. Anyone can see, that insensitivity is ruling the world, and therefore it is mad. I appealed to my daughters' feelings, but they had none, and they are now governing the world, and therefore it goes to hell. Anyone can see that except my daughters, for they have no feelings to see with. You understand the entire world order just by studying how a beggar is being barked at by a dog. The beggar escapes to avoid being bitten by the barking dog. There you

have the entire world order: the dog is obeyed just because he has an office, namely to bark. Thus my daughters barked me off, like bitches, and their husbands obeyed them like dogs. They now govern Albion: barking bitches and obeisant dogs, while human people in the palace of dogs are obliged to hide their tails between their legs and escape to get bitten. Still they are bitten. Just look at you. Who has bitten out your eyes? Dogs or bitches or both? Perhaps you refused to bark with the others. Get yourself some glass eyes, and you will no more see the misery, and no one then sees more than you with empty eyes, for your glass eyes will present as empty looks as all the others.

Edgar Who can certify that this king is mad?

Lear If you still will insist on crying, then take my eyes, for they have finished crying and need another's tears to be renewed. I know you very well. You are Gloucester. You must continue being patient; we managed to cry ourselves all the way here. But no matter how much we have cried, dear friend, we never cried more than when we first saw the light of day. Then we had no reason to cry yet but cried all the same and the more desperate, for we saw, we felt, we knew perhaps more of life than what we ever learned later. We found ourselves unhappily alive and immediately cried ourselves to all but death.

(enter knight with following)

Knight Here he is at last! Take care of him! Sir, your daughter...

Lear No, I have no daughter, for the two I had were changelings that wheedled their way into my wasted queen's bosom to kill her. Which one of them? What does she want with me? Hasn't she tortured me enough? Am I a prisoner now? Well, you could ransom me, and if you would not, then you have an innocent and faithful family father here to pluck out his eyes from. Is that not reasonable? What else are my daughters good for? Or perhaps they are gracious enough to give me some brain surgeon to cleanse my sick brains, which they would fain drink up, if I know them correctly.

Knight My lord, you have a third daughter.

Lear Had. I consumed her myself. She did right to flee the country.

Knight She is here, my king, to restore order and to reinstate you in all your rights and offices.

Lear (to Edgar) What is he jabbering about? Is he mad? This is too much. I had best run away from here. *(escapes)*

Knight Hurry to catch up with him, but treat him gently! – I have never seen anything more pathetic. Has he forgotten his third daughter? Doesn't he remember that she exists? Have the other two so completely managed to change all nature, that they alone have taken possession of his entire world?

Edgar Unfortunately, that's the indication, my lord. I understand that she is here with an army. Is there any battle at hand?

Knight Definitely, and everyone is talking about it, for there is noise of weapons everywhere.

Edgar And the other army, is it close?

Knight It is on its way with haste. It is well watched and expected everywhere with extensive preparations made.

Edgar Thank you for your news.

Knight The queen's main interest and aim is though to save the king, not just his person but above all his health. That is why we are here to bring him to safety for sure.

Edgar Thank you, my friend. *(The knight leaves.)*

Gloucester There is constantly more to live for provided here. Don't let the suicide temptation haunt me again with involuntary decisions by impulse!

Edgar It pleases me to see you enter constantly better thoughts, father.

Gloucester Tell me again, who are you?

Edgar A sorely tried poor man like you, who is constantly more urged to prioritize qualities of decent mercy. Give me your hand, and I will lead you to some better camp.

Gloucester Thank you, my friend. The enigma of your mystery spurns me on.

(enter Oswald)

Oswald The wanted man! There is a price on this blind head to further the interests of my career! Poor old abominable traitor, you will not have to suffer any more, death is all you want and lack, so if you want to make a last prayer, be brief about it.

Gloucester (to Edgar) My friend, your friendship is now immediately put to a graver test.

Edgar Don't worry. – Just a minute, Sir!

Oswald What kind of a lousy peasant are you to interfere between justice and a damned worthless traitor? Go to your pumpkins! Fight with them, if you don't want to lose your head!

Edgar Your head is looser than mine and needs screwing up. So you don't recognize me?

Oswald (studies him) Are you not that mad poor Tom? What are you doing here? Let go the arm of the old man! It's only him I want. Idiots will give me no money.

Edgar My good man, begone and leave us poor people in peace! You wouldn't dare insult this old man! You don't know what pumpkins, cucumbers and turkeys you are dealing with! If you want to fight, go ahead, but don't complain afterwards that I was quick at repartee.

Oswald You dare to make trouble, you nitwit!

Edgar Who is making trouble here? You wanted to make a headhunter at the cost of this old man! Do you know what that means?

Oswald That he will die, as well as you!

Edgar My friend, it will be you who will get shorter by your head! *(They fight.)*

Oswald falls.)

Oswald You peasant slave, you hit me!

Edgar Don't tell me I didn't warn you! Don't complain!

Oswald I am finished. Take my purse. You will find money in it with which I ask you to give me a decent funeral. There you will also find an important letter for Edmund, the earl of Gloucester. Try to deliver it to him, if there is the least trace of honour in your base body. Never could I have died more inopportunately! (*dies*)

Edgar I know you too well, you wretched servile crook, a servant to the lewdest vices of your mistresses, optimal for their cultivation of them. Yes, I have so much honour that I will neither give you any funeral nor deliver your mail. I will be honourable enough to make myself the receiver of it and also the keeper of your black market money, you headhunter!

Gloucester Is he dead?

Edgar Completely. Take it easy, father, and sit down. The letters he mentioned should concern my friends. He is dead, and I only regret that he died alone – there are worse villains left. Let's see. (*opens the letters*) They say, you should not read the letters of others, but in order to get to know your enemies and their strategy it's quite justified to tear their hearts asunder, and nothing could be more legitimate. (*reads*) "Remember our agreement. You will get many occasions to let him draw a blank. If he manages and returns home from the war there is nothing to do, I am done for as his slave in bed, and his bed will be my prison of torture, from which I still hope you will be able to liberate me and replace with a more suitable marriage. Hopefully your future wife and fondest friend, Goneril."

So this is the situation and conspiracy, she wants to change husband and remove her consort by the help of my brother, who would be his longed for successor. Thus the lewd woman scraps her husband and takes his murderer for a better husband instead. How do these women think? Is desire everything then and at its most attractive when it chooses for its means the blackest criminal most ruthless intriguers, who seem to be one-sidedly focussed on self-destructively spreading evil everywhere as wide as possible? No wonder that we never in this world can be free from civil wars.

Gloucester The king makes a good example in his perfect madness. How intolerable it is to constantly be soundly aware of and feel your sorrows without being able to give them proper expression by bellow resounding through all the universe! But the king found a way to achieve this and seems to have chosen himself his consistent madness just to be able to rage with a vengeance and at the same time forget or get detached to the unbearability of his suffering and outrageous sorrows. (*Drums at a distance.*)

Edgar Give me your hand. I hear the war drums at some distance. Come, my father, I know a friend who is waiting for us.

Scene 7. A tent in the French camp.

Cordelia, Kent and the doctor.

Cordelia O my good Kent, how shall I live and work to be like you in goodness? My life is getting too short, and I am insufficient in most things.

Kent Just the acknowledgement is too much a salary. I only do what has to be done and confine myself to facts and necessity. That is all.

Cordelia I beg you to lay off the rags that only is reminding of worse times past. They make a disguise that never could have been worthy of you.

Kent Pardon me, my lady, but it is safest that I so far remain unknown. I must beg you not to know me at all until it is time to at last lay off the terrible masks that twisted times have forced us to wear.

Cordelia As you wish, my friend. *(to the doctor)* How is our father and king?

Doctor Still asleep, and the fact that he sleeps at all is a good sign.

Cordelia O you better gods, mend this broken heart and give him back his senses, that were bereft of him by meanness and injustice! Let him feel that he is among people again and among his own!

Doctor If you please, my lady, I think we can wake him up now. He has slept enough.

Cordelia I trust you completely. Do what you find is best. Is he properly dressed? *(Lear is carried in by a palanquin carried by servants. The knight is in his service.)*

Knight Yes, my queen, in his heavy beauty sleep we took the opportunity to dress him up in clean and proper clothes.

Doctor Be present, my lady, when we wake him up, which will surely do him good.

Cordelia Of course.

Doctor Come closer. It will probably also be helpful for him to hear some sweet and soothing music.

Cordelia O my dear father, on my lips there is the medicine of restoration, and let my kiss disperse all the scars and memories of demons that were caused by my two poor sisters.

Kent Your care is his highest security.

Cordelia If you hadn't been their father, my compassion with them would have encountered reasonable questioning, but your person is enough to forgive everything. Was this then a face that could be spited, when it spited the worst storms of the elements? In that night even the dog of my enemy who had bitten me would have sought refuge by my hearth, while you fraternized with the worst rabble of swine and madmen in a haunted shed to find protection in used and sullied hay. It's a veritable miracle that you survived and didn't find the end with the loss of your senses, and that you now in spite of all are on your way back. I think he is waking up. Speak to him.

Doctor Madame, it would be most proper if you did.

Cordelia How is my king and father? Are you well, your majesty?

Lear You did me wrong to dig me out of my grave. You are a blessed soul, but I am tied to a wheel of fire, which my own tears overflow like molten lead.

Cordelia Sir, do you recognize me?

Lear I know that for sure, that you are a spirit. But when did you die?

Cordelia He is still gone!

Doctor He has hardly awakened yet. Leave him alone and in peace for a moment.

Lear Where have I been, and where am I? Lovely daylight? I am ruthlessly being made fun of. If I saw someone so ridiculed, I would die of pity. I know not what to say. I can't swear that these are my hands. Let us see. Here is a needle. Yes, I feel its prick. I wish someone could appraise me of my condition.

Cordelia O father, look at me, and keep your blessed veiny hands over me. (*kneels. Lear also wants to kneel.*) No, Sir, not you. You must not bend your knees.

Lear I beg of you, don't joke with me. I am a very foolishly faithful and stupid old man, who is eighty years and more, and I am not one hour younger or older. In all simplicity and plainly speaking, I fear that I am not quite in my right senses. It seems to me that I should know you and this man, but I hesitate in ignorance of what place this is, and by all my experience I don't know how I got into these clothes, and neither do I know where I spent the last night. Don't laugh at me, but it seems to me, as I am a man, that this young lady should be my Cordelia.

Cordelia It's right! It's me indeed!

Lear Are your tears wet? Yes, so it seems. I beg you, don't cry. If you have any poison for me I shall drink it. I know that you don't love me, for your sisters, if I remember correctly, have done me wrong, while you were the one who had reason to, not they.

Cordelia No reason at all, not ever!

Lear Am I in France?

Kent You are in your own country, Sir.

Lear Don't play tricks on me.

Doctor Be positively assured, dear queen. As you see, the rage has died out in him, and still it could be dangerous to go back and remind him of the time of which he now has lost his memory. Ask him to retire, and let him rest until he gradually gets better.

Cordelia Would it please your majesty to take a walk?

Lear I must ask you to have patience with me. I am so old and foolish. Try to forgive and, if possible, also to forget.

Cordelia There is nothing for any of us to forgive. We are all innocent and only victims to the wild and incomprehensible plays of a most unfathomable destiny.

Lear I will walk with you, if you will walk with me. (*All out except Kent and the knight.*)

Knight Is it true that Cornwall has been killed?

Kent It is quite true.

Knight Who is now leading his people?

Kent They say it is Gloucester's son, the bastard.

Knight They say the real son Edgar who was banished is with Kent in Germany.

Kent There are different reports. It's time to be alert at the alarms. The collected armies of the realm are on their way here.

Knight It is inevitable that there will be a bloody fight. Farewell, Sir. (*leaves*)

Kent My direction is clear, and there is only one thing for me to accomplish, but whether I will prevail or fall, if everything will go well or to perdition, will depend on the outcome of the battle.

Act V scene 1. The British camp.

Drums and banners, Edmund, Regan, attendants and soldiers.

Edmund Find out if the duke will stand by his last word, or if he has changed his mind as usual. He is constantly preoccupied with his doubts and self reproaches. His changeability has become chronic with him. Keep me informed. (*a knight leaves*)

Regan Our brother-in-law has lately lost himself.

Edmund I don't think so, my lady.

Regan Tell me as it is, by all the goodness I wasted on you – do you love my sister?

Edmund As propriety demands.

Regan But have you ever tried to reach that for a husband privately reserved place?

Edmund That thought ill becomes you.

Regan I don't find it very probable that you fused yourself with her.

Edmund Never, on my honour.

Regan I can't stand her. My good friend, don't get too intimate with her.

Edmund Do not worry about that. Here she is now with her husband.

(enter with drums and banners Goneril, Albany and soldiers.)

Goneril (aside) I would rather suffer a defeat in battle than let her take him away from me.

Albany Dear sister, now we are united in final concord with our forces for the final battle. Sir, I heard the king has allied himself with the invader from France, his loveless opportunistic daughter and others, which has caused an outrage all over the country, which is now rising against this intolerable invasion. Where I could not be honest I was never yet courageous, and my cause is to defend the independence and sovereignty of the country, not to prevent the king's reinstatement. It is not the French alliance with him that we are fighting, but our own independence that we are defending.

Edmund That's reasonable and for you a noble cause.

Regan Why are we discussing this?

Goneril Because we must stand united against the enemy. Private quarrels and interests have no say here.

Albany Let's hold a council and plan our strategy with our generals.

Edmund I will join you presently.

Regan Are you coming with us, my sister?

Goneril No.

Regan It would be appropriate. I ask you to come with us.

Goneril (aside) She is jealous. She can't fool me. – Well, I will follow.

Edgar (appearing, to the duke) If ever your grace was willing to listen to a poor wretch, I ask you to listen to me.

Albany (to the others) I will join you presently. *(exit all except Albany and Edgar)* Speak.

Edgar Before you join the battle, I must ask you to read this letter. If you will have the victory, let the trumpet sound for the man who delivered it. No matter how miserable I may seem, I can produce a witness for confirmation of the matter. If you suffer defeat, the case is closed, and no one needs to do anything more. Providence be with you!

Albany Wait until I have read your letter.

Edgar I must not do that. When the time comes I will be at your service. Let the herald call then, and I will come.

Albany Welcome back then. I will read the letter. *(exit Edgar)*

Edmund (returns) The enemy is within reach. Gather your forces. We can only guess their number and capacity, but we have spies at large. It's important that you make ready.

Albany We will gather all our strength. *(exit)*

Edmund I have sworn both these sisters all my love, both equally jealous and envious of the other, both stung deeply by the cloven tongue of the love worm. Which one of them shall then be my choice? Both? No one? Or just one? Neither can be satisfied and enjoyed if both survive. To take the widow would turn Goneril completely mad and furious, and as long as her husband lives I could hardly play that card. We will see what outcome the battle will bring. When it is over she could arrange his demission herself. Concerning the grace he wishes to show the old man Lear and his naïve daughter, that shall never be. We will win, and with them at our mercy no pardon can be given. They did instigate and make themselves guilty of war against our nation. This is a cause of defence and battle and no subject of debate.

Scene 2. A field between the two camps.

Lear and Cordelia march with banners and drums and soldiers across the stage.

Then there is Edgar and Gloucester.

Edgar Here, old man, keep in the protection in the shadow of this friendly tree as your host. Pray that the right cause may carry victory. If I ever may see you again and will come here passing by, I will comfort you. Endure and wait in the meantime.

Gloucester The fortune of grace be with you, Sir! *(exit Edgar)*

(war alarum and noise from the battlefield)

Thus the world makes big noise about nothing in constant aggrandized exaggerated stress driving humanity incessantly more mad and uncontrollable, while all we pious good and innocent people can do is to observe and deplore, and if we are lucky enough to stand outside, try to keep our hands clean. But the innocent are always struck nonetheless.

(enter Edgar anew)

Edgar Away, old father, give me your hand, for we must escape. King Lear has been taken prisoner with his daughter, the battle is lost, all we can do now is to get away. Give me your hand.

Gloucester Not one step further, my friend. I will rather rot here than suffer any more with the destructive way of the world.

Edgar Are you obsessed with suicidal thoughts now again? It will not do. We are not worthy our lives if don't overcome it by enduring it till the end. We mature in the meantime, which perhaps is our only comfort. Come with me now.

Gloucester I grant you the possibility of being right and follow you, but where? That we shall see, even if we don't have eyes any more.

Edgar Come on now. *(they leave)*

Scene 3. The British camp by Dover.

(enter Edmund with flying colours and music in triumph,

Lear and Cordelia as prisoners, officers and soldiers.

Edmund Bring them away into secure custody with strict guards, until we learn what the rulers will decide about them.

Cordelia We are not the first who by the best of purposes were rewarded with the worst salary. For your sake, my poor abused and suppressed father, I am devastated. I have nothing against suffering myself and can bear with anything, for women are better equipped for sufferings by nature than the psychically more vulnerable men, who like oaks can be broken by a storm while weak and soft reeds never are broken but always will rise again. May we not meet our sisters, the king's daughters?

Lear Never again in my life! Come with me, my darling, to the prison. There we belong now when tyranny has conquered and chased off every glimpse of light and decency in this country. There we will sing like canaries just for being there together, and I will constantly lie down on my knees for you and ask your forgiveness. So we shall live, pray, sing and tell stories to each other, laugh at the blinded delusion and perdition of the world, where dogs bark down all freedom, and listen to idle gossip about the intrigues at court, that never tire of making fools of themselves, wherefore the court is a court as long as it eventually lasts. We will also carefully discuss who is winning and losing, who will move in and who will move out and descry the enigmatic nature of everything and solve the riddle of the universal system as if we were God's specially chosen secret spies; and we will there wait for great people's congregations and sects to go and survive them all, how they prevail and perish in constant fluctuation, like ebb and flood to and forth completely intoxicated by the faces of the moon and eclipses of both the sun and the moon.

Edmund Take them away, for they are all finished. They have no other role to play in life now than the gaga of the outlived king.

Lear On victims such as us, Cordelia, even the gods themselves throw their incense. Have I found you at last? If anyone tries to separate us now, he will only

succeed in turning all heavens against himself in a worse fury than mine, for I am now united in league with the universe and will never again lose that control, which was bequeathed on me by my total derailment, which was necessary. Don't cry any more. You have perhaps like me lost all the world, but instead you have secured me. The evil time they have won for themselves by the victory of foul play will consume them from top to bottom leaving nothing remaining of their kind, which will be willingly forgotten by all, before they again will make us cry. We have won, for we have lost everything except each other, while they have lost who have won the power but lost their souls and the eternity of their future in the vain delusional process of folly. Come, my friend, my love, my daughter, we shall live in sweetest joys of pleasure and enjoyment in the light of our souls in prison no matter how deep the darkness may be in the world all around us.

Cordelia Now I can die, father, if only I may never lose you again.

Lear You can't, because I have regained you. (*Lear and Cordelia are brought out.*)

Edmund Come here, captain. Listen. Take this order. (*gives him a paper*) Follow them down to their prison. I provide for you a step on your career. If you just follow the instructions you will have your future secured. Know, that tenderness will never go well with the sword, power or a successful career. Tell me that you will do as I have written here, or go and find your fortune elsewhere.

Captain I have no choice, your honour, than to follow your order.

Edmund Do it then, and let me know when it is done in writing. And do it at once, before hesitation sets in with the weak scruples of afterthought, that could make a donkey back off from anything. I can't tolerate tearfulness and love drivel and childish babbling nonsense of delight. Happiness is an illusion that has to be smothered. If you are a man you must not hesitate.

Captain If it is a manly task, I will go through with it.

Edmund You will be rewarded amply for a positive and fortuitous result. (*captain leaves*)

Here is now the sumptuously criminal gang with rewards for me for having finally overcome innocence and love and their intolerable sentimentality.

(*Flourish, enter Albany, Goneril, Regan and other warriors.*)

Albany Sir, you have managed this battle with honour and bravery and brought it to a splendid victory for our free country against foreign interference. The victory is overwhelming, since you took those prisoners who brought about this civil war. Hand them over to me, so we may use them as they best deserve and for what is best for the security of the realm.

Edmund Sir, I found it safest to confine the mentally retarded old king to a secure place under armed guard in isolation to prevent his influence by weak and pleading sentimental looks that with his in spite of all still maintained royal rank and past could have a risky influence on common people. For the same reason I also placed the queen in the same isolation, and they will be at your disposal tomorrow when you deal with the instigators of this unnecessary war. May they pay for it. We have

bled and sweated for it, friends have lost friends, and a war like this between brothers must leave ineffaceable and long lasting traumas and almost incurable wounds in hearts and souls. Cordelia and her father have much in their irresponsibility and incompetence to answer for.

Albany Sir, pardon me, but you are just a subordinate in this campaign and not a brother.

Regan Speak for yourself. You forget that it is we, me and my sister, who have the power and authority here to order and decide. He has in spite of all led our army to victory and united it in glory, he had the highest command and has more than well lived up to it, why he has the right indeed to be called a brother with the dignity as such.

Goneril Wait a moment. He has deserved his praise and merits himself without your help.

Regan He was made a general by me and stands among the foremost of the highest rank.

Albany Why then hasn't he wed you who so favours him?

Regan He hasn't asked me, but your prophecy might come true.

Goneril And what in your vanity makes you believe that he could?

Regan I will not answer you, for I am not feeling well. I am tired out and haven't eaten, sister. Or else I would give you an answer indeed for you to take a bite in and chew, you jealous calculating and insidious crocodile. I beg you, general, take care of my men and prisoners and all that we have won. Do with them as you please, the walls are yours, may all the world bear witness that I hereby make you my lord and owner.

Goneril So you claim to own him.

Albany Have you anything against it? Do you have claims on him yourself? It almost sounds like that. As my wife you have no right to do that.

Edmund Sir, you don't own her.

Albany Yes, you halfblood, that's exactly what I do as her lawful wedded husband.

Regan (to Edmund) Let the drum roll and sound around loudly to the honour of your victory and our success.

Albany Just a moment! We are not finished yet. There is still an issue that cannot wait. Edmund, you are hereby arrested for high treason, and with you I also arrest that gilded worm. (*indicates Goneril*) Your claims, sister Regan, I refute on the grounds of my wife's secret contract with him. If you intend to marry him, then turn to me, who speaks for my wife, who by her own claims will discard yours.

Goneril What a scene! You are improving, my duke!

Albany Gloucester, you are in arms. Here is my glove. (*throws it*) If there is anyone else who also has a case against this collector of evil, mean and devastating treasons, like a female viper full of poison-sprouting brood, I demand to have it out with him first.

Regan This is sick. Here is another madman.

Goneril If it isn't sick indeed, I will never again believe in any medicine.

Edmund Here is then my own and my answer. (*throws his glove*) Anyone who calls me a traitor is a false and lying scoundrel. Let the trumpet sound, and let someone appear to support the duke's accusations, if there is anyone. I stand for the truth and honour that I am and have nothing to be ashamed of.

Albany Bring us a herald!

Edmund A herald! Bring a herald here!

Albany You stand alone, for all your soldiers belonged to me and have been dismissed by me.

Regan There is something wrong with me, and I am getting worse.

Albany She is not well. Lead her home to her tent. (*Regan is helped out.*)

(*enter a herald*)

Come here, herald. Let the trumpet sound, and then read out my message.

Captain Let the trumpet sound! (*A trumpet sounds.*)

Herald If any man of any rank or any quality in or out of the army endorses that Sir Edmund, earl of Gloucester, is a manyfold traitor, then let him appear at the third call of the trumpet, for the earl denies the allegations.

Edmund Blow! (*trumpet*)

Herald Again! (*trumpet*)

Herald Again! (*trumpet*)

(*Another trumpet answers. Enter Edgar armed, with a trumpet.*)

Albany Ask him what he wants, why he appears at the call of our trumpet.

Herald Who are you? Name and rank? And why did you answer the signal?

Edgar My name is lost, devoured and consumed by the gloating appetite and ambitions of treason, but I am born as noble as the man I step forth to expose.

Albany What man is that?

Edgar Who claims to be Edmund, earl of Gloucester?

Edmund That's me. What is your case with him?

Edgar Pull your sword, and if my speech is insulting to any minimal portion of nobility in that grieved heart that you don't have, if it isn't made of stone, may your weapon defend it. Here is my own. I represent with all right a position, honour and faith which you lack in spite of your strength, title and distinguished career of only success and triumph. In spite of your victorious sword and your triumphs, I assert implicitly that you are an insidious and low traitor, since all you are is but falseness, faithlessness, deceit and premeditated evil, of which I have as witnesses your brother and your father, not just of your abominable treason against them but also against your duke, your commander, against whose life you have taken part in a conspiracy to annihilate. If you deny this, my sword is ready to defeat and refute your lies and put them out forever by moral superiority. You are a liar whatever you say and always were.

Edmund I don't know you and have never seen you before, poor peasant in most inappropriate armour of the lowest possible quality, for you are an adventurer riding high on the illusion of the strangest rumours that you've heard, but still you seem to mean what you say, and you speak clearly as if you had some education and

culture, wherefore I gave you the chance to defend yourself. I return to you your imbecile and absurdly far-sought accusations and claim that your hatred is as much without any reason and cause as it isn't convincing. You don't know me. I know myself and who I am and what I stand for and know, that everything you say is just ridiculous fantasies, that only ask for being eradicated and forgotten. Let the trumpet speak!

(trumpet flourish. They fight. Edmund falls.)

Albany Save him! Save him!

Goneril You were too weak, my young Gloucester. You didn't have to answer an unknown opponent. You now lie deceived by yourself but not defeated, only cheated by your fate. That's how it works.

Albany Shut up, you bitch, or else this letter will. Before you die, you devil worse than his name, read yourself about your crime, which only is the latest one. You will not touch it, devil woman, for you know it already since you wrote it yourself.

Goneril If such is the case, the laws of the country are mine, though, not yours. I stand above every possibility of prosecution and compromise. *(leaves)*

Albany She still believes that she could be something, the infamous monster. Well, my lord, read! Tell me, do you know this letter?

Edmund Don't ask me of what I know.

Albany Follow her. She is desperate and could now do anything rash. Take care of her. *(a servant leaves)*

Edmund Everything that I am accused of I am guilty of and much more. In due time everything will come out. It is all over, and I am ready. But who are you who has managed to find out so much about me that you have seen me through, which no one else has even tried to? If you are nobly born, I must forgive you.

Edgar So let's exchange some amities. I am not less of your blood than you are yourself, Edmund, perhaps more, and the more for your having me thrown out, banished, exiled and all but killed. Do you know a father in the betrayal of whom you took part, when he only wanted to help someone in dire need? He was also my father, but contrary to you, instead of contributing to the bereavement of his sight, I later became his eyes, without his realizing who I was.

Edmund Then you are Edgar. The circle is closed. Everything fits, and we are back where we started, I no more than a worthless bastard and you my superior with all titles, rights and future possibilities. I saw a chance and took it. That was all. It was my only crime, but I was consistent and went the whole way. My downfall is just, and I have nothing to regret.

Albany (to Edgar) Only your gait revealed anything noble. Let me embrace you, my friend. You are forthwith promoted to my brother. Let my heart be cleft at once if I ever bore any ill will against you or against your father!

Edgar My lord, I am well aware of that if anything.

Albany Where have you concealed yourself? And how did you come so close as to learn about your father's sufferings?

Edgar He found me as his caretaker in the madhouse. It's a long story, but even if it is but briefly reported, your heart will break for what we have gone through and survived together, after my own was broken. To survive at all, I found it necessary to disguise myself as a bedlamite, and as a complete idiot I found my father, destitute and outcast in the darkness like the king but with his eyes put out as well. To spare him I didn't tell him who I was, until now finally it was time to settle with my half brother. Then for the first time after the meeting between the madman and the blind, I found a light appearing in his face, as he for the first time smiled.

Edmund My brother, I never thought that anything any more could move me, but this moves me. Go on and tell me more. It seems to me that you still have something left to say.

Albany Save it, for I am overwhelmed and can hardly bear hearing anything more at the risk of dissolution into tears.

Edgar Still I was not alone. When I homeless and wild found myself at the mercy of the storm, someone turned up who entrusted me with my blind father. He was also dishonoured, disguised and degraded to a lower being than he was, and still his only crime was pious honesty, sincerity and faithfulness with the intention to only do good, in which he also was consistent and only has succeeded in.

Albany Who was that man?

Edgar Kent, Sir, banished by king Lear for having dared to defend the honesty of Cordelia, but who chose to rather risk his life by staying on and applying for service with Lear as a groom and slave but who as such might have saved the king's life, since he shared all the king's worst ordeals with him.

Albany Where is he now?

Edgar He also saw new daylight when the trumpet challenge called.

Knight (enters) That's the end of it.

Albany What has happened?

Edgar You look all pale as if you had seen a ghost.

Knight No, there is not even a ghost left of her. She is dead, she has taken her own life with a dagger in her heart, here is the knife, still warm, but she was not alone. Beside her also Regan lies, poisoned by her, which she confessed before her black heart pressed out its last drop of life, as if they both suddenly had decided to give up and then together escaped in cowardice from life, both seeking the other's death in hopeless desire of a younger man's irresistibility, which none of them could get, one successful in the murder of the other but not without punishing herself by a reasonable sentence for the crime, flying from life and from mundane justice to an even crueller one in hell.

Edmund I had love arrangements with both of them. It's almost like a triple marriage, a wedding act in death in the presence of the devil for his pleasure.

Edgar Here is Kent.

Albany Bring their bodies here, whether they really are dead or not. (*exit knight*) Such cruelty as these two succeeded in carrying through and drag a whole nation with them into it will unfortunately never be forgotten but will live on as an

unforgettable example of political terror through all history. This supreme judgement and sentence by destiny is too just and appropriate to be able to touch us with any sort of compassion. (*enter Kent*) O, is that the man? Welcome back, Kent! There are too many things happening here simultaneously to give any time or space for courteous formalities, which anyway would only seem rather out of place.

Kent I just came to see my king and wish him a good night. Is he not here?

Albany We have completely forgotten all about him! Where is he? Speak, Edmund! Where have you kept the king and Cordelia? – Do you see these sick dead worms, Kent? (*Regan and Goneril are brought in*)

Kent Alack, what has happened? And why?

Edmund Maybe because they were both after me. One of them gave the other poison and then took her own life swiftly with the dagger in the heart that she in spite of all did have.

Albany Cover them, so that we may be spared any more of their false beauty.

Edmund Let me finally do something good before I die, no matter how unavoidably I may be dying although it is contrary to my nature, but I am getting short of time and don't want to leave without at least trying an effort at some kind of an atonement – I am still done for and have nothing to lose except my life, which definitely is lost anyway. Quickly send a countermand to our castle annulling earlier orders concerning Cordelia and Lear. Perhaps they may still be saved.

Edgar What have you done?

Albany Hurry, hurry!

Edgar Whom shall the countermand be given? Who is in command? Enclose a sure token of your command!

Edmund Quite right. Take this my sword, and give it to the captain in charge.

Albany Make haste for your life, my friend, so that everything will not just turn out a tragedy! (*exit Edgar*)

Edmund The order by me and your consort was that Cordelia should be hanged in a way that it would seem like a suicidal escape from life by depression and grief.

Albany How could you? What was the motive?

Edmund The sisters were atrociously jealous of their better sister. When it came out that you intended to spare them and release them, they could not stand the thought but anticipated the decision by its contrary.

Albany Take him out of here, for hell's sake! I cannot bear to see that monster any more! (*Edmund is carried out in the pains of his death.*) How could everything go so wrong? No one really had any evil intentions. The two sisters were vain but not evil, but a short-sighted unfortunate action by the abdicating king led to a chain reaction of crimes and tragedies, which though this false earl of Gloucester, a bastard, made himself the leader of. He intrigued for his own advantage and advancement with most unexpected unsurveyable and terrible consequences.

(enter Lear carrying Cordelia in his arms, followed by Edgar and guards.)

Lear Howl! Howl! Howl! Howl! Are you men of stone? If I had the tongue of your powers I would scream out such a noise of disharmony that heaven itself would crack! She has left us forever! I know that much, that I know when someone is still alive when she appears dead, but she is as lifeless as the barren dry and naked earth! Lend me a mirror, so that her breath may still give some faint but hopeful sign by some fickle vapour, and then she would still be alive.

Kent Is this doomsday?

Edgar Or some portent of something even worse?

Albany This is too much!

Lear This feather is moving. So she is alive. If that is the case, I here see a chance of all my sorrows that I ever felt, being cancelled.

Kent (falls on his knees) My good king!

Edgar It's the noble Kent, your friend.

Lear Damned traitors and murderers!

I could have saved her, and now she is gone forever!

Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a while yet! You did have everything returned that you could live for and even me finally in the end! Ha! She is speaking to me! What was that you said? Her voice was always soft, so tender and prudent as befits a good woman and excellent for any woman. The slave that took your life I killed with my bare hands.

Knight It is true. He did.

Lear Isn't it true, my friend? That was all I could do. Everything else was too late. I have seen the day, it passed long ago, there is only twilight remaining which never seems to come to an end but only grows darker all the time interminably, as if its total eclipse was impossible. Who are you? My sight is dim and gets dimmer every day, but I still have some memory left. A moment, and I will remember. Just wait.

Kent If providence ever boasted of two that she has loved as highly as she deeply hated them, here is one of them.

Lear It's such a sad sight. Are you not Kent?

Kent The same, your very servant, your faithful Kent. Where is your faithful Caius?

Lear That was a good man, I can tell you. He was a warrior of quick turns and efficiency. He is dead and rotten since long.

Kent No, my lord, I am the very man.

Lear I will investigate that.

Kent Who ever since the introductory and unfortunate division has followed you closely through all your ordeals...

Lear You are welcome here.

Kent ... like no one else. Everything is now over and passed, left is only the comfortless and murderous darkness, and both your elder daughters have together taken their lives, dead in total desperation.

Lear That's what I thought.

Albany He knows not what he is saying. Everything is equal to him now, and it's hardly worth the effort to try to present yourself to him.

Edgar Yes, it seems rather pointless.

(enter a captain)

captain Edmund is dead, your grace.

Albany That appears as something like an irrelevant detail here. Gentlemen, let me explain my intentions. We intend to do everything we can to reduce the consequences and circumstances of the catastrophe. I intend to resign myself and give over all power and authority to this old king, for as long as he lives. Others who have proved friendly towards us and the king will be rewarded, and we have not many enemies left to punish and settle with. But look, he is rising.

Lear Alas, my poor beloved minion is hanged and dead! And why would then a dog, a horse, a rat have the right of life and you no breath at all? You will never come to me again, no, never, never, never, never, never! – I am tired. I am getting short of breath. Pray, Sir, unbutton this last button! Thank you, Sir. Do you see this? Do you see her lips? Look! Look! Hope is awakening! She might still live! She is not dead! I knew it! *(dies)*

Edgar He faints! My lord! My lord!

Kent Break, my heart, break, I pray!

Edgar Wake up, my lord!

Kent Don't trouble his spirit any more. Let him go. He will hate the one who would force him on the rack once more in this hard world just to stretch him further.

Edgar He is truly gone.

Kent The miracle is that he endured for so long, he just kept usurping his life.

Albany Carry them out of here. There is nothing else for us to do now but to grieve. *(to Kent and Edgar)* My soul mates, you two will now govern this kingdom and try to do what you can for the healing of this entire wrecked state.

Kent I have a journey ahead of me, neither am I very young any more, and my lord is calling on me. I cannot turn him down.

Edgar The heaviness of our sorrow forces us to obeisance, we should speak what we feel and not say what we should say. Those who have gone before us, the eldest, have had most to carry. We, who still are young, will never be able to live up to see so much, live so long and reach that unfathomable experience and richness of maturity and endless wisdom of the soul.

(Exeunt all to the funeral march.)

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