

Act 4, Scene 6 Fields near Dover

(Enter GLOUCESTER, and EDGAR, dressed like a peasant.)

GLOUCESTER

When shall we come to the top of that same hill?

EDGAR

You do climb up it now. Look how we labor.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR

Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER

No, truly.

EDGAR

Why then, your other senses grow imperfect by your eyes' anguish.

GLOUCESTER

So may it be indeed.

Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st in better phrase and matter than thou didst.

EDGAR

You're much deceived. In nothing am I changed but in my garments.

GLOUCESTER

Methinks you're better spoken.

EDGAR

Come on, sir; here's the place. Stand still.

How fearful and dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low.

The crows and choughs* that wing the midway air show scarce so gross as beetles.

Half way down hangs one that gathers sampire,* dreadful trade; methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach appear like mice;

and yond tall anchoring bark,* diminished to her cock;* her cock, a buoy almost too small for sight.

The murmuring surge* that on the unnumbered idle pebbles chafes cannot be heard so high.

I'll look no more, lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER

Set me where you stand.

choughs - jackdaws, *sampire* - samphire (aromatic herb used in relishes), *bark* - boat,

diminished to her cock - reduced to the size of her cockboat, her rowboat, *murmuring surge* - sound of waves on the shore

EDGAR

Give me your hand.

You are now within a foot of the extreme verge. For all beneath the moon would I not leap upright.*

GLOUCESTER

Let go my hand.

Here, friend is another purse; in it a jewel well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods prosper it with thee.

Go thou farther off.

Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR

Now fare you well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER

With all my heart.

EDGAR

(Aside.) Why I do trifle thus with his despair is done to cure it.

(GLOUCESTER kneels.)

GLOUCESTER

O you mighty gods! This world I do renounce, and in your sights shake patiently my great affliction off.

If Edgar live, O, bless him!

(He falls forward.)

EDGAR

(Aside.) Had he been where he thought, by this had thought been past.

Alive or dead? Ho, you sir! Friend! Hear you, sir? Speak!

(Aside.) Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives.

What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER

Away, and let me die.

EDGAR

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air, so many fathom down precipitating,
thou'dst shivered like an egg.

But thou dost breathe, hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.

Ten masts at each make not the altitude which thou hast perpendicularly fell.

Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again.

GLOUCESTER

But have I fallen, or no?

upright - i.e. even upright, let alone forward

EDGAR

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.*

Look up a-height; the shrill-gorged* lark so far cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, I have no eyes.

Is wretchedness deprived that benefit, to end itself by death?

EDGAR

Give me your arm. Up. So. How is it? Feel you your legs? You stand.

GLOUCESTER

Too well, too well.

EDGAR

This above all strangeness. Upon the crown of the cliff what thing was that which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER

A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR

As I stood here below, methought his eyes were two full moons;

he had a thousand noses, horns whelked* and waved like the enridged sea. It was some fiend.

Therefore, thou happy father, think that the clearest gods have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER

That thing you speak of, I took it for a man. Often 'twould say 'The fiend, the fiend.' He led me to that place.

EDGAR

Bear free and patient thoughts.

But who comes here?

(Enter KING LEAR, fantastically dressed with wild flowers.)

KING LEAR

No, they cannot touch me for coining;* I am the King himself.

EDGAR

O thou side-piercing sight!

KING LEAR

Nature's above art in that respect. There's your press money.*

That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper.* Draw me a clothier's yard.*

Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace; this piece of toasted cheese will do it.

There's my gauntlet; I'll prove it on a giant.

bourne - headland, *gorged* - throated, *whelked* - twisted, *touch me for coining* - arrest me for minting coins,

press-money - paid to conscripted soldiers, *crow-keeper* - a farmer scaring away crows,

clothier's yard - i.e. arrow (normally a yard long)

O, well flown, bird. In the clout,* in the clout. Hewgh!
Give the word.

EDGAR
Sweet marjoram.*

KING LEAR
Pass.

GLOUCESTER
I know that voice.

KING LEAR
Ha! Goneril, with a white beard!
They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs in my beard* ere the black ones were there.
To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said
When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter;
when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out.
Go to, they are not men of their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie—I am not ague proof.*

GLOUCESTER
The trick of that voice I do well remember. Is it not the King?

KING LEAR
Ay, every inch a king.
When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.
I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?* Adultery? Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No.
The wren goes to it, and the small gilded fly does lecher in my sight. Let copulation thrive!
For Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to his father than my daughters got 'tween the lawful sheets.
To it, luxury,* pell-mell, for I lack soldiers.
Behold yond simpering dame, whose face between her forks presages snow,*
that minces virtue, and does shake the head to hear of pleasure's name.
The fitchew* nor the soiled horse goes to it with a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,* though women all above.
But to the girdle* do the gods inherit, beneath is all the fiend's.
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit;
burning, scalding, stench, consumption. Fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet,* good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination. There's money for thee.

GLOUCESTER
O, let me kiss that hand.

KING LEAR
Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

In the clout - bull's eye (archery term), *Sweet marjoram* - herb associated with treating madness, *white hairs in my beard* - (i.e. I was wise), *ague-proof* - secure against fever, *cause* - offense, *luxury* - lechery, *whose face...snow* - whose demeanor, seen between her legs, promises chaste behavior, *fitchew* - polecat (and slang for prostitute), *Centaurs* - lustful mythological creatures, half human/half beast, *girdle* - waist, *civet* - musk perfume

GLOUCESTER

O ruined piece of nature. Dost thou know me?

KING LEAR

I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squiny at me?

No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love.

Read thou this challenge; mark but the penning of it.

GLOUCESTER

Were all the letters suns, I could not see one.

EDGAR

I would not take this from report—it is, and my heart breaks at it.

KING LEAR

Read.

GLOUCESTER

What, with the case* of eyes?

KING LEAR

What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears.

See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief.

Hark in thine ear: change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?

Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, sir.

KING LEAR

And the creature run from the cur?

There thou mightst behold the great image of authority—a dog's obeyed in office.

Thou rascal beadle,* hold thy bloody hand! Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back.

Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind for which thou whipp'st her.

The usurer hangs the cozener.*

Through tattered clothes small vices do appear; robes and furred gowns hide all.

Plate sin with gold, and the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks; arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

None does offend, none, I say, none.

Get thee glass eyes and, like a scurvy politician, seem to see the things thou dost not.

Now, now, now, now! Pull off my boots. Harder, harder! So.

EDGAR

O, reason in madness.

KING LEAR

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.

case - sockets, *beadle* - parish constable,

the usurer hangs the cozener - the big thief (the money-lending judge) hangs the small thief

I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester. Thou must be patient.
 We came crying hither. Thou knowest the first time that we smell the air we wawl and cry.
 I will preach to thee. Mark.

GLOUCESTER
 Alack, alack the day.

KING LEAR
 When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools.
 This a good block.*
 It were a delicate stratagem to shoe a troop of horse with felt.
 I'll put it in proof,* and when I have stolen upon these sons-in-law, then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

(Enter a GENTLEMAN, with attendants.)

GENTLEMAN
 O, here he is! Lay hand upon him. Sir, your most dear daughter—

KING LEAR
 No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am even the natural fool of fortune.
 Use me well; you shall have ransom.
 Let me have surgeons; I am cut to the brains.

GENTLEMAN
 You shall have any thing.

KING LEAR
 I am a king; my masters, know you that?

GENTLEMAN
 You are a royal one, and we obey you.

KING LEAR
 Then there's life in it. Come, and you get it, you shall get it with running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.*

(Exit running; GENTLEMAN and attendants follow.)

GLOUCESTER
 You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me.
 Let not my worser spirit tempt me again to die before you please.

EDGAR
 Well pray you, father.

GLOUCESTER
 Now, good sir, what are you?

block - (his head?), *in proof* - to the test, *Sa, sa, sa, sa* - hunting and rallying cry

EDGAR

A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,
am pregnant* to good pity.
Give me your hand; I'll lead you to some biding.*

GLOUCESTER

Hearty thanks.

(Enter OSWALD.)

OSWALD

A proclaimed prize! Most happy!
That eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh* to raise my fortunes.
Thou old unhappy traitor, briefly thyself remember. The sword is out that must destroy thee.

GLOUCESTER

Now let thy friendly hand put strength enough to it.

(EDGAR interposes.)

OSWALD

Wherefore, bold peasant, darest thou support a published* traitor?
Hence, lest that the infection of his fortune take like hold on thee. Let go his arm.

EDGAR

Ch'ill not let go, zir, without vurther 'casion.

OSWALD

Let go, slave, or thou diest!

EDGAR

Good gentleman, go your gait, and let poor volk pass.
Nay, come not near the old man. Ch'ill be plain with you.

OSWALD

Out, dunghill!

EDGAR

Ch'ill pick your teeth, zir. Come. No matter vor your foins.*

(They fight, and OSWALD falls.)

OSWALD

Slave, thou hast slain me. Villain, take my purse. If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body,
and give the letters which thou find'st about me to Edmund Earl of Gloucester.
Seek him out upon the British party.
O, untimely death!

pregnant - disposed, *biding* - place of refuge, *framed flesh* - born, *published* - proclaimed, *foins* - thrusts

(OSWALD dies.)

EDGAR

I know thee well. A serviceable villain, as duteous to the vices of thy mistress as badness would desire.

GLOUCESTER

What, is he dead?

EDGAR

Sit you down, father; rest you.

Let's see these pockets. The letters that he speaks of may be my friends.

(Reads.) 'Let our reciprocal vows be remembered.

You have many opportunities to cut him off. If your will want not,* time and place will be fruitfully offered.

There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror. Then am I the prisoner, and his bed my goal;
from the loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply the place for your labor.

Your (wife, so I would say) affectionate servant, 'GONERIL.'

O undistinguished space of woman's will!

A plot upon her virtuous husband's life, and the exchange my brother.

Give me your hand.

(Drum afar off.)

Come father, I'll bestow you with a friend.

(Exeunt.)

want not - is not lacking