

## Act 1, Scene 2      The Earl of Gloucester's castle

(EDMUND, with a letter.)

EDMUND

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law my services are bound.  
Wherefore should I stand in the plague of custom,\* and permit the curiosity of nations\* to deprive me,  
for that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines lag\* of a brother?  
Why bastard? Wherefore base, when my dimensions are as well compact, my mind as generous,  
and my shape as true, as honest madam's issue?  
Why brand they us with base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base. Base?  
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take more composition\* and fierce\* quality  
than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed, go to the creating a whole tribe of fops\* got\* 'tween asleep and wake?  
Well then, legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.  
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund as to the legitimate.  
Fine word, 'legitimate.'  
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed, and my invention thrive, Edmund the base shall top the legitimate.  
I grow; I prosper. Now gods, stand up for bastards!

(Enter GLOUCESTER.)

GLOUCESTER

Kent banished thus and France in choler\* parted? And the King gone to-night? All this done upon the gad?\*  
Edmund, how now? What news?

EDMUND

So please your lordship, none.

(Putting up the letter.)

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

What paper were you reading?

EDMUND

Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

No? What needed then that terrible dispatch of it into your pocket?  
The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see.  
Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

*stand...custom* - submit to diseased convention, *curiosity of nations* - nice distinctions of people, *lag* - younger than  
*composition* - robustness, *fierce* - thoroughbred, *fops* - fools, *got* - begot, *choler* - anger, *gad* - spur of the moment