1. LEAR, EDGAR, FOOL/GLOUCESTER, KENT

Lear has stormed out of his daughters’ households in a rage and descended into madness. He is staging a ‘trial’ for those who have wronged him. The Fool is playing along.
Edgar is in disguise as a bedlam madman because he is wrongfully accused of plotting his father, Gloucester’s, death. Kent and Gloucester are both worried about Lear’s health.

KING LEAR
I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.

To EDGAR
Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;

To the Fool
And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
Bench by his side:

To KENT

you are o' the commission,
Sit you too.

EDGAR
Let us deal justly.
Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

KING LEAR
Arraign her first; 'tis Goneril. I here take my oath before this honourable assembly, she kicked the poor king her father.

Fool
Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR
She cannot deny it.

Fool
Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.

KING LEAR
And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim
What store her heart is made on. Stop her there!
Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?

EDGAR
Bless thy five wits!

KENT
O pity! Sir, where is the patience now,
That thou so oft have boasted to retain?

EDGAR
[Aside] My tears begin to take his part so much,
They'll mar my counterfeiting.

KING LEAR
The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanch, and
Sweet-heart, see, they bark at me.

EDGAR
Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt, you curs!
Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite;
For, with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled.

KING LEAR
Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds
about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that
makes these hard hearts?

KENT
Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

KING LEAR
Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains:
so, so, so. We'll go to supper i' he morning. So, so, so.

Fool
And I'll go to bed at noon.

Re-enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER
Come hither, friend: where is the king my master?

KENT
Here, sir; but trouble him not, his wits are gone.

GLOUCESTER
Good friend, I prithee, take him in thy arms;
I have o'erheard a plot of death upon him:
There is a litter ready; lay him in 't,
And drive towards Dover, friend, where thou shalt meet
Both welcome and protection. take up;
And follow me, that will to some provision
Give thee quick conduct.

**KENT**
Oppressed nature sleeps:
This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken senses,
Which, if convenience will not allow,
Stand in hard cure.

*To the Fool*

Come, help to bear thy master;
Thou must not stay behind.

**GLOUCESTER**
Come, come, away.

*Exeunt all but EDGAR*

**EDGAR**
When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers suffers most i' the mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind:
But then the mind much sufferance doth o'er skip,
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
How light and portable my pain seems now,
What will hap more to-night, safe 'scape the king!

*Exit*
2. LEAR, CORDELIA, GONERIL, REGAN

Lear is dividing up his kingdom between his three daughters, deciding the share based on how much they profess their love for him.

KING LEAR
Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death.
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,--
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,--
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest-born, speak first.

GONERIL
Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA
[Aside] What shall Cordelia do?
Love, and be silent.

LEAR
Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.
REGAN
Sir, I am made
Of the self-same metal that my sister is,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;
Only she comes too short: that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses;
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA
[Aside] Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
More richer than my tongue.

KING LEAR
To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
No less in space, validity, and pleasure,
Than that confer'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA
Nothing, my lord.

KING LEAR
Nothing!

CORDELIA
Nothing.

KING LEAR
Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA
Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

KING LEAR
How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA
Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

**KING LEAR**
But goes thy heart with this?

**CORDELIA**
Ay, good my lord.

**KING LEAR**
So young, and so untender?

**CORDELIA**
So young, my lord, and true.
Edgar, Gloucester’s legitimate heir, has just evaded capture for the wrongful accusation of plotting his father’s murder. He is now planning his next steps.

**EDGAR**

I heard myself proclaim'd;
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt. No port is free; no place,
That guard, and most unusual vigilance,
Does not attend my taking. While I may 'scape,
I will preserve myself: and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast: my face I'll grime with filth;
And with presented nakedness out-face
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object,
Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.
4. REGAN, OSWALD

Regan (one of Lear’s ungrateful daughters) is speaking with Oswald (her sister, Goneril’s, servant). Both sisters desire the new, illegitimate, Earl of Gloucester, Edmund. Oswald carries a letter from Goneril for Edmund.

REGAN
But are my brother's powers set forth?

OSWALD
Ay, madam.

REGAN
Himself in person there?

OSWALD
Madam, with much ado:
Your sister is the better soldier.

REGAN
Lord Edmund spake not with your lord at home?

OSWALD
No, madam.

REGAN
What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD
I know not, lady.

REGAN
'Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.
It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,
To let him live: where he arrives he moves
All hearts against us: Edmund, I think, is gone,
to dispatch
His nighted life: moreover, to descry
The strength o' the enemy.

OSWALD
I must needs after him, madam, with my letter.

REGAN
Our troops set forth to-morrow: stay with us;
The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD
I may not, madam:
My lady charged my duty in this business.
REGAN
Why should she write to Edmund? Might not you
Transport her purposes by word?
Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD
Madam, I had rather--

REGAN
I know your lady does not love her husband;
I am sure of that: and at her late being here
She gave most speaking looks
To noble Edmund. I know you are of her bosom.

OSWALD
I, madam?

REGAN
I speak in understanding; you are; I know't:
Therefore I do advise you, take this note:
My lord is dead; Edmund and I have talk'd;
And more convenient is he for my hand
Than for your lady's: you may gather more.
If you do find him, pray you, give him this;
And when your mistress hears thus much from you,
I pray, desire her call her wisdom to her.
So, fare you well.
If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor,
Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD
Would I could meet him, madam! I should show
What party I do follow.

REGAN
Fare thee well.
5. GONERIL, ALBANY

Goneril, Lear's eldest daughter, and her husband, the Duke of Albany, are arguing. Albany is horrified by the terrible acts Goneril has undertaken against Lear.

GONERIL
I have been worth the whistle.

ALBANY
O Goneril!
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition:
That nature, which contemns its origin,
Cannot be border'd certain in itself.

GONERIL
No more; the text is foolish.

ALBANY
Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile:
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Most barbarous, most degenerate! have you madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

GONERIL
Milk-liver'd man!
That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs;
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honour from thy suffering; Where's thy drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless land;
Whiles thou, a moral fool, sit'st still, and criest
'Alack, why does he so?'

ALBANY
See thyself, devil!
Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL
O vain fool!

ALBANY
Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame,
Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones: howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL
Marry, your manhood now--
6. KENT, LEAR

This is early in the play: after Lear has divided his Kingdom and exiled Kent (his closest advisor) for standing up for Cordelia, but before his mistreatment at the hands of his other daughters. Kent disguises himself to continue serving Lear.

Enter KENT, disguised

KENT
Now, banish'd Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lovest,
Shall find thee full of labours.

Enter KING LEAR and Knights

KING LEAR
Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready.

Exit an Attendant

How now! what art thou?
what wouldst thou with us?
KENT
I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve
him truly that will put me in trust: and
to converse with him that is wise,
and says little.
KING LEAR
What art thou?
KENT
A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the king.
KING LEAR
If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a
king, thou art poor enough. What wouldst thou?
KENT
Service.
KING LEAR
Who wouldst thou serve?
KENT
You.
KING LEAR
Dost thou know me, fellow?
KENT
No, sir; but you have that in your countenance.
KING LEAR
What's that?
KENT
Authority.
KING LEAR
What services canst thou do?
KENT
I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious
tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message
bluntly.
KING LEAR
How old art thou?
KENT
Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor
so old to dote on her for any thing.
KING LEAR
Follow me; thou shalt serve me: if I like thee no
worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet.
Dinner, ho, dinner! Where's my knave? my fool?
Go you, and call my fool hither.

Exit a Knight
7. GLOUCESTER, EDMUND

The beginning of Edmund’s plot to take the place of his legitimate brother as Gloucester’s heir. As his father enters he obviously hides a letter (supposedly from Edgar), which Gloucester notices, as he planned.

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? Let’s see: come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.
EDMUND
I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my brother, that I have not all o'er-read; and for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your o'er-looking.
GLOUCESTER
Give me the letter, sir.
EDMUND
I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The contents, as in part I understand them, are to blame.
GLOUCESTER
Let's see, let's see.
[Reads] ‘I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, EDGAR.’
Hum--conspiracy!--'Sleep till I waked him,--'
'--My son Edgar!
Had he a hand to write this? a heart and brain
to breed it in?--When came this to you? who brought it?

EDMUND
It was not brought me, my lord; there's the cunning of it; I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet.

GLOUCESTER
You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMUND
If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but, in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

GLOUCESTER
It is his.

EDMUND
It is his hand, my lord; but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

GLOUCESTER
Hath he never heretofore sounded you in this business?

EDMUND
Never, my lord: but I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit, that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

GLOUCESTER
O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! worse than brutish!
I'll apprehend him: abominable villain!
Where is he?

EDMUND
I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, I dare pawn down my life for him, that he hath wrote this to feel my affection to your honour, and to no further pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER
Think you so?

EDMUND
If your honour judge it meet, I will place you
where you shall hear us confer of this, and by an
auricular assurance have your satisfaction; and
that without any further delay than this very evening.

GLOUCESTER
He cannot be such a monster--

EDMUND
Nor is not, sure.

GLOUCESTER
To his father, that so tenderly and entirely
loves him. Heaven and earth! Edmund, seek him
out: frame the
business after your own wisdom. I would unstate
myself, to be in a due resolution.

EDMUND
I will seek him, sir, presently: convey the
business as I shall find means and acquaint you withal.
8. FOOL, LEAR

After being mistreated by his other two daughters (and with some cryptic prompting from Fool), Lear realises that he was wrong about Cordelia.

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

KING LEAR
Why, what canst thou tell, my boy?

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

KING LEAR
No.

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

KING LEAR
I did her wrong--

Fool
Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

KING LEAR
No.

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

KING LEAR
Why?

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

KING LEAR
I will forget my nature. So kind a father!

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

KING LEAR
How's that?
Fool
Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

KING LEAR
O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven
Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!
9. CORDELIA, KENT, DOCTOR, LEAR

Cordelia has returned to England with France's army and rescued a mad Lear from the moors. Here she is talking with an undisguised Kent and the Doctor who is caring for Lear.

CORDELIA
O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work,
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short,
And every measure fail me.

KENT
To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid.
All my reports go with the modest truth;
Nor more nor clipp'd, but so.

CORDELIA
Be better suited:
These weeds are memories of those worser hours:
I prithee, put them off.

KENT
Pardon me, dear madam;
Yet to be known shortens my made intent:
My boon I make it, that you know me not
Till time and I think meet.

CORDELIA
Then be't so, my good lord.

To the Doctor

How does the king?

Doctor
Madam, sleeps still.

CORDELIA
O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abused nature!

Doctor
So please your majesty
That we may wake the king: he hath slept long.

CORDELIA
Be govern'd by your knowledge, and proceed
I' the sway of your own will. Is he array'd?
Doctor
Be by, good madam, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.

CORDELIA
Very well.

Doctor
Please you, draw near. Louder the music there!

CORDELIA
O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT
Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA
Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning? to watch--poor perdu!--
With this thin helm?
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all. He wakes; speak to him.

Doctor
Madam, do you; 'tis fittest.

CORDELIA
How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

KING LEAR
You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like moulten lead.

CORDELIA
Sir, do you know me?

KING LEAR
You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

CORDELIA
Still, still, far wide!

Doctor
He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.
10. EDMUND, EDGAR, CURAN

Edmund is talking with his servant, Curan, and then convinces his brother, Edgar, that he is wanted for speaking against the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany and that his best option is to run.

Enter EDMUND, and CURAN

EDMUND
Save thee, Curan.
CURAN
Have you heard of no likely wars toward, 'twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany?
EDMUND
Not a word.
CURAN
You may do, then, in time. Fare you well, sir.

Exit

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

Enter EDGAR

My father watches: O sir, fly this place;
Intelligence is given where you are hid;
You have now the good advantage of the night:
Have you not spoken 'gainst the Duke of Cornwall?
He's coming hither: now, i' the night, i' the haste,
And Regan with him: have you nothing said
Upon his party 'gainst the Duke of Albany?
Advise yourself.
EDGAR
I am sure on't, not a word.
EDMUND
I hear my father coming: pardon me:
In cunning I must draw my sword upon you
Draw; seem to defend yourself; now quit you well.
Yield: come before my father. Light, ho, here!
Fly, brother. Torches, torches! So, farewell.

Exit EDGAR

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion.

Wounds his arm

Of my more fierce endeavour: I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport. Father, father!
Stop, stop! No help?

Enter GLOUCESTER, and Servants with torches