

GLOUCESTER AND EDMUND ACT I SCENE II

GLOUCESTER

Kent banished thus? And France in choler parted?
And the King gone tonight, prescribed his power, 25
Confined to exhibition? All this done

Upon the gad?—Edmund, how now? What news?

EDMUND So please your Lordship, none. *He puts a
paper in his pocket.*

GLOUCESTER Why so earnestly seek you to put up that
letter? 30

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 35
hath not such need to hide itself. 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'erread; and
for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for 40
your o'erlooking.

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. 45

GLOUCESTER Let's see, let's see.

Edmund gives him the paper.

EDMUND I hope, for my brother's justification, he
wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.

GLOUCESTER *(reads)* *This policy and reverence of age
makes the world bitter to the best of our times, keeps
our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish
them. 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 enjoy half his revenue forever and* 50
live the beloved of your brother. 55

Hum? Conspiracy? "Sleep till I wake him, you
should enjoy half his revenue." My son Edgar! Had
he a hand to write this? A heart and brain to breed it
in?—When came you to this? Who brought it? 60

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? 65

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. 70

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

GLOUCESTER Has he never before 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 declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue. 75

GLOUCESTER O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter. Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain! Worse than brutish!—Go, sirrah, seek him. I'll apprehend him.—Abominable villain!—Where is he? 80

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, you should run a certain course; where, if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honor and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. 85
~~I dare pawn down my life for him that he hath writ this to feel my affection to your Honor, and to no other pretense of danger.~~ 90

GLOUCESTER Think you so?

EDMUND If your Honor 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. 95

GLOUCESTER He cannot be such a monster.

EDMUND Nor is not, sure. 100

GLOUCESTER To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him! Heaven and Earth! Edmund, seek him out; wind me into him, I pray you. Frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution. 105

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

GLOUCESTER These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. ~~Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction: there's son against father. The King falls from bias of nature: there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time.~~ Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.—Find out this villain, Edmund. It shall lose thee nothing. Do it carefully.—And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! His offense, honesty! 'Tis strange. 110
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