

ACT
2SCENE
1

A court within the castle of the Earl of Gloucester

Enter EDMUND and CURAN, meeting

EDMUND Save thee, Curan.
 CURAN And you, sir. I have been with your father, and given him notice that the Duke of Cornwall and Regan his Duchess will be here with him this night.

EDMUND How comes that?
 CURAN Nay, I know not. You have heard of the news abroad? I mean the whispered ones, for they are yet but ear-kissing arguments?

EDMUND Not I. Pray you, what are they?
 CURAN Have you heard of no likely wars toward 'twixt the two 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' th' night, i' th' 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!
[To Edgar] Fly, brother. – Torches, torches! – So farewell.

Exit EDGAR.

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion
 Of my more fierce endeavour. *[Stabs his arm]* I have seen
 drunkards
 Do more than this in sport. – Father, father! –
 Stop, stop! No help?

Enter GLOUCESTER, and Servants with torches.

GLOUCESTER Now, Edmund, where's the villain?
 EDMUND Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
 Warbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
 To stand auspicious mistress.

1 *Save thee:* God save thee6 *news abroad:* news travelling around8 *ear-kissing arguments:* rumours10 *toward:* about to happen17 *queasy:* question18 *Briefness:* speed21 *Intelligence:* information spoken 'gainst ... *Advise yourself:* Edmund is planting seeds of doubt and suspicion in Edgar's mind regarding his safety26 *Upon his party:* on his side27 *Advise:* think on it29 *In cunning I must draw my sword upon you:* his cunning is used against rather than for Edgar
 29 *cunning:* device, pretence
 30 *quit:* behave33 *beget opinion:* create a false impression38 *Warbling:* singing, chanting
mistress: allusion to Hecate
Warbling ... mistress: Edgar's description of Edmund's occult activities feeds Gloucester's fear of supernatural forces

GLOUCESTER But where is he?

EDMUND Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could –

GLOUCESTER Pursue him, ho! Go after.

Exeunt some Servants.

– By no means what?

EDMUND Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;
But that I told him the revenging gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;
Spoke with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to th' father – sir, in fine,
Seeing how loathly opposite I stood loathly
To his unnatural purpose, in fell motion
With his prepared sword he charges home
My unprovided body, lanc'd mine arm;
But when he saw my best alarum'd spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right, rous'd to th' encounter,
Or whether gasted by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

GLOUCESTER Let him fly far.
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And found – dispatch. The noble Duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron, comes to-night.
By his authority I will proclaim it
That he which find, him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous caitiff to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMUND When I dissuaded him from his intent
And found him pight to do it, with curst speech
I threaten'd to discover him. He replied,
'Thou unpossessing bastard, dost thou think,
If I would stand against thee, would the reposal
Of any trust, virtue, or worth in thee
Make thy words faith'd? No. What I should deny
(As this I would; ay, though thou didst produce
My very character), I'd turn it all
To thy suggestion, plot, and damned practice;
And thou must make a dullard of the world,
If they not thought the profits of my death
Were very pregnant and potential spurs
To make thee seek it.'

GLOUCESTER Strong and fastened villain!
Would he deny his letter? I never got him.

Tucket within.

Hark, the Duke's trumpets! I know not why he comes.
All ports I'll bar; the villain shall not scape;
The Duke must grant me that. Besides, his picture
I will send far and near, that all the kingdom
May have due note of him, and of my land,
Loyal and natural boy, I'll work the means
To make thee capable.

Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, and Attendants.

CORNWALL How now, my noble friend? Since I came hither
(Which I can call but now) I have heard strange news.

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46 *parricides*: killing of fathers

46 *thunders bend*: aim their
thunderbolts

47 *manifold*: many-sided

48 *in fine*: in short, to sum up

49 *loathly opposite*: grossly opposed

50 *fell motion*: fierce movement

51 *prepared*: drawn

52 *unprovided*: unprotected

55 *gasted*: frightened (aghast)

58 *dispatch*: death

59 *arch*: superior

62 *caitiff*: miserable wretch

65 *pight*: determined / *curst*: angry

67 *unpossessing*: no rights of
inheritance

68 *reposal*: placing

70 *faith'd*: believed

72 *character*: handwriting

74 *dullard*: fool

76 *pregnant*: full of potential

77 *fastened*: fixed, complete

80 *scape*: escape

84 *natural*: two senses;
illegitimate / loving

85 *capable*: of inheriting

86 *How now*: how is it now

REGAN	If it be true, all vengeance comes too short Which can pursue th' off ender. How dost, my lord?	
GLOUCESTER	O madam, my old heart is crack'd, it's crack'd!	90
REGAN	What, did my father's godson seek your life? He whom my father nam'd? Your Edgar?	91
GLOUCESTER	O lady, lady, shame would have it hid!	
REGAN	Was he not companion with the riotous knights That tend upon my father?	95
GLOUCESTER	I know not, madam. 'Tis too bad, too bad!	
EDMUND	Yes, madam, he was of that consort.	97
REGAN	No marvel then though he were ill affected. 'Tis they have put him on the old man's death, To have th' expense and waste of his revenues. I have this present evening from my sister Been well inform'd of them, and with such cautions That, if they come to sojourn at my house, I'll not be there.	98 100
CORNWALL	Nor I, assure thee, Regan. Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father A childlike office.	104 105
EDMUND	'Twas my duty, sir.	
GLOUCESTER	He did betray his practice, and received This hurt you see, striving to apprehend him.	106 107
CORNWALL	Is he pursued?	
GLOUCESTER	Ay, my good lord.	
CORNWALL	If he be taken, he shall never more Be fear'd of doing harm. Make your own purpose, How in my strength you please. For you, Edmund, Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant So much commend itself, you shall be ours. Natures of such deep trust we shall much need; You we first seize on.	110 115
EDMUND	I shall serve you, sir, Truly, however else.	
GLOUCESTER	For him I thank your Grace.	
CORNWALL	You know not why we came to visit you	
REGAN	Thus out of season, threading dark-ey'd night. Occasions, noble Gloucester, of some prize, Wherein we must have use of your advice. Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister, Of differences, which I best thought it fit To answer from our home. The several messengers From hence attend dispatch. Our good old friend, Lay comforts to your bosom, and bestow Your needful counsel to our business, Which craves the instant use.	119 120 125
GLOUCESTER	I serve you, madam. Your Graces are right welcome.	

Exeunt. Flourish.

LOOK BACK AT ACT 2 SCENE 1

EDGAR AND EDMUND

Comprehension

1. Who does Edmund's servant, Curren, say will be spending the night at Gloucester's? What does Curren tell him about the state of affairs between Cornwall and Albany?
2. 'descend, brother, I say'. Edmund seems to have his own rooms within Gloucester's house and Edgar has been hiding here. Refresher: Why is Edgar hiding? Who is he hiding from?
3. Edmund wishes Edgar to appear guilty in the eyes of their father. How does he manage to achieve this? What does he tell his father that Edgar was plotting to do?
4. What does Gloucester propose to do to ensure that Edgar is apprehended?
5. What is Regan's reaction to hearing rumours of Edgar's intent to kill his father? How does she suggest that Lear's retinue of knights might have had a role to play in Edgar's behaviour?
6. How is Edmund treated by Cornwall and Regan following his brother's flight?
7. Why have Regan and Cornwall come to spend the night at Gloucester's?

Character Development

Edmund

1. Would you agree that Edmund is a cunning and manipulative person? Where is this evident in this scene?
2. Why does Edmund wish his father to think Edgar is plotting against him? What does Edmund stand to gain from this?
3. Do you think that Edmund could be described as representing a more modern breed of man than Lear, Kent and Gloucester, someone who believes in themselves and is not afraid to go after what they want?

Gloucester

1. Do you think that Gloucester is a gullible man for believing what Edmund tells him?
2. Gloucester refers to Edgar as a 'murderous' wretch and calls for him to be put to death. Do you think that his reaction to what he has heard and seen is reasonable and proportionate or is it rash and over-the-top? In what way is Gloucester's behaviour in this scene reminiscent of Lear's in the opening scene?
3. In this scene Gloucester refers to Edmund as a 'Loyal and natural boy'. How has his attitude towards his illegitimate son changed since the play began?

Think About Themes

Loyalty and Betrayal

1. Who demonstrates loyalty to whom in this scene? Is everyone being completely honest in their words of allegiance?
2. 'I hear you have shown your father / A childlike office'. Discuss the different expectations that Lear and Gloucester have for their children. Who meets these expectations? Who is perceived to be behaving in an inappropriate way?

Imagery Corner

Images of the cosmos and heavens repeat through King Lear. Can you identify any such images in this scene?

You are the Director

Think about how you would stage the false fight between Edgar and Edmund if you were performing the play. Would it be possible to introduce any notes of comedy into the scene?