

Act III, Scene iii

Gloucester's castle

Enter GLOUCESTER and EDMUND

GLOUCESTER

Alack, alack, Edmund, I like not this unnatural dealing. When I desir'd their leave that I might pity him, they took from me the use of mine own house, charg'd me, on pain of perpetual displeasure, neither to speak of him, entreat for him, nor any way sustain him.

EDMUND

Most savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

Go to. Say you nothing. There is division betwixt the dukes, and a worse matter than that. I have receiv'd a letter this night. 'Tis dangerous to be spoken. I have lock'd the letter in my closet. These injuries the king now bears will be reveng'd home. There is part of a power already footed. We must incline to the king. I will look him and privily relieve him. Go you and maintain talk with the duke, that my charity be not of him perceiv'd. If he ask for me, I am ill and gone to bed. Though I die for it, as no less is threaten'd me, the king, my old master, must be reliev'd. There is strange things toward, Edmund. Pray you, be careful.

Exit

EDMUND

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke Instantly know, and of that letter too. This seems a fair deserving and must draw me That which my father loses—no less than all. The younger rises when the old doth fall.

Exit

"desir'd" = requested

"pity" = relieve

"on pain of perpetual displeasure" = with the threatened penalty of their unceasing bitterness

"entreat" = plead

"sustain" = care for

"Most savage and unnatural!" – Edmund makes a dramatic but false show of his abhorrence at the behavior of Cornwall and Regan.

"Go to" = it's true

"worse matter" – i.e. the threatened French invasion

"be spoken" = discuss it

"closet" = private room

"home" = fully

"power" = army

"footed" = landed

"incline to" = take the side of

"look him" = seek for him

"privily" = privately

"maintain talk" = keep him in conversation

"of him" = by him

"toward" = happening

"This courtesy ... letter too" = Your act of charity, the doing of which is prohibited, Cornwall will be told of immediately, and of the secret intelligence that has come to you

"This seems a fair deserving" – This can be heard as Edmund saying My father will earn his due reward for deliberately breaking Cornwall's law. Alternately, his statement can be read as This makes a good opportunity for me

"draw me" = bring to me

In true Machiavel style, Edmund chooses to serve his own selfish purposes by using information given him in confidence and at the giver's peril. He will reveal to Cornwall what he has learned from Gloucester, knowing that it will mean the old man's death. At this turning of the wheel, of course, Edmund will become the new Earl of Gloucester.