

Act V, Scene ii

A field between the two camps

Alarum within. Enter, with drum and colors, LEAR, CORDELIA, and soldiers over the stage, and exeunt

Enter EDGAR and GLOUCESTER

EDGAR
Here, father, take the shadow of this tree
For your good host. Pray that the right may thrive.
If ever I return to you again,
I'll bring you comfort.

GLOUCESTER
Grace go with you, sir!

Exit EDGAR

Alarum and retreat within. Re-enter EDGAR

EDGAR
Away, old man! Give me thy hand! Away!
King Lear hath lost. He and his daughter ta'en.
Give me thy hand. Come on!

GLOUCESTER
No farther, sir. A man may rot even here.

EDGAR
What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all. Come on.

GLOUCESTER
And that's true too.

Exeunt

"father" – Again, "father" is used as a marker of respect, not as an address to an actual father, for Edgar still has not revealed his real identity to Gloucester.

"good host" = *entertainer; provider of shelter*

"the right may thrive" = *goodness* (i.e. the force defending Lear) *may be successful*

"comfort" = *good news*

"retreat" – a trumpet call indicating that the battle is over

Time here is significantly telescoped (compressed), for we are to understand that in the time it takes for Edgar to exit and re-enter, the battle is fought and (as his next speech indicates) the French force is defeated.

"No farther ... even here" = *Take me no further. Here is as good a place to die as any*

Again Gloucester is suicidal. And again Edgar must steer him clear of that verge. His mentoring in this case is expressed in the form of a statement that may be taken as one of the first laws for tragic heroes: "Men must endure their going hence (their dying), even as their coming hither (their entry into the world). Ripeness is all." In this he says that we had no say in our being born, and likewise we have no say in our leaving life. Our choice and responsibility is only to be ready at all times to die but not to make it happen on our own. We must always exercise the king-becoming grace of perseverance (endurance).

Another of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Hamlet, expresses the same idea in a similarly phrased line—"the readiness is all"—shortly before he completes *his* tragic mission.