



William Shakespeare

*The Tragedy
of King Lear*



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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LEAR, King of Britain.

GONERIL, eldest daughter to Lear.

REGAN, second daughter to Lear.

CORDELIA, youngest daughter to Lear.

DUKE of ALBANY, married to Goneril.

DUKE of CORNWALL, married to Regan.

KING of FRANCE.

DUKE of BURGUNDY.

EARL of GLOUCESTER.

EDGAR, elder son to Gloucester.

EDMUND, younger bastard son to Gloucester.

EARL of KENT.

FOOL.

OSWALD, steward to Goneril.

CURAN, a Courtier.

OLD MAN, Tenant to Gloucester.

Physician.

An Officer employed by Edmund.

Gentleman, attendant on Cordelia.

A Herald.

Servants to Cornwall.

Knights attending on the King, Officers, Messengers,
Soldiers and Attendants.

Scene: Britain

ACT I

Scene I

A ROOM OF STATE IN KING LEAR'S PALACE

Enter Kent, Gloucester and Edmund.

KENT

I thought the King had more affected
the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER

It did always seem so to us; but now,
in the division of the kingdom,
it appears not, which of the Dukes he values most,
for qualities are so weighed that curiosity
in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

KENT

Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge:
I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him
that now I am braz'd to't.

KENT

I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER

Sir, this young fellow's mother could;
whereupon she grew round-wombed,
and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle
ere she had a husband for her bed.
Do you smell a fault?

KENT

I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue
of it being so proper.

GLOUCESTER

But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year
elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account:
though this knave came something saucily
to the world before he was sent for, yet was
his mother fair; there was good sport at his making,
and the whoreson must be acknowledged.
Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

EDMUND

No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

My Lord of Kent: remember him hereafter
as my honourable friend.

EDMUND

My services to your lordship.

KENT

I must love you, and sue to know you better.

EDMUND

Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER

He hath been out nine years,
and away he shall again.
The King is coming.

[Sennet within.]

*[Enter Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia
and Attendants.]*

LEAR

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,
Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

I shall, my lord.

[Gloucester and Edmund leave.]

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

Unburden'd crawl toward death.

Our son of Cornwall,

And you, our no less loving son of Albany,

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 word can wield the matter;
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valu'd, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace,
health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er lov'd, 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 speak?
Love, and be silent.

LEAR

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual.
—What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made of the self-mettle as my sister,
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 ponderous than my tongue.

LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
No less in space, validity, and pleasure
Than that conferr'd on Goneril.—Now, our joy,
Although the last and least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing?

CORDELIA

Nothing.

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; no more nor less.

LEAR

How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little,
Lest you may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd 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.

LEAR

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, my good lord.

LEAR

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

LEAR

Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower:
For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs,
From whom we do exist and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever.
The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes

To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT

Good my liege,—

LEAR

Peace, Kent!
Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest
On her kind nursery.

[To Cordelia.]

Hence and avoid my sight!
So be my grave my peace, as here I give
Her father's heart from her! Call France.
Who stirs?
Call Burgundy! Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:
Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
I do invest you jointly with my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop with majesty.
Ourself, by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights,
By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain
The name, and all the addition to a king; the sway,
Revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm,
This coronet part between you.

[Giving the crown.]

KENT

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers.—

LEAR

The bow is bent and drawn;
make from the shaft.

KENT

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad.
What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows?
To plainness honour's bound
When majesty falls to folly. Reverse thy state;
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness:
answer my life my judgement,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds
Reverb no hollowness.

LEAR

Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies;
ne'er fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

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