

KING LEAR

By William Shakespeare

Sample

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Characters

Many of which may be doubled

Lear, *King of Britain*

King of France

Duke of Cornwall

Duke of Albany

Earl of Kent

Earl of Gloucester

Edgar, *son to Gloucester*

Edmund, *illegitimate son to Gloucester*

Oswald, *steward to Goneril*

Old Man, *tenant to Gloucester*

An Officer

A Gentleman

A Herald

A Messenger

Servants to Cornwall

Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, *daughters to Lear*

Soldiers and Servants

SCENE I. 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.

KENT

Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: this young fellow's mother grew round-wombed ere she had a husband for her bed. But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this. The king is coming.

Enter KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN and CORDELIA.

KING LEAR

Attend the lord of France, Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

I shall, my liege.

Exeunt GLOUCESTER and EDMUND.

KING LEAR

Give me the map there. Know that we have divided In three our kingdom. Tell me, my daughters,-- Which of you shall we say doth love us most? Goneril, speak first.

GONERIL

Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter; Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare; No less than life, as much as child e'er loved; Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

LEAR

What says our second daughter, Our dearest Regan? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made of the self-same metal that my sister is;
Only she comes too short: I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
And I alone felicitate in your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA

[Aside] Poor Cordelia!
I am sure, my love's richer than my tongue.

KING LEAR

To thee and thine hereditary
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
No less than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now,
Although the last, not least; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

KING LEAR

Nothing! Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA

I cannot heave my heart into my mouth:
I love your majesty according to my bond; nor more nor less.

KING LEAR

Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

KING LEAR

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

KING LEAR

Let it be so; Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever.
Regan and Goneril, digest this third:
I do invest you jointly with my power.

KENT

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king--
Reverse thy doom; cheque this hideous rashness:
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least.

KING LEAR

Kent, on thy life, no more! Five days we do allot thee.
If following, thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away!

KENT

Fare thee well, king.

Exit.

Re-enter GLOUCESTER, with KING OF FRANCE.

GLOUCESTER

Here's France, my noble lord.

CORDELIA

I yet beseech your majesty,--

KING LEAR

Better thou hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better.
Thou hast her, France: let her be thine; for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. Therefore be gone.

Exeunt all but KING OF FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA.

KING OF FRANCE

Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA

With wash'd eyes Cordelia leaves you:

I know you what you are;
And like a sister am most loath to call
Your faults as they are named.

KING OF FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

Exeunt KING OF FRANCE and CORDELIA.

GONERIL

He always loved our sister most.

REGAN

We must do something.

Exeunt.

SCENE II. The Earl of Gloucester's castle.

Enter EDMUND, with a letter.

EDMUND

For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines
Lag of a brother? Why brand they me
With base? with baseness? base, base?
Well, then, legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
If this letter speed, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate.
Now, gods, stand up for baseness!

Enter GLOUCESTER.

GLOUCESTER

Kent banish'd thus! and France in choler parted!
And the king gone to-night! subscribed his power!
Edmund, how now! what news?

EDMUND

None.

Putting up the letter.

GLOUCESTER

Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMUND

I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER

No? What needed, then, that terrible dispatch of it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself.

EDMUND

I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my brother.

GLOUCESTER

Give me the letter, sir.

[Reads] 'This policy and reverence of age keeps our fortunes from us. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, EDGAR.' Conspiracy! When came this to you? Who brought it?

EDMUND

I found it in my closet.

GLOUCESTER

You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMUND

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

GLOUCESTER

O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend him! Where is he?

EDMUND

I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you I will place you where you shall hear us confer of this, this very evening.

GLOUCESTER

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'Tis strange.

GLOUCESTER exits.

Enter EDGAR.

EDGAR

How now, brother Edmund! what serious contemplation are you in?

EDMUND

When saw you my father last?

EDGAR

Why, the night gone by.

EDMUND

Spake you with him?

EDGAR

Ay, two hours together.

EDMUND

Parted you in good terms? Found you no displeasure in him?

EDGAR

None at all.

EDMUND

You may have offended him: forbear his presence till some little time hath qualified the heat of his displeasure.

EDGAR

Some villain hath done me wrong.

EDMUND

That's my fear. I pray you, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak: there's my key: go armed.

EDGAR

Armed, brother!

EDMUND

I advise you to the best; pray you, away.

Exit EDGAR.

A credulous father! and a brother noble, on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy!
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit.

EDMUND exits.

SCENE III. The Duke of Albany's palace.

Enter GONERIL.

GONERIL

My father struck my steward for chiding of his fool?
By day and night he wrongs me; I'll not endure it:
Let him to my sister, whose mind and mine, I know,
In that are one: Not to be over-ruled.

Exits as KENT, disguised, enters.

KENT

If I other can my speech defuse, my good intent
May carry through itself. Now, banish'd Kent,
If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd,
So may it come, thy master, whom thou lovest,
Shall find thee full of labours.

Enter KING LEAR.

KING LEAR

How now! what art thou?

KENT

A man, sir; to serve him truly that will put me in trust.

KING LEAR

Dost thou know me, fellow?

KENT

No, sir; but you have that in your countenance
which I would fain call master.

KING LEAR

Follow me; thou shalt serve me: if I like thee no
worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet.
Dinner, ho, dinner!

Enter GONERIL.

How now, daughter! what makes that frown?

GONERIL

These dispositions, that of late transform you
From what you rightly are.
As you are old and reverend, you should be wise.
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,
That make our court more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace.

KING LEAR

Detested kite! thou liest.

GONERIL

The shame itself doth speak for instant remedy.

KING LEAR

Monster ingratitude!
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster! How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! Away, away! I'll not trouble thee.
Yet have I left a daughter.

Exeunt all.

SCENE IV. GLOUCESTER's castle.

Enter EDMUND.

EDMUND

My father hath set guard to take my brother;
I must act: briefness and fortune, work!
Brother, a word; descend: brother, I say!

Enter EDGAR.

O sir, fly this place; you have now the good advantage of the night:
I hear my father coming: draw; seem to defend yourself;
'Yield: come before my father. Light, ho, here!'
Fly, brother. 'Torches, torches!' So, farewell.

Exit EDGAR.

Some blood drawn on me would beget opinion.

Wounds his arm.

Enter GLOUCESTER and Servant.

GLOUCESTER

Now, Edmund, where's the villain?

EDMUND

Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
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 Servant.

By no means what?

EDMUND

Persuade me to the murder of your lordship.

GLOUCESTER

Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
He which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
He that conceals him, death.

Enter REGAN and CORNWALL.

CORNWALL

I have heard strange news.

REGAN

How dost, my lord?

GLOUCESTER

O, madam, my old heart is crack'd, it's crack'd!

REGAN

What, did your Edgar seek your life?

GLOUCESTER

O, lady, lady, shame would have it hid!

REGAN

Was he not companion with the riotous knights
That tend upon my father?

EDMUND

Yes, madam, he was of that consort.

REGAN

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.

CORNWALL

Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
A child-like office.

EDMUND

'Twas my duty, sir.

REGAN

If Edgar be taken, he shall never more
Be fear'd of doing harm.

Exeunt.

SCENE V. A wood.

Enter EDGAR.

EDGAR

I will preserve myself: my face I'll grime with filth;
Blanket my loins: elf all my hair in knots.
Poor Turlygod! poor Tom! Edgar I nothing am.

Exits.

SCENE VI. Before GLOUCESTER's castle.

Enter KING LEAR, KENT and GLOUCESTER.

KING LEAR

Deny to speak with me? They are sick? they are weary?
They have travell'd all the night?
The king would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service