

King Lear

by William Shakespeare

The king asked Cordelia to mend her speech a little, but Cordelia would give him nothing more than a simple expression of love. Angered, Lear told her that she was no longer his daughter. The Earl of Kent stepped in and asked the king to reconsider.



KENT, ON THY LIFE,
NO MORE.

MY LIFE I NEVER
HELD BUT AS A PAWN
TO WAGE AGAINST
THY ENEMIES.

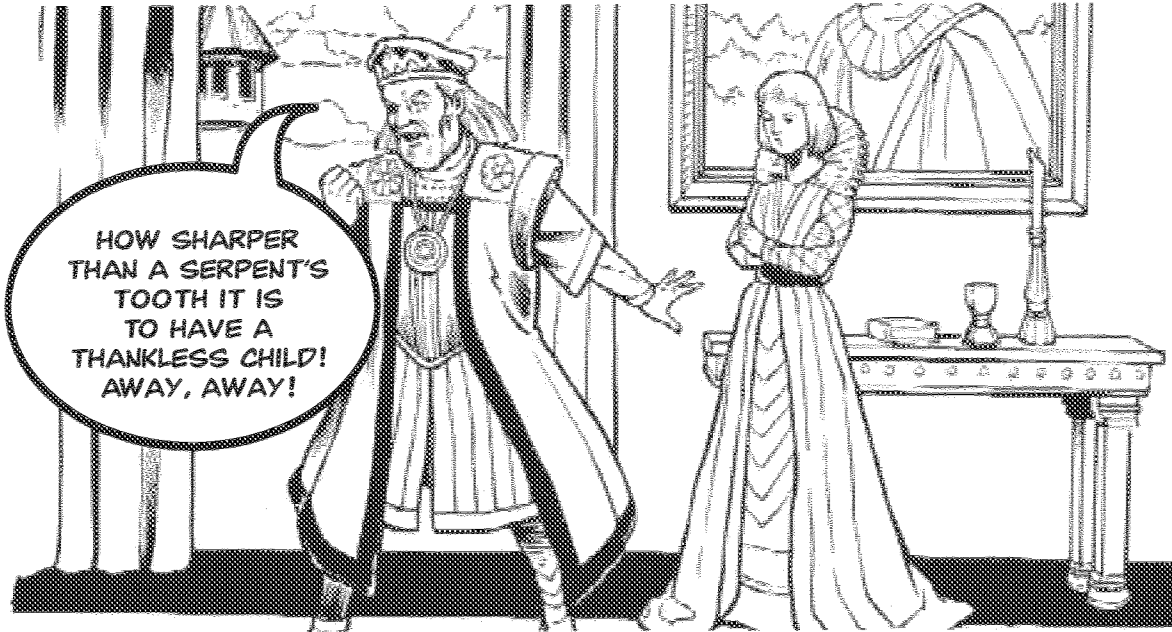
King Lear of Britain planned to divide his kingdom equally among his three daughters. Before doing so, he asked them to declare publicly how much they loved him. Goneril and Regan swore that they loved their father better than anything in the world. Then Lear turned to his youngest—and favorite—daughter, Cordelia.



Kent continued arguing, and Lear banished him. Then the ruler told the two men who had wanted to marry Cordelia that her only dowry would be his curse. The Duke of Burgundy refused her hand. But the King of France did not care and took her as his queen.



After dividing his kingdom between Goneril and Regan, Lear went to stay with Goneril and her husband, the Duke of Albany. Goneril did not like having all of Lear's followers around. She demanded that her father get rid of half of them. He refused, and vowed to stay with Regan instead.



Oswald's cries brought Regan, Cornwall, and Gloucester. Regan and Cornwall put Kent into stocks for being disrespectful. Gloucester asked them not to treat the king's servant this way, but they refused to listen. When Lear arrived a short while later, he asked his servant who put him in stocks.



Kent had disguised himself as a servant so Lear wouldn't recognize him. Lear sent Kent ahead with a letter to Regan. Goneril also sent her steward, Oswald, to deliver a letter to Regan. Kent and Oswald met at the Earl of Gloucester's castle, where Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, were staying.



The king called for Regan and Cornwall. He told Regan how Goneril had abused him. Regan answered, saying that Goneril did nothing wrong, and that Lear should ask for her forgiveness. Lear did not want to return to Goneril.



Lear reminded Regan that he had given her half of his kingdom, but she refused to be moved. When Goneril arrived, the two sisters made fun of their father until Lear left them, mad with grief. A storm came up, and Gloucester wanted to go after the king.



When Kent found Lear, he was ranting to his Fool on the stormy heath. Kent found a hovel where his master could take shelter from the storm. The king sent Kent and his Fool in first, then, reluctantly, followed.



Kent was released from the stocks and went after his master. On the way, he learned from a gentleman that the army of France was in Dover, preparing to attack England. He sent this gentleman to find Cordelia, and tell her of her sisters' abuse of their father.



Meanwhile, Gloucester received a letter informing him that the French army had landed at Dover to avenge the king's injuries. He shared the news with his son Edmund, asking him to keep it secret, while he looked for the king.



Gloucester found King Lear, his Fool, and Kent in a hut on the heath. The king seemed mad, so Gloucester warned Kent, whom he did not recognize, to get Lear to safety for his daughters sought his death. He led them to a farmhouse near the castle where they were to wait for a carriage that would bring them to Dover.



Cornwall sent Goneril to inform her husband that the French army had landed. Then he and Regan turned to Gloucester, who had just been caught. They bound him, and Cornwall questioned him. When Gloucester refused to cooperate, Cornwall put his eyes out.



While Gloucester helped his king, Edmund betrayed his father. He took Gloucester's secret of the French invasion to the Duke of Cornwall. Regan's husband declared Edmund's father a traitor, and named Edmund the new Earl of Gloucester.



When Goneril returned to Albany, he was appalled to learn that Edmund had also turned against his father. He called his wife a devil. She called him a coward. Then a messenger came with the news that Cornwall was dead, killed by a servant as he put out Gloucester's eyes.



Thanks to Gloucester's foresight and Kent's guidance, King Lear was soon safe in Dover. Lear was truly like a madman then, dressed with wild flowers. When he first saw Cordelia, he did not recognize her. When he realized who she was, he fell to his knees in repentance.



Before Albany could find out where Edmund had sent Lear and Cordelia, Edmund's honest brother, Edgar, appeared. He called Edmund a traitor, and the two fought. Mortally wounded, Edmund confessed that he had ordered Cordelia to be hanged.



The British armies had soon set up camp near Dover. Despite his misgivings, Albany felt he had to defend British soil against a foreign invader, and joined Edmund at the camp. They weren't there long when Edmund captured King Lear and Cordelia.



But it was too late. Within minutes, Lear appeared carrying his dead daughter, whom he had tried but failed to save. He was followed by his faithful friend Kent, whom he had finally recognized. When the king reached Albany and Edgar, he fell to the ground.

