

# Shakespeare: King Lear § Act 1, Scene 1

*Enter Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund.*

*[Sound a sennet.] The King is coming.*

*Enter one with a coronet, King Lear, Cornwall, Albany,  
Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and attendants.*

**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 *equalities* 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 blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to't.

10 **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?

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

20 **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.

25 **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.

30 **Lear** Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

**Gloucester** I shall, my lord.

Exit with Edmund

35 **Lear** Mean time 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  
Unburthen'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  
40 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  
45 (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.

50 **Goneril** Sir, I love you more than *words* can wield the matter,  
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,  
Beyond what can be valued, 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.

55

*Cordelia* [Aside] What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

60 *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*.

65 *Regan* I am made of that self metal 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  
 70 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  
 75 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 conferred on Goneril. — Now, our joy,  
 80 Although our 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.

85 *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  
 90 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,  
 95 Obey you, love you, and most honour you.  
 Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
 They love you all? Happily, 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.

105 *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;  
 110 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 loved 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

120

Her father's heart from her. Call France. Who stirs?  
 Call Burgundy. Cornwall and Albany,  
 125 With my two daughters' dowers digest the 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,  
 130 With reservation of an hundred knights  
 By you to be sustained, shall our abode  
 Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain  
 The name, and all th' addition to a king;  
 The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,  
 135 Beloved sons, be yours, which to confirm,  
 This coronet part between you.

*Kent* Royal Lear,  
 Whom I have ever honoured as my king,  
 Loved as my father, as my master followed,  
 As my great patron thought on in my prayers —

140 *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  
 145 When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's  
 bound,

When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state,  
 And in thy best consideration check  
 This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment,  
 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,  
 150 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, *nor fear* to lose it,  
 Thy safety being motive.

*Lear* Out of my sight!

155 *Kent* See better, Lear, and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye.

*Lear* Now, by Apollo —

*Kent* Now, by Apollo, King,  
 Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

*Lear* O vassal! Miscreant [*Starts to draw his sword.*]

*Alb &* Dear sir, forbear.

*Corn.*

160 *Kent* Kill thy physician, and *the* fee bestow  
 Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift,  
 Or whilst I can vent clamor from my throat,  
 I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

*Lear* Hear me, recreant,  
 On thine allegiance, hear me!  
 165 That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,  
 Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride  
 To come betwixt our sentence and our power,  
 Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,  
 Our potency made good, take thy reward.  
 Five days we do allot thee, for provision  
 To shield thee from disasters of the world,  
 And on the sixth to turn thy hated back  
 Upon our kingdom. If, on the tenth day following,  
 Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,  
 175 The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,  
 This shall not be revok'd.

*Kent* Fare thee well, King; sith thus thou wilt appear,  
 Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.  
 [*To Cordelia.*] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,  
 That justly think'st and hast most rightly said!  
 [*To Regan and Goneril.*] And your large speeches may your  
 deeds approve,  
 That good effects may spring from words of love.  
 Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu,  
 He'll shape his old course in a country new.

*Exit*

*Flourish. Enter Gloucester with France and Burgundy, attendants.*

185 *Cordelia ?* Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.  
*Lear* My Lord of Burgundy,  
 We first address toward you, who with this king  
 Hath rivalled for our daughter. What, in the least,  
 Will you require in present dower with her,  
 190 Or cease your quest of love?

*Burgundy* Most royal Majesty,  
 I crave no more than hath your Highness offered,  
 Nor will you tender less.

*Lear* Right noble Burgundy,  
 When she was dear to us, we did hold her so,  
 But now her price is fallen. Sir, there she stands:  
 195 If aught within that little seeming substance,  
 Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,  
 And nothing more, may fitly like your Grace,  
 She's there, and she is yours.

*Burgundy* I know no answer.

*Lear* Will you, with those infirmities she owes,  
 200 Unfriended, new adopted to our hate,  
 Dowered with our curse, and strangered with our oath,  
 Take her, or leave her?

*Burgundy* Pardon me, royal sir,  
 Election makes not up in such conditions.

*Lear* Then leave her, sir, for by the power that made me,  
 205 I tell you all her wealth. [*To France.*] For you, great King,  
 I would not from your love make such a stray  
 To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you  
 T' avert your liking a more worthier way  
 Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed  
 210 Almost t' acknowledge hers.

*France* This is most strange,  
 That she, whom even but now was your *best* object,  
 The argument of your praise, balm of your age,  
 The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time  
 Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle  
 215 So many folds of favour. Sure her offence  
 Must be of such unnatural degree

That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection  
 Fall into taint; which to believe of her  
 Must be a faith that reason without miracle  
 220 Should never plant in me.

*Cordelia* I yet beseech your Majesty —  
 If for I want that glib and oily art  
 To speak and purpose not, since what I *well* intend,  
 I'll do't before I speak — that you make known  
 It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,  
 225 No unchaste action, or dishonoured step,  
 That hath deprived me of your grace and favour,  
 But even for want of that for which I am richer —  
 A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue  
 That I am glad I have not, though not to have it  
 230 Hath lost me in your liking.

*Lear* Better thou  
 Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me better.

*France* Is it but this — a tardiness in nature  
 Which often leaves the history unspoke  
 That it intends to do? My Lord of Burgundy,  
 235 What say you to the lady? Love's not love  
 When it is mingled with regards that stands  
 Aloof from th' entire point. Will you have her?  
 She is herself a dowry.

*Burgundy* Royal King,  
 Give but that portion which yourself proposed,  
 240 And here I take Cordelia by the hand,  
 Duchess of Burgundy.

*Lear* Nothing. I have sworn, I am firm.

*Burgundy* I am sorry then you have so lost a father  
 That you must lose a husband.

*Cordelia* Peace be with Burgundy!  
 245 Since that *respect and fortune* are his love,  
 I shall not be his wife.

*France* Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,  
 Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised,  
 Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,

250 Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.  
 Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect  
 My love should kindle to inflamed respect.  
 Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,  
 Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.  
 255 Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy  
 Can buy this unprized precious maid of me.  
 Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind,  
 Thou lovest here, a better where to find.  
  
 260 *Lear* Thou hast her, France, let her be thine, for we  
 Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see  
 That face of hers again. [*to Cordelia.*] Therefore be gone,  
 Without our grace, our love, our benison. —  
 Come, noble Burgundy.  
  
 [*Flourish. Exeunt all but France, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia*]  
  
 265 *France* Bid farewell to your sisters.  
  
 270 *Cordelia* The jewels of our father, with washed 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. Love well our father;  
 To your professed bosoms I commit him,  
 But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,  
 I would prefer him to a better place.  
 So farewell to you both.  
  
 275 *Regan* Prescribe not us our duty.  
*Goneril* Let your study  
 Be to content your lord, who hath received you  
 At fortune's alms. You have obedience scanted,  
 And well are worth the want that you have wanted.  
  
*Cordelia* Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,  
 Who covers faults, at last with shame derides.  
 Well may you prosper!  
  
*France* Come, my fair Cordelia.  
  
 [*Exeunt France and Cordelia.*]  
 280 *Goneril* Sister, it is not little I have to say of what most nearly  
 appertains to us both. I think our father will hence

to-night.

That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little. He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

'Tis the infirmity of his age, yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of long-ingrained condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

There is further compliment of leave-taking between France and him. Pray *you* let us *hit* together; if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us.

We shall further think of it.

We must do something, and i' th' heat. [Exeunt.]