

King Leir¹

By Geoffrey of Monmouth

After the unhappy fate of his father Bladud, Leir took the throne and nobly governed his country sixty years. He built a city on the river Sore, called in the British tongue Kaerleir, and in the Saxon, Leircestre. He had no male heirs, but had three daughters, whose names were Gonorilla, Regau, and Cordeilla, of whom he was all dotingly fond, but especially of the youngest, Cordeilla.

When he began to grow old, he had thoughts of dividing his kingdom among them and of giving them to such husbands as were fit to rule with them. But to test who was worthy to have the best part of his kingdom, he went to each to ask which of them loved him most. The question was first proposed to Gonorilla the eldest. She answered: "I call on heaven to witness that I love you more than my own soul." The father replied, "Since you have preferred my declining age before your own life, I will marry you, my dearest daughter, to whomsoever you shall make choice of, and give with you the third part of my kingdom."

Willing after the example of her sister to prevail on her father's good nature, the second daughter Regau then answered with an oath, "I cannot otherwise express my thoughts but that I love you above all creatures." Her credulous father on this made her the same promise that he did to her eldest sister, that is, the choice of a husband, with the third part of his kingdom.

But understanding how easily he was satisfied with the flattering expressions of her sisters, the youngest daughter Cordeilla wanted to test his affection in a different way. "My, father," she said, "is there any daughter that can love her father more than duty asks of her? In my opinion, whoever pretends it must hide her real feelings under the veil of flattery. I have always loved you as a father and I do not yet depart from my purposed duty. And if you insist to have something more out of me, hear now the greatness of my affection that I always bear you, and take this for a short answer to all your questions. Look how much you have, so much is your value, and so much do I love you."

Supposing that she was sincere in what she said, the father was highly angered, and immediately replied, "Since you have so far despised my old age as not to think me worthy the love that your sisters express for me, you shall have from me the like regard and shall be excluded from any share with your sisters in my kingdom. Notwithstanding, I do not say but that since you are my daughter, I will marry you to some foreigner, if fortune offers you any such husband. But I will never, I do assure you, make it my business to get so honorable a match for you as for your sisters because, though I have formerly loved you more than them, you have in return thought me less worthy of your affection than they have."

¹ Adapted by William Walter

And without further delay, after consultation with his nobility, he gave his two other daughters' hands in marriage to the dukes of Cornwall and Albania with half the island at present, but after his death, the inheritance of the whole monarchy of Britain.

The king of the Franks, Aganippus, had heard of the fame of Cordeilla's beauty and it happened after this that he immediately sent his ambassadors to the king to demand her hand in marriage. Still angry, her father answered that he was very willing to give his daughter away in marriage, but without either money or territories because he had already given away his kingdom with all his treasure to his eldest daughters, Gonorilla and Regau.

When this was told Aganippus, he, being very much in love with the lady, sent a message back to King Leir to tell him that he had money and territories enough, as he possessed the third part of Gaul, and desired no more than his daughter only, that he might have heirs by her. At last the match was concluded. Coredeilla was sent to Gaul and married to Aganippus.

A long time after this, when Leir came to be infirm through old age, the two dukes, on whom he had bestowed Britain with his two daughters, staged a rebellion against him, took away his kingdom, and stripped him of all regal authority, which he had formerly exercised with great power and glory. At length, by mutual agreement, Maglaunus, duke of Albania, one of his sons-in-law, allowed him a maintenance at his own house, together with sixty soldiers, who were to be kept for state. After two years' stay with his son-in-law, his daughter Gonorilla grudged the number of his men, who began to upbraid the ministers of the court with their scanty allowance. She spoke to her husband about it, and then gave orders that the number of her father's followers should be reduced to thirty, and the rest discharged.

The father resented this treatment. He left Maglaunus and went to Henuinus, duke of Cornwall, to whom he had married his daughter Regau. Here he met with an honorable reception, but before the year was at an end, a quarrel happened between the two families, which raised Regau's indignation, so that she commanded her father to discharge all his attendants except for five, and to be contented with their service. This second affliction was insupportable to him and made him return again to his former daughter with hopes that the misery of his condition might move in her some sentiments of filial piety, and that he, with his family, might find a subsistence with her. But she did not forget her resentment. She swore that he should not stay with her unless he would dismiss his retinue and be contented with the attendance of one man. She reproachfully told him how ill his desire of vain-glorious pomp suited his age and poverty. When he found that she was by no means to be prevailed on, he was at last forced to comply, and dismissing the rest to take up with one man only.

But by this time he began to reflect more sensibly with himself on the grandeur from which he had fallen, the miserable state to which he was now

reduced, and to enter on thoughts of going across the sea to his youngest daughter. He doubted though whether he would be able to move her sympathy because he had treated her so unworthily. However, disdainful to be treated any longer so basely, he sailed to Gaul. In his passage he observed he had only the third place given him among the princes that were with him in the ship, at which, with deep sighs and tears, he burst forth into the following complaint:

“O Fates that never swerve from your stated course! why did you give me happiness, since the punishment of lost happiness is greater than the sense of present misery? The remembrance of the time when vast numbers of men humbly served me in battle more deeply pierces my heart than the view of my present calamity, which has exposed me to the derision of those who were formerly bowing at my feet. Oh! the enmity of fortune! Will I ever again see the day when I may be able to give those who have forsaken me in my distress their just rewards? How true was your answer, Cordeilla, when I asked you about your love to me. You said, ‘As much as you have, so much is your value, and so much do I love you.’ While I had anything to give, they valued me. They were friends not to me but to my gifts. They loved me then, but they loved my gifts much more. When my gifts ceased, my friends vanished. But how will I face you, my dearest daughter, since in my anger I married you on worse terms than your sisters, who after all the large favors they received from me, allowed me to live banished and poor?”

As he was lamenting his condition in these and expressions like it, he arrived at Karitia, where his daughter was and waited outside the city while he sent a messenger to tell her of the misery he had fallen into and to ask relief for a father who suffered both hunger and nakedness. Cordeilla was startled at the news and wept bitterly. With tears she asked how many men her father had with him. The messenger answered, he had only one man, who had been his armor-bearer, and was staying with him outside the town. She then took what money she thought would be sufficient and gave it to the messenger with orders to take her father to another city, and there give out that he was sick, and provide for him bathing, clothes, and all other nourishment. She likewise gave orders that he should take into his service forty men, well clothed and accoutered, and that when all things were thus prepared he should notify his arrival to king Aganippus and his daughter. The messenger quickly returned and carried Leir to another city, and there kept him concealed until he had done every thing that Cordeilla had commanded.

As soon as he was provided with his royal apparel, ornaments, and retinue, he sent word to Aganippus and his daughter that he had been driven out of his kingdom by his sons-in-law, and had come to them to help him recover his dominions. Attended with their chief ministers of state and the nobility of the kingdom, they went out to meet him and received him honorably, and gave into his management the whole power of Gaul until such time as he was restored to his former dignity.

In the meantime Aganippus sent officers over all Gaul to raise an army to restore his father-in-law to his kingdom of Britain. When this was done, Leir returned to Britain with his son and daughter and the forces which they had raised, where he fought with his sons-in-law and routed them. Having thus reduced the whole kingdom to his power, he died the third year after. Aganippus also died, and Cordeilla, now reigning the kingdom, buried her father in a certain vault, which she ordered to be made for him under the river Sore, in Leicester, and which had been built originally under the ground to the honor of the god Janus.

King Lear²

By Charles and Mary Lamb

Lear, King of Britain, had three daughters. They were Goneril, wife to the duke of Albany; Regan, wife to the duke of Cornwall; and the young maid Cordelia. Both the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy were suitors for Cordelia's love, and had come to Lear's court to seek her hand in marriage.

The old king was worn out with age and with the difficult duties of ruling his people. He was now more than eighty years old, and had decided that it was time to leave the throne to younger strengths, that he might have time to prepare for his coming death, which must soon come to pass. With this purpose in mind, the king called his three daughters to him, to know from their own lips, which of them loved him best. He had in his mind that he would divide his kingdom according to the amount of love each had for him. To the daughter who loved him the most, he would give the most. To the daughter who loved him the least, he would give the least.

Goneril, the oldest, said that she loved her father more than words could express. She said that he was dearer to her than the light of her own eyes. Indeed, she said that he was dearer to her than life and liberty. The king was fooled by her false words. Thinking that her heart truly went with her mouth, in a fit of fatherly fondness, he gave her and her husband one-third of his large kingdom.

Then calling to him his second daughter, he demanded what she had to say. Regan was as shallow as her sister and was not a bit less talented in flattering. She declared that what her sister had spoken came short of the love that she had for his highness. She loved him so much that she found all other joys dead, in comparison with the pleasure that she took in the love of her dear king and father.

Lear rejoiced to have such loving children. After hearing the flattering words which Regan had spoken, he decided to give a third of his kingdom to her and her husband, equal in size to that which he had already given away to Goneril.

Then the king turned to his youngest daughter Cordelia. Cordelia was his favorite daughter and in addressing her, called her his joy. "What can you say?" he asked her. "Speak."

Cordelia, however, disgusted with the flattery of her sisters replied, "Nothing." She knew her sisters' hearts were far from their lips, and that they only intended to trick the old king out of his lands so that they and their husbands might rule in his lifetime.

"Nothing?" her father asked.

"Nothing," she said, and added that she loved his majesty the king according to her duty, neither more, nor less.

² Adapted by William Walter

The king was shocked to hear such words come from his favorite child. How unthankful! "Change your speech a little," he warned her, "so that you do not lose your inheritance."

Cordelia then told the king that he was her father. That he had raised her and loved her. Now she gave back those duties, as it was right to do. She obeyed him, loved him, and most honored him. But she told him that she could not make her mouth say such large speeches as her sisters had done, or promise to love nothing else in the world. Why had her sisters husbands, if they had no love for anybody but their father? If she would ever marry, she was sure the lord to whom she gave her hand would want half her love, half of her care and duty. She would never marry like her sisters and love nobody but her father.

At any other time, Cordelia would have plainly told her father her love. She really did love her old father, even almost as much as her sisters pretended to. At any other time, she would have told him so. Her words did indeed sound a bit ungracious, but after the crafty flattering speeches of her sisters, which, she had seen, drew such extravagant rewards, she thought the best thing she could do was to love and be silent. This showed that she did not love to get gifts or land grants in return. It showed that the words she spoke, because they were less showy, had much more truth and sincerity than those of her sisters.

This plainness of speech enraged the old monarch. In reply, he said terrible things. He told her that she was no longer his daughter. He said that he loved her less than he did a savage Scythian or cruel cannibal. "Go away!" he said. "Get out of my sight!"

In his best of times, the king was rash and quick to anger. Now, his old age had made his thinking so cloudy that he could not tell truth from flattery, or a lie from a fact. In a fury of resentment, he took back the third part of the kingdom he had reserved for Cordelia, and gave it to her two sisters and their husbands, the dukes of Albany and Cornwall. He called them to him, and in front of all his courtiers, gave them a crown between them. He gave the two all the power, authority and revenue of government, only keeping to himself the name of king. He was to be provided for in each of his daughters' palaces, one month at a time in each, with a hundred knights for his attendants. All the rest of his kingship he gave up.

The king had been rash, unreasonable, and foolish in giving away his kingdom. His actions filled all his courtiers with astonishment and sorrow. But none of them had the courage to come between Lear and his anger—except the earl of Kent. He began to defend Cordelia, but the hotheaded king commanded him to stop—if he valued his life. But the good earl Kent would not stop. He had always been loyal to Lear, whom he had honored as a king, loved as a father, followed as a master. He had never valued his life more than as a pawn to fight against his royal master's enemies. He did not fear to lose it when he fought for Lear's safety, nor now when Lear was his own enemy. He bravely

went against Lear, to do Lear good. He begged Lear to listen to his advice, as he used to. Lear's youngest daughter did not love him least, Kent said. As for Lear's threats, what could the king do to him? Kent was already ready and willing to give up his life. His threats would not stop him from speaking.

Good Kent's honest and open words only made the king more angry, and like a frantic patient who kills his physician, and loves his mortal disease, Lear banished this true servant. He gave him five days to make ready to leave. But if on the sixth he was found within the realm of Britain, he would be put to death. Kent bade farewell to the king, but before he went, he wished Cordelia well, the young lady who had acted and spoken so rightly. He said that he wished that her sisters' large speeches might be answered with deeds of love. Then he went, as he said, to carry on in a new country.

The King of France and Duke of Burgundy were now called in to hear Lear's decision about his youngest daughter. Would they continue to court Cordelia, now that Lear had disinherited her and taken away her handsome dowry? The Duke of Burgundy said no, he would not marry her under these new terms. The King of France, however, understood why Cordelia had lost the love of her father—that it was only a slowness of speech, and an inability to flatter like her sisters. He took this young maid by the hand and said that her virtues were a dowry above a kingdom. He bade Cordelia to say farewell to her sisters and father, though he had been unkind. He said she would go with him, and be his queen and of fair France, and reign over fairer lands than her sisters. He reproved the Duke of Burgundy as a “waterish” duke because his love for this young maid had in a moment run all away like water.

Then, weeping, Cordelia departed from her sisters and begged them to love their father well, and prove the love that they had professed to have for him. Her sisters sullenly told her not to tell them what to do; they knew their duty. They further told her that her duty was now to try to please her husband, who had taken her, as they rudely expressed it, as Fortune's charity. Cordelia left the palace with a heavy heart, for she knew the cunning of her sisters, and she wished that her father were in better hands than she was about to leave him in.

Cordelia was no sooner gone, than the devilish intentions of her sisters began to show themselves in their true colors. Even before the first month had ended, the old king began to find out the difference between promises and performances. As had been agreed, Lear moved in with his oldest daughter, Goneril. Now that she had gotten almost all that he could give, including the crown, she began to grudge even those small remains of royalty that the old man had reserved to himself to make himself believe he was still king. She could not bear to see him and his hundred knights. Every time she met her father, she frowned. And when the old man wanted to speak with her, she would pretend to be sick, or do anything to get him out of her sight. It was plain that she thought his old age a useless burden, and his attendants an unnecessary expense. Not only was she herself rude to her royal father, but by

her example, and probably according to her private instructions, her own servants started to slight him, and would either refuse to obey his orders, or still more, pretend not to hear them. When Lear saw this change in the behavior of his daughter, he shut his eyes against it as long as he could, as people commonly are unwilling to believe the unpleasant consequences that their own mistakes and stubbornness have brought upon them.

A true and faithful friend cannot be lost by ill treatment, nor can a false and hollow friend be won by good treatment. This truth was notably shown in the behavior of the good earl of Kent. Lear had banished him, and threatened death if he returned. But Kent chose to stay and submit to suffer whatever would come his way, as long as there was a chance for him to serve his master king. Kent then disguised himself as a servant and offered his services to the king. Lear, however, did not recognize him as the good Earl Kent in that disguise, but he seemed pleased with the plainness, or rather bluntness in his answers, which the earl put on—so different from that false flattery which he had so much reason to be sick of. A bargain was quickly struck, and Lear took Kent into his service by the name of Caius, as he called himself, never suspecting him to be his once great favorite, the high and mighty earl of Kent.

This Caius quickly found a way to show his faithfulness and love to his royal master when that same day he observed Goneril's steward treating Lear with vile disrespect. The steward gave Lear scornful looks and spoke to him rudely—as, no doubt, his mistress secretly encouraged him to do. Caius could not endure to see his majesty so openly insulted, and without hesitation tripped up his heels, and laid the unmannerly servant in the kennel. For this friendly service Lear became more and more attached to him.

The coolness and disrespect that Lear had now begun to see, was not all that this foolish fond father was to suffer from his unworthy daughter. Goneril now plainly told him that his staying in her palace was inconvenient so long as he insisted upon keeping his hundred knights. She told him that they were useless and expensive, and only served to kill her court with riot and feasting. She requested that he lessen their number, and keep none but old men about him, such as himself, and fitting his age.

Lear at first could not believe his eyes or ears. Was this his daughter who spoke so unkindly? He could not believe that she, who had received a crown from him, would want to take away his knights and grudge him the respect due to his old age. But Goneril would not give in. Enraged by his daughter's bold disrespect, Lear yelled out, "Saddle my horses; call my knights together," intending to go to his other daughter, Regan—he and his hundred knights. Riding the crest of his anger, the old king called his daughter a detested vulture and said that she had told a lie. And so indeed she had, for the hundred knights were all mannerly and sober men, skilled in all particulars of duty, and not given to rioting or feasting, as she said.

Goneril's husband, the Duke of Albany then entered into this stormy scene and addressed the raging Lear. "I am guiltless," he said, "as I am ignorant of what has made you so angry." The king would not stay to hear him. In a rage, he set out with his followers for the palace of Regan, his other daughter. Lear thought to himself how small Cordelia's fault—if it was a fault—now appeared, in comparison with her sister's, and he wept. He was ashamed that such a creature as Goneril should have so much power over his manhood as to make him weep.

Regan and her husband were keeping their court in great pomp and state at their palace; and Lear sent his servant Caius with letters to his daughter, that she might be prepared for his reception, while he and his knights followed after. But it seems that Goneril had been beforehand with him, sending letters also to Regan, accusing her father of being unruly and moody, and advising her not to receive all those knights that he was bringing with him. This messenger arrived at the same time as Caius, and they both met. Who should it be but Caius's old enemy the steward, whom he had formerly tripped up by the heels for his rude behavior toward Lear. Not liking the fellow's look and suspecting what he came for, Caius, began to revile him, and challenged him to fight. The fellow refused and in a fit of honest passion, Caius beat him soundly, as such a mischief-maker and carrier of wicked messages deserved. Regan and her husband heard about it and they ordered Caius to be put in the stocks. The first thing, then, that the king saw when he entered the castle was his faithful servant Caius sitting in that shameful condition, unbecoming the messenger of a king!

This was but a bad omen of the reception that he was to expect. Upon arriving at the castle, Lear asked for his daughter and her husband. He was told they could not see him, for they were tired from traveling all night. When Lear insisted in an emphatic and angry manner to see them, they came to greet him, but not alone. Goneril came with them; she had come to their castle to tell her own story, and set her sister against the king her father!

This sight much moved the old man, and still more to see Regan take her by the hand. He asked Goneril if she was not ashamed to look upon his old white beard. Regan advised him to go home again with her sister, and live with her peaceably, dismissing half of his attendants, and to ask her forgiveness, for he was old and lacked discretion, and must be ruled and led by people that had more sense than himself. Lear showed how ridiculous that would sound, if he were to go down on his knees, and beg of his own daughter for food and clothing. He argued against such an unnatural dependence, declaring that he had already decided never to return with her, but to stay where he was with Regan, he and his hundred knights. He said that she had not forgotten the half of the kingdom that he had endowed her with, and that her eyes were not fierce like Goneril's, but mild and kind. He said furthermore that rather than return to Goneril, with half his knights cut off, he would go over to France, and

beg a wretched pension of the king there, who had married his youngest daughter without a dowry.

He was mistaken in expecting kinder treatment from Regan than he had experienced from Goneril. As if trying to outdo her sister in her unfair treatment toward their father, she declared that she thought fifty knights too many to wait upon him. Twenty-five were enough, she said.

Lear, nearly heart-broken, turned to Goneril and said that he would go back with her, for her fifty doubled five-and-twenty, and so her love was twice as much as Regan's. But Goneril excused herself, and said, what need was there of so many as five-and-twenty? or even ten? or five? He might just as well be waited upon by her servants, or her sister's servants.

Little by little, then, the two queens had reduced their father's train of men to nothing. This ill treatment and the anger and sorrow he felt for having so foolishly given away his kingdom began to work on his mind and make it unstable. Lear vowed revenge against those unnatural hags, as he called them, and to make examples of them that should be a terror to the earth!

While he was thus idly threatening what his weak arm could never do, night came on, and a loud storm of thunder and lightning with rain. His daughters would not budge in their decision not to admit his followers. Lear called for his horses, and chose rather to face the utmost fury of the storm abroad, than stay under the same roof with these ungrateful daughters. They replied that the injuries which willful men incur are their just punishment, allowed the poor old king to go in that condition and shut their doors upon him.

The winds were high, and the rain and storm increased, when the old man sallied forth to combat with the elements, less sharp than his daughters' unkindness. For many miles about there was scarcely a bush. There on a heath, exposed to the fury of the storm in a dark night, King Lear wandered out to defy the winds and the thunder. He bid the winds to blow the earth into the sea, or swell the waves of the sea till they drowned the earth, that no token might remain of any such ungrateful animal as man. The old king was now left alone with the poor fool, who said it was but a naughty night to swim in, and truly the king had better go in and ask his daughter's blessing, and swore it was an excellent night to cool a lady's pride.

Thus poorly accompanied, this once great monarch was found by his ever-faithful servant the good earl of Kent, now disguised as Caius, who continued to follow close at his side, though the king did not know him to be the earl. Kent asked, "Alas! Sir, are you here? Creatures that love night, love not such nights as these. This dreadful storm has driven the beasts to their hiding places. Man's nature cannot endure the affliction or the fear." Lear rebuked him and said that he could not feel these lesser evils, while a greater disease was borne. When the mind is at ease, the body has the leisure to be delicate, but his mind's disposition took all feeling left from his senses, except that which beat at his

heart. Lear spoke of his daughter's thanklessness, and said it was the same if the mouth would tear the hand for lifting food to it, for parents were hands and food and everything to children.

Caius continued to beg the king to find shelter from the open air, and at last persuaded him to enter a little wretched hovel which stood upon the heath. He saw plainly that Lear was not in his right mind, but that his daughters' ill treatment toward him had really made him go mad. And now Kent was able to help Lear more than he had ever done before. For with the assistance of some of the king's attendants who remained loyal, he had the king removed at daybreak to the castle of Dover, where his own friends and influence, as earl of Kent, chiefly lay. Kent embarked for France and went quickly to the court of Cordelia, and in moving words described the pitiful condition of her royal father, as well as the cruelty of her sisters. With many tears, Cordelia begged her husband to give her permission to embark for England, with a sufficient power to subdue these cruel daughters and their husbands, and restore the old king her father to his throne. The King granted her request and she set forth and with a royal army landed at Dover.

Some of Cordelia's knights found Lear who was wandering about the fields near Dover. He had escaped from the guardians that the good earl of Kent had put over him to take care of him in his madness. There in a pitiable condition, stark mad, he wandered singing aloud to himself with a crown upon his head which he had made of straw, and nettles, and other wild weeds that he had picked up in the corn-fields. By the advice of the physicians, Cordelia, though deeply wanting to see her father, put off the meeting, until after the king slept when the medicinal herbs had time to take effect. By the aid of these skillful physicians, to whom Cordelia promised all her gold and jewels for the recovery of the old king, Lear was soon in a condition to see his daughter.

And so Cordelia was, as it were, miraculously restored to Lear. What a tender sight it was to see this father and daughter together again. The poor old king struggled between the joy at seeing his once darling child again and the shame at receiving such kindness from his daughter whom he had cast off for so small a fault in his anger. His troubled mind so wrestled with these passions that he scarcely remembered where he was, or who it was that so kindly kissed him and spoke to him. He begged the standers-by not to laugh at him, if he were mistaken in thinking this lady to be his daughter Cordelia!

The king fell on his knees to beg forgiveness. She, good lady, knelt all the while to ask his blessing, and told him that it was not right for him to kneel—it was her duty, for she was his child, his true and very child Cordelia! She kissed him, as she said, to kiss away all her sisters' unkindness, and said that they might be ashamed of themselves, to turn their old kind father with his white beard out into the cold air. She said that her enemy's dog, though it had bitten her, would have stayed by her fire on such a night as that and warmed himself. She told her father how she had come from France with purpose to bring him

help. He said that she must forget and forgive, for he was old and foolish, and did not know what he did, but that surely she had reason not to love him, but her sisters had none. And Cordelia said that she had no reason, no more than they had.

Meanwhile, Cordelia's sisters, these monsters of ingratitude, who had been so false to their old father, could not be expected to prove more faithful to their own husbands. They soon grew tired of paying even the appearance of duty and affection, and in an open way showed they had fixed their guilty affection on someone else. It happened that they fell in love with the same man. It was Edmund, son of the late Earl of Gloucester. By his trickery, he had succeeded in disinheriting his brother Edgar, the lawful heir, from his earldom, and by his wicked practices was now earl himself. He was a wicked man, and a fit object for the love of such wicked creatures as Goneril and Regan. It happened that about this time, the duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband, died. Regan immediately told of her intention to marry this Earl of Gloucester. This, of course, roused the jealousy of her sister, who found a way to do away with her sister by poison. Her deed was found out, and her husband, the Duke of Albany, imprisoned her for the murder and for her guilty passion for the earl. In a fit of disappointed love and rage, Goneril shortly put an end to her own life. Thus, the justice of Heaven at last overtook these wicked daughters.

Cordelia and Lear were captured in battle and while the good Queen Cordelia was locked up in prison, the Earl of Gloucester sent out a command to murder her. After seeing the body of his dead lover, Goneril, however, and his change in fortune, Edmund seemed to repent and wished to do some good. Orders were given to reverse the command, but all too late. Cordelia was dead—hanged. Thus, Heaven took this innocent lady to itself in her young years, after showing her to the world an illustrious example of filial duty.

Lear bore his strangled daughter in his feeble arms to the battlefield. "Howl, howl, howl!" he cried in utter despair. "She's gone forever! She's dead as earth." Lear wanted a mirror to put to her lips, to see if there was still breath in his beloved daughter. "If her breath will mist or stain the stone, why then she lives." Thinking that he marked the sign of her breath, he said, "She lives—if it be so, it is a chance that will make up for all the sorrows that I have ever felt." But it was not so, and Lear died of grief. Kent remarked that it was a wonder that Lear, who had suffered so much, had endured so long.

King Lear³

By William Shakespeare

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
Unburdened 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 answered.—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 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, honor;
As much as child e'er loved, 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 riched,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue

³ Excerpt from Act I

Be this perpetual.—What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN

Sir, I am made of the selfsame metal that my sister is,
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 richer 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,
Although the last, not least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interested; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR

Nothing!

CORDELIA

Nothing.

LEAR

Nothing can 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, loved me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honor 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, good my 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 neighbored, pitied, and relieved,
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.—Hence, and avoid my sight!—
 [To Cordelia] 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 in 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 sustained, shall our abode
 Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
 The name, and all the additions to a king;
 The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
 Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm,
 This coronet part betwixt you. [Gives the crown]

KENT

Royal Lear,
 Whom I have ever honored as my king,
 Loved as my father, as my master followed,
 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 honor's bound
 When majesty falls to folly. Reverse thy state;
 And in thy best consideration check
 This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,
 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
 Reverbs 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 the motive.

LEAR

Out of my sight!

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! [Lays his hand on his sword]

ALBANY AND CORNWALL

Dear sir, forbear!

KENT

Do;
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!—
Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow—
Which we durst never yet—and with strain'd pride
To come between 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 diseases of the world;
And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom: if, on the tenth day following,
Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away! by Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

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. Re-enter Gloucester, with France, Burgundy, and Attendants]

GLOUCESTER

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

LEAR

My Lord of Burgundy,
We first address toward you, who with this king
Hath rivaled for our daughter: what in the least
Will you require in present dower with her,
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 fall'n. Sir, there she stands:
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,
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 on such conditions.

LEAR

Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,
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
To avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed
Almost to acknowledge hers.

FRANCE

This is most strange,
That she, who even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favor. Sure her offense
Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
Fall'n into taint; which to believe of her
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
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,
No unchaste action or dishonored step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favor;
But even for want of that for which I am richer—
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR

Better thou
Hadst not been born than not to have pleas'd 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,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stands
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY

Royal king,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
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!
Since that respects of 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:
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:
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.

LEAR

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

~~Without our grace, our love, our benison.—~~

Come, noble Burgundy.

*[Flourish. Exeunt Lear, Burgundy, Cornwall, Albany, Gloucester,
and Attendants]*

FRANCE

Bid farewell to your sisters.

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.

REGAN

Prescribe not us our duties.

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 cover faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper!

FRANCE

Come, my fair Cordelia.

[Exeunt France and Cordelia]

GONERIL

Sister, it is not little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I
think our father will hence tonight.

REGAN

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

GONERIL

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.

REGAN

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

GONERIL

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

REGAN

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

GONERIL

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

REGAN

We shall further think of it.

GONERIL

We must do something, and i' th' heat.

[Exeunt]