

King Lear

by William Shakespeare

(Adapted book. Intermediate level)

King Lear. Part 1

'From today; I will not be your father. You will be a stranger to me and to my heart.'

King Lear, King of Britain, came into the hall with his three daughters: Goneril, who was married to the Duke of Albany; Regan, who was married to the Duke of Cornwall, and Cordelia. Cordelia was not yet married, but the King of France hoped to make her his wife.

The king spread out a map. 'I have separated my kingdom into three parts,' he said. 'I am old, and I do not want to govern my kingdom any longer. Let younger people do the work. So I will give the best part of my kingdom to the daughter who loves me most. Goneril, you are my eldest daughter. You must speak first.'

'Sir,' said Goneril, 'I love you as much as I love my life, my health, my beauty and my honour. I love you as much as any daughter can ever love her father. I cannot put into words how much I love you.'

'What shall I say?' thought Cordelia. 'I love him, but I cannot say such things.'

King Lear was very pleased with Goneril's speech. He said to her, 'I will give all the land between these two lines on the map to you, your husband and your children. Now, what does my second daughter, Regan, say?'

'I love you as much as my sister,' Regan replied. 'But she has not said enough. Nothing pleases me except my love for you. My only happiness comes from my love for you.'

The king was pleased with Regan's reply and he gave a third of his kingdom to her.

Then it was Cordelia's turn to speak. 'Now,' said her father, 'what do you say? Shall I give you the richest part of my kingdom? Shall I give you more than I gave to your sisters? Speak!'

Cordelia answered, 'I can say nothing, my lord.'

'Nothing?' the king asked. He was surprised by her words.

'Nothing,' she said.

'Nothing will bring you nothing. Speak again.'

'I cannot put my feelings into words,' Cordelia said. 'I love you as much as any daughter can love her father. You are my father: you gave me life, cared for me, loved me. So of course I love you. I obey you. I honour you. Why do my sisters have husbands if you have all their love? When I marry, I will give my husband half my love.'

'Do you really mean that?' Lear asked. 'You are very young and unkind.'

'I am young, my lord, but I am telling you the truth.'

'Truth? Then you will only receive truth. From today I will not be your father. You will be a stranger to me and to my heart. Cornwall and Albany, you can have

Cordelia's share of my kingdom. I will stay with each of you-for one month. I will only bring 100 knights with me. People will still call me king, but you will share the government of all my lands.'

The King of France came in.

'I do not want you to take Cordelia as your wife,' Lear said to him. 'You should look for a better woman.'

'This is very strange,' said the King of France. 'She was your favourite daughter. Why have you changed your mind about her?'

'Tell the king that I have lost my father's love because I do not have a tongue like my sisters. I am glad that I do not speak like them,' interrupted Cordelia.

'You have not pleased me,' Lear said. 'You are not my daughter. Why were you ever born?'

But the King of France loved Cordelia. 'Fair Cordelia, your father refuses to keep you, but I love you. Your loneliness makes you even lovelier to me. You are a good woman. I will happily marry you. I will make you the queen of my heart and queen of my lovely country. Say goodbye to your father, the king. Better things are waiting for you.'

Cordelia said goodbye to her father. Then she turned to her sisters. 'I know what you are doing!' she said. 'Take care of our father.'

'Do not tell us our duty!' said Regan.

'Look after your lord of France. He is marrying you because he pities you,' said Goneril.

'You are clever and you hide your faults. In time, people will see the truth,' Cordelia replied.

'Come, Cordelia,' said the King of France, and they left the castle.

'Sister,' said Goneril, 'I suppose our father will stay with me tonight.'

'Yes, he will. And next month he will come to us.'

'You see how he changes his mind. Fie always loved Cordelia most. He was foolish to throw her out now. As he grows older, he will become more and more difficult. We must be ready for that.'

* * *

The Earl of Gloucester was a great lord. He had two sons, Edgar and Edmund. Edgar was his true son from his marriage, and Edmund was the earl's bastard, Edgar's half-brother. Edmund hated Edgar.

At that moment, Edmund was in a room in Gloucester's castle.

'There should be no difference between Edgar and me,' he thought. 'Why do people think that he is more important than I am? My body is as strong as his. My mind is as clear as his. But he is the next Earl of Gloucester and he will get all our father's land. Well, Edgar, I will get the land. At the moment my father loves us equally, so I must make him hate you.' He looked at a letter in his hand. It was part of his plot to destroy Edgar.

Just then his father, Gloucester, entered. Edmund pretended to hide the letter.

'Why are you trying to hide that letter?' asked Gloucester.

‘It is a letter from my brother Edgar,’ Edmund said. ‘I have not finished reading it. I do not think that you ought to read it.’

‘Give me the letter. Let me see it,’ Gloucester said.

He read:

We will not get our money until we are too old to enjoy it. Come to me and I will tell you more. If our father dies soon, I will let you have half of his money. You will be a rich man. And you will earn the love of your brother, Edgar

‘My son Edgar! Did he write this letter? How did you get it?’ Gloucester asked.

‘My lord, someone passed it in through my window. Edgar believes that it is wrong for sons to wait until their fathers die of old age. I have often heard him say that.’

‘That seems to be what he says in his letter! He is evil! Go and find him. Where is he?’

‘I do not know,’ said Edmund. ‘But please do not do anything to my brother. Wait until you can prove it. What does he intend to do? I will try to find out for you.’

‘Edmund, find him. Make him trust you and tell you his plans.’

Gloucester left the room. Soon Edmund saw Edgar coming towards him.

‘Have you seen my father?’ he asked Edgar.

‘I saw him last night,’ Edgar said.

‘Did you talk?’

‘Yes, for two hours,’ said Edgar.

‘Did you end the conversation as good friends? Was he angry with you?’ Edmund asked.

‘No,’ said Edgar. ‘Why?’

‘Because he is very angry with you now/ said Edmund. ‘I am afraid that you are in danger.’

‘An evil person has spoken against me,’ Edgar said.

‘I am afraid that is true, brother. Go to my room. At the right time, I will take you to Lord Gloucester. You can speak to him then.’

Edgar left and Edmund smiled to himself. ‘My father believes everything I say. My brother is a good man and he thinks no one could plot against him. I am clever and I will get everything that I want - everything that my birth has taken away from me.’

* * *

King Lear was foolish to trust Goneril. He stayed in her house with his 100 knights, but he was a difficult visitor. Now Goneril had power over him, and she became an unkind daughter.

‘Behave coldly when you see him,’ she said to her servant. ‘Tell all my servants to be unfriendly with his knights. I am going to write to my sister. She and I agree that we do not want our father to stay with us. She will behave in the same way.’

Lear came into the room. 'You look angry, daughter,' he said. 'You often look angry. Why?'

'Your knights are always quarrelling,' Goneril answered. 'They make a lot of noise. My house is in disorder. It is too much! I will not allow it! I have spoken to you about this before. I believe that you tell them to behave badly. I cannot stop them because you are their master. I am your daughter, but I must speak.'

'Are you my daughter?'

'Listen, sir,' said Goneril. 'Be sensible! Recently you have changed. What are these feelings that have changed you? Be the man you really are.'

'Who can tell me what I really am?' cried Lear. 'I really thought that I had daughters.'

'You are old,' said Goneril, 'and you should be wise. But you keep 100 knights and their followers here in my house and they behave badly. I beg you, send some of your knights away. Keep just a few men. They should be wise and older men like you.'

'Darkness and devils! Bring my horse and call my men. You are an unnatural child! I will not trouble you any more! I still have one daughter left. I was mad - I made a mistake when I trusted you.'

Lear went out, and Goneril heard him shout in surprise.

'What? She has already sent away fifty of my knights? But I have another daughter. I am sure that she will be kind. When she hears this, she will hit Goneril's face with her own fingers.'

* * *

In the Earl of Gloucester's castle, Edmund called Edgar to him. He knew that their father was in the next room. The two brothers talked for a minute, and then Edmund said, 'My father is coming! I can hear him.'

He lowered his voice to a whisper. 'He has ordered me to make you a prisoner. I must pretend to pull out my sword and attack you. You must pretend to defend yourself.'

Their swords struck each other. Then Edmund whispered, 'Now escape! Run away, quickly!'

Edgar ran out.

Edmund struck his own arm with his sword and wounded himself. 'Father! Father!' he cried.

Gloucester came in. 'Where is he, Edmund?'

'Look, sir! I am bleeding. Edgar told me to murder you. When I refused, he attacked and wounded me. He was frightened by the noise I made, so he ran away.'

'We must find him immediately!' said Gloucester.

'I tried to make him give up his plot against you but I failed,' Edmund said. 'Then I said that I would tell you. He said, "You poor bastard, no one will believe you." He said that you loved him. You would not believe that he wrote the letter or plotted against you.'

‘How could he say that it was not his letter?’ Gloucester asked. ‘I will send a picture of him to every part of the kingdom. I will make sure that he does not escape. Edmund, you are my good son. You will have all my land when I die.’

Cornwall and Regan entered the room. They had come to visit Gloucester.

Cornwall said to Gloucester, ‘We have heard strange things about your son Edgar. Did he really want to kill you?’

‘Oh!’ cried Gloucester. ‘My old heart is broken! I am ashamed that you know about this.’

‘Wasn’t Edgar a friend of those knights who came to my house with my father?’ asked Regan.

‘I do not know,’ said Gloucester.

‘Yes,’ said Edmund. ‘He was.’

‘Then I am not surprised,’ said Regan. ‘They advised Edgar to kill you, Gloucester. They wanted to get your money. My sister sent me a letter about those knights. If my father brings them to my house, I will not be there.’

* * *

When Lear arrived at Gloucester’s castle, Gloucester came out and spoke to him.

‘Do my daughter and Cornwall really refuse to speak to me?’ Lear said. ‘You say that they are sick. You say that they are tired, that they travelled all night! I do not believe it. I, the king, wish to speak to Cornwall. I wish to speak to my daughter. Tell them to come out to me now!’

‘I wish there was no trouble between you,’ said Gloucester, as he went into the castle.

‘Oh, my heart! My heart!’ cried Lear. ‘Do not break!’

Gloucester came back with Cornwall, Regan and their servants.

‘Good morning to you both,’ Lear said.

‘I am happy to see you,’ Regan replied.

‘Of course you are happy to see me. I am your father,’ said Lear. ‘Dear Regan, your sister has been so unkind to me.’

‘I cannot believe that my sister failed in her duty to you. You must not blame her. She only tried to make your noisy followers behave. You are old, sir. We know your needs better than you do. Let us help you. Please, sir, say that you were wrong. Go back and ask Goneril to forgive you.’

‘Ask her to forgive me!’ cried Lear. ‘Do you want me to go to her and say, “Dear daughter, I am old. I beg you to give me clothes and a bed and food.”? Never! She sent away half my knights. Let heaven strike her!’

‘Will you curse me like that when you are angry?’ said Regan.

‘Oh, never, Regan! You are kind and gentle. You will never hurt me. You have kind eyes, not cold eyes like hers. You will not forget that I gave you half my kingdom.’

Just then, Goneril arrived.

‘Aren’t you ashamed to see me?’ said Lear. ‘And you, Regan! Why are you taking her hand?’

‘Please, father, go back and stay with my sister until the end of the month,’ said Regan.

‘Return to Goneril? Without my knights? Never! I will live in the open air without a roof.’

‘If that is what you want, then do it, sir,’ said Goneril.

‘Please, daughter, do not make me mad. I will not trouble you again, my child. Goodbye. We do not have to meet again. I can stay with Regan.’

‘No, sir,’ said Regan. ‘I did not expect you. I am not ready for your visit. You have fifty followers! One house cannot hold so many knights. Bring twenty-five. You do not need more. My servants can look after you.’

‘Why does he need twenty-five knights?’ Goneril asked. ‘Why does he need ten? Or five?’

‘Why does he need any followers?’ said Regan.

‘The poorest people have more than they need to keep them alive,’ Lear said. ‘Oh, you gods, help me. Make me angry. Daughters, I will do terrible things to you both! Do you think you will make me weep? No, I will not weep. My heart will break into a thousand pieces before I weep. Oh, I will go mad!’

He went away, followed by Gloucester.

A storm began. ‘We must go inside,’ Cornwall said.

‘This castle is too small to hold the old man and his knights,’ Regan said.

‘It is his fault. Let him suffer,’ said Goneril.

‘I will let him stay at my home,’ Regan said. ‘But not one of his followers will enter the house.’

Gloucester came back to them. ‘The king is very angry. He has called for his horse. I do not know where he is going.’

‘Shut your doors, Lord Gloucester,’ said Cornwall. ‘Come in out of the storm.’

* * *

Gloucester's men were hunting Edgar. They watched all the roads, so he could not escape.

‘I will put mud on my face,’ he thought. ‘My hair will be long and dirty and I will wear old clothes. The country is full of mad people, shouting and begging.’

They travel through the farms and villages. I will be one of them, and I will call myself Poor Tom.’

Lear was also caught in the storm. He was losing his mind, and sometimes he was completely mad. He began to talk to the weather.

‘Fires of the stormy sky above me, burn my head of white hair! Thunder, you shake everything, but I do not care what you do to me. I did not give you my lands or call you my children. You do not have to give me anything. Here I stand, your servant, a poor, weak old man. But do not join my two daughters and fight against an old man. Oh, here is a hut. I can rest here until my daughters come to apologize.’

Edgar was inside the hut. He came out, pretending to be a madman. ‘Oh!

Oh!’ he cried. ‘Poor Tom is cold! The devil has led him through fire and through water. The devil has put knives in his bed, and poison in his food. Poor Tom!’

‘What! Did you give everything to your two daughters?’ Lear asked.

‘Poor Tom has no daughters,’ Edgar said.

‘Of course you have daughters. Only daughters can be so cruel. Come with me and we can talk about our cruel daughters.’

* * *

Gloucester left his castle and came to find the king. He found Lear and Edgar, but he did not recognize his son.

‘King Lear, your daughters ordered me to close the doors of my castle against you,’ he said. ‘I cannot obey - their commands are too hard. I came to find you. Let me take you to a place where there is a warm fire and some food.’

Lear did not understand him and spoke wild, broken words.

‘Ask him again, my lord Gloucester,’ said Edgar. ‘He is mad, just like Poor Tom.’

‘Can you blame him?’ Gloucester asked. ‘His daughters want him to die. I am almost mad myself. I had a son once, and now he is a stranger to me. Not long ago, he wanted to kill me. I loved him so much.’

Gloucester led them to a room in a farmhouse near his castle. Then he went out to look for things to make the room more comfortable.

Soon he came back. ‘There is a plot to kill the king,’ he cried. ‘Quick, take him towards Dover. You will find help there.’

They carried the sleeping old man away to Dover.

King Lear. Part 2

‘Sir,’ Cordelia said to her father; do you know me?’

‘You have come from heaven,’ Lear said. ‘When did you die?’

In Gloucester’s castle, Edmund was speaking to Cornwall. Edgar and Gloucester were, he said, both evil men.

‘I discovered that my father is a traitor,’ Edmund said. ‘The French army is going to attack us. This letter shows that my father knows about the attack. He welcomes it!’

‘Come with me,’ said Cornwall. ‘I will make you a very rich man.’

Cornwall found Goneril and Regan in another part of Gloucester’s castle. He said to Goneril, ‘Go quickly to your husband, Albany. Show him this letter. The French army has landed.’ Then he said to his servants, ‘Find the traitor Gloucester and bring him here.’

‘Kill him!’ said Regan.

‘Take out his eyes!’ said Goneril.

‘Leave him to me,’ answered Cornwall. Then he said to Edmund, ‘Go with Goneril. I am going to punish your father, the traitor. I do not want you to watch.’

So Goneril and Edmund left.

Two or three men brought Gloucester to Cornwall and Regan.

‘Tie his arms,’ ordered Cornwall. ‘Make sure that he cannot escape.’

‘My friends,’ cried Gloucester, ‘what are you doing? You are guests in my house. Do not do this to me!’

But the servants tied him up. The evil Regan laughed. ‘Tighter!’ she cried.

‘Don’t be kind to him! He is a traitor.’

‘I am not a traitor,’ Gloucester cried.

Regan went to him and pulled his white beard.

‘Now, sit,’ said Cornwall. ‘Tell me about the letters that came from France. And where is the mad king? Where did you send him?’

They turned Gloucester’s simple, true answers against him.

‘I am tied up like a poor animal,’ Gloucester said. ‘I sent the king to Dover. I do not want to see your evil fingers take out his poor old eyes. But I will see God punish you. You are evil children.’

‘You are wrong! You will never see anything,’ cried Cornwall. ‘Men! Hold the chair! You will not see because I am going to take your eyes out!’

‘Help! Help!’ Gloucester shouted.

One of Cornwall’s servants ran to stop his master. ‘Stop!’ he cried. ‘I have served you for many years, but you must stop!’

‘You dog!’ cried Regan.

Cornwall pulled out his sword and attacked the servant. Regan took a sword from another man and wounded Cornwall’s servant.

‘Oh, my lord,’ cried the dying servant to Gloucester, ‘he will be punished. You will see.’

‘He will see nothing!’ said Cornwall, and he took out both Gloucester’s eyes.

Gloucester screamed in pain. ‘Where is my son Edmund? Edmund, help me! ‘Traitor!’ said Regan. ‘Edmund hates you. Edmund told us that you were helping the King of France.’

‘I was wrong about Edgar!’ Gloucester said. ‘Edgar was my true and honest son. I was wrong not to trust him. Kind gods, forgive me, and help him.’

Regan said to the servants, ‘Throw him out of the gates and let him smell his way to Dover.’

A man went out with the blind Gloucester. Regan went away with her husband, Cornwall. His servant had wounded him during the fight and he was bleeding.

* * *

In a wild place, Edgar was walking alone.

‘My life cannot get worse,’ he thought. ‘But that is better than living in fear. I can still hope and all changes will make my life better.’

He saw his father coming slowly towards him. An old man was leading him. He heard Gloucester say to the old man, ‘Go away, good friend. You will suffer if people see you with me. You will get into trouble. You cannot help me.’

‘You cannot see. What will you do?’ asked the old man.

‘When I could see, I made great mistakes. Oh, Edgar, Edgar! I want to live long enough to hold you in my arms again! Is someone there?’

‘It is a mad beggar,’ said the old man. ‘It is poor, mad Tom.’

‘Poor Tom is cold,’ said Edgar. ‘Your poor, sweet eyes! They are covered in blood!’

‘Do you know the way to Dover, Poor Tom?’ asked Gloucester.

‘Yes, I know the way,’ Tom replied.

‘There is a rock at Dover, high above the sea. If you take me to the edge of it, I will give you a jewel. You will be a rich man.’

‘Give me your arm. Poor Tom will lead you.’

* * *

Goneril and Edmund were talking in front of Albany’s castle when Goneril’s servant came out to them.

‘The Duke of Albany is behaving strangely,’ the servant said. ‘I tell him good things and he gets angry. I tell him bad things and he is pleased. I told him about the French army and he smiled. I told him that you are here, and he said, “That is bad!” I told him about Gloucester and that Edmund was a loyal friend. He said that I was a fool.’

‘Our secret wishes will come true,’ said Goneril to Edmund. ‘This good servant will take my messages to you. Wear this jewel for me, Edmund. Let me kiss you.’

‘Madam, my lord is coming,’ whispered the servant, and Edmund went away. ‘Oh, Goneril,’ said Albany to his wife, ‘you are an evil woman. You will come to a terrible end.’

‘Do not say any more!’ said Goneril. ‘Your words are foolish.’

‘Evil people believe that wise and good people are foolish. What have you done? You have made your father mad. Heaven will judge you.’

‘Fool!’ answered his wife. ‘The King of France’s army is here. Our country is not prepared. And you sit there and say, “Oh, why are they doing this?”’

At that moment a messenger rushed in.

‘Do you have any news?’ asked Albany.

‘Oh, my lord, the Duke of Cornwall is dead. He went to take out Lord Gloucester’s eyes and his servant wounded him. Now he is dead!’

‘Oh, poor Gloucester! Has he lost both eyes?’ said Albany.

‘Both, both, my lord,’ the messenger replied. Then he turned to Goneril. ‘I have a letter from your sister, madam. You must answer it quickly.’

‘Does Gloucester’s son, Edmund, know what has happened?’ asked Albany. ‘Yes, my lord. Edmund told Cornwall that the Earl of Gloucester hoped for help from the French.’

Albany said, ‘I must thank Gloucester. He has shown great love to the king. And I must punish those evil people who took out his eyes.’

* * *

The French army was in a camp near Dover. Cordelia was with them, but the French king had returned to France because he was suddenly needed there.

Cordelia was speaking to her doctor in an army tent. ‘Someone saw my father only a short time ago. He was as mad as the troubled sea waves. He was singing loudly and he was wearing a crown of flowers.’

She turned to an officer and said, 'Send out soldiers. Search every field and bring my father to me.' Then she asked the doctor, 'Is it possible to make his mind well again?'

'He needs to rest,' said the doctor. 'But there are also plants which will help him to forget his pain.'

'Search for him,' said Cordelia. 'I am afraid that he will try to kill himself.'

A messenger ran in. 'I have news, madam!' he cried. 'The British army is marching in this direction.'

'We know that already,' said Cordelia, 'and we are prepared. Oh, dear father, we have not come to take control of the country, but only to help you.'

* * *

Goneril's servant came to Gloucester's castle, carrying a letter from Goneril to Edmund. Edmund was not in the castle, so Regan saw the letter.

'I do not like this,' said Regan. 'Why is she writing to Edmund? I am going to read this letter. Give it to me. I know that Goneril does not love her husband, and I have seen her look strangely at Edmund. Does she love him? Servant, you know everything that Goneril plans and thinks. Listen to me. My husband is dead.'

Edmund and I have talked. He is my man, not your lady's. Tell that to my sister.

Then she said, 'And find that blind traitor Gloucester! I will give a lot to the person who kills him. People feel sorry for him, and that could harm us.'

* * *

In the fields near Dover, Edgar was leading Gloucester by the hand.

'When will we come to the top of that high rock?' asked Gloucester.

'You are climbing up to it now,' answered Edgar. 'Isn't it hard work?'

'The ground feels flat to me.'

'No, it is very steep. Listen. Can you hear the sea?'

'No, I cannot,' Gloucester said.

'You have lost your eyes and your other senses are failing too. Come, sir. Here is the place. It is terrible to look down so far! The birds down there are the size of insects. The fishermen on the shore look like mice. I cannot look - I am afraid of falling!'

'Lead me to the place where you are standing,' ordered Gloucester.

'Give me your hand,' said Edgar. 'You are now just one step from the edge.'

'Leave my hand,' said Gloucester. 'Here is a purse, my friend. There is a valuable jewel inside it. You are a poor man - this jewel will make you rich. Go away, further away. Say goodbye to me. Let me hear you leave.'

'Goodbye, sir,' said Edgar.

'Now I must say goodbye to life,' said Gloucester. 'My sadness will end for ever. If Edgar is alive, God will take care of him.'

He stepped forward and fell - but he only fell on to the ground at his feet. Now Edgar used a different voice to pretend to be somebody else.

'Alive or dead? Ah! You, sir, friend! Who are you, sir?'

'Go away!' said Gloucester. 'Go away and let me die!'

‘It is wonderful that you are alive!’ said Edgar. ‘You must be a bird. You fell from such a terrible height and you did not break like an egg. Look up and see how far you fell.’

‘I have no eyes. Am I still alive? I wanted to end my life.’

‘Give me your arm,’ Edgar said. ‘Stand up. You can feel your legs. Who brought you to the top of the rock?’

‘A poor unhappy beggar,’ Gloucester replied.

‘It was a devil, but the gods saved you.’

‘Yes,’ Gloucester said. ‘From this moment, I will accept my troubles bravely. When my heart cries out, “Enough! Enough!” I will die.’

Lear came towards them, dressed in wild flowers.

‘Oh!’ cried Edgar. ‘What a terrible sight!’

Lear came nearer, shouting mad words.

‘I know that voice,’ Gloucester said. ‘It is the king. Let me kiss his hand.’

Then Cordelia’s men arrived, looking for Lear.

‘Here he is!’ called their leader. ‘Hold him! Your dear daughter has-’

‘Daughter! Am I a prisoner?’ cried Lear. ‘Will nobody help me? I will die bravely! I am a king! Do you not know that?’

‘You are the king, and we obey you,’ the leader of the men said.

‘Catch me, then! Run after me and catch me!’ Lear ran away, and the others ran after him.

‘Are you still there?’ Gloucester asked Edgar. ‘Who are you?’

‘I am only a poor man,’ Edgar answered. ‘Take my hand, and I will lead you to a safe place.’

But Goneril’s servant was there. ‘Good,’ he said. ‘I have found Gloucester. His eyeless head will earn me a lot of money!’

He pulled out his sword, but Edgar stepped quickly between the man and Gloucester. He fought the servant without a sword, but he knocked the man down.

‘Oh, I am going to die!’ cried the servant, ‘Take this bag. There is a letter inside it. Give the letter to Edmund and use the money to put me in a tomb.’

Edgar opened the letter. He read:

Remember our promises and kill my husband. Then I will be your wife.
Goneril

‘I will show this letter to Albany,’ Edgar said to himself. ‘It is a good thing for him that I have learned his wife’s plans.’ Then he turned to Gloucester. ‘Come, my lord,’ he said, ‘I will lead you to a friend who can help you and keep you safe. I can hear drums beating in the distance.’

* * *

In a tent in the French camp, Cordelia was talking to the doctor.

‘How is the king?’ she asked.

‘He is sleeping,’ the doctor replied. ‘I have dressed him in clean clothes and I will ask the servants to bring him here. Stay close to him when we wake him, my lady. I think he will get better.’

Cordelia kissed her father. ‘This kiss will make you better. My two sisters have done great harm to you.’

She turned to the doctor. ‘He is awake now,’ she said. ‘Speak to him.’

‘It is better that you speak, madam.’

‘Sir,’ Cordelia said to her father, ‘do you know me?’

‘You have come from heaven,’ Lear said. ‘When did you die?’

‘Oh, look at me, sir. Take my hand and give me your love. No! You must not fall to your knees!’

‘I think I know you, but I am not sure,’ Lear cried. ‘Do not laugh at me. I think that this lady is my child, Cordelia.’

‘She is! She is!’ Cordelia wept.

‘Do not weep! If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you cannot love me. Your sisters were bad to me. You have a reason to hate me, but they have not.’

‘No, no! I do not hate you!’

‘Am I in France?’ Lear asked.

‘You are in your own kingdom, sir,’ Cordelia answered. ‘Will you let me help you?’

‘Yes, yes, dear daughter. Please forgive me. I am old and foolish.’

* * *

Edmund was in the British camp near Dover. He was commander of the British army.

‘Sweet lord,’ said Regan to Edmund, ‘tell me the truth. Do you love my sister Goneril? Are you close to her?’

‘No, I promise you that I am not, madam,’ Edmund replied.

Regan did not believe him. She thought it would be better to lose the coming battle than to lose this man to her sister.

Albany and Goneril arrived and they all prepared for battle. The sisters hated each other more than ever. Each sister knew that the other sister wanted Edmund.

In one of the tents, Albany spoke to Edgar, who was still pretending to be a stranger.

‘Before you fight in battle,’ said Edgar, ‘open this letter. If you win, send for me. I can bring someone who will prove that the words in this letter are true.’

He went out, leaving Albany alone. Then Edmund came in. The enemy was very near, so Albany went to meet them with his army.

‘I love both these sisters,’ thought Edmund. ‘Which shall I marry? If I choose Goneril, then Albany must die. He wants to forgive Lear and Cordelia, but I will not forgive them! If we win, they will fall into my power.’

* * *

The battle was bitter. In the end, Edmund and the British army were more powerful than the French army. The British soldiers took Lear and Cordelia as prisoners.

‘I am only worried about you,’ Cordelia said to her father. ‘I do not care about myself. Do you think we will see my sisters?’

‘No!’ said Lear. ‘We must not see them! Let us go away to prison. When you ask for my love, I will ask you to forgive me. We will sing and tell old stories and laugh.’

‘Take them away,’ said Edmund. He sent for a captain. ‘Your orders are in this letter. Will you obey me?’

‘I will, sir,’ the man said.

‘Go, then, and do it. Do exactly what I say.’

Albany, Goneril, Regan and their soldiers arrived.

‘You are holding the prisoners from this battle,’ Albany said to Edmund. ‘I want you to bring them here.’

‘People feel very sorry for the old king,’ Edmund said. ‘I thought it was wise to keep him in a secret place. Soldiers are guarding him, and I sent Cordelia with him. I will bring them to you tomorrow.’

Albany was very angry that Edmund had taken Lear and Cordelia away without his permission. ‘Sir,’ he said to Edmund, ‘in this war you are under my command.’

There was a quarrel. Edmund said that he was the new Earl of Gloucester. At the same time, the sisters quarrelled too. Each sister said that Edmund was her lover.

‘You cannot say that you love him when you are married to me,’ Albany said to Goneril. ‘Edmund, you and Goneril are traitors. If no one else comes to prove it, I will prove it myself with my sword.’

Regan suddenly grew faint. ‘Oh, I am ill!’ she cried.

‘If she is not ill,’ thought Goneril, ‘I have made a mistake and mixed her drink wrongly.’

‘I will fight any man who calls me a traitor,’ shouted Edmund.

‘You will fight alone,’ Albany replied. ‘I have sent all your men away.’

‘Oh! I feel worse!’ said Regan. Albany ordered the servants to take her to her tent.

Then Edgar came in. He was carrying a sword, and his face was hidden.

‘Pull out your sword,’ he cried to Edmund. ‘You were disloyal to your brother, your father and Lord Albany. You are a traitor!’

‘My sword will answer you,’ cried Edmund.

They fought and Edmund was wounded.

‘This is a trick,’ said Goneril. ‘By the laws of war, you do not have to fight an enemy unless you know his name.’

‘Shut your mouth, woman,’ said Albany, ‘or I will shut it with this paper.’ He waved her letter to Edmund in the air. ‘Ah! I can see that you recognize it!’ Goneril ran out.

‘Who are you?’ said Edmund to the man who had wounded him.

More books on <http://adapted-english-books.site>

‘My name is Edgar. I am your father’s son.’

Albany took Edgar’s hand. ‘I never hated you or your father. Where did you hide? How did you know what happened to your father?’

In a few words Edgar told his story.

‘Only half an hour ago,’ he said, ‘I told my father who I was. I told him everything. But, I am sorry to say, it was too much for his heart. His happiness and his sadness were too much for him, and he died.’

A man entered, holding a bloody knife in his hand.

‘What does this mean?’ asked Albany.

‘Your lady, sir, your lady-’

‘Lady Goneril poisoned Regan because of her love for me,’ Edmund said.

‘And now it seems that she has killed herself.’

Servants brought in the bodies of Goneril and Regan. Edmund was also dying. ‘I am afraid of death,’ he said. ‘I must try to do one good act before I die.’

Send men to the castle. I told my soldiers to kill Lear and Cordelia. I gave them secret orders to make the people there say that Cordelia killed herself.’

After the servants carried Edmund away, Lear came in with Cordelia in his arms.

‘I know when someone is dead and when she is alive,’ he cried. She is as dead as the earth. A curse on you, you murderers. You are all traitors! I wanted to save her. Now she has gone for ever.’

He bent down and seemed to listen to her. ‘Ha! Her voice was always soft, gentle and low. That is an excellent thing in a woman.’

A messenger came in. ‘Edmund is dead, my lord.’

‘And my poor child is dead,’ said Lear. He could not breathe. ‘Will you, please, undo this button ... Thank you, sir.’

He fell, and Edgar ran to him. ‘Look up, my lord. No - he is dead.’

‘It is surprising that he lived for so long,’ said Albany.

Edgar shook his head sadly. ‘We younger ones must live with the unhappiness of these sad times.’

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

Come back to <http://adapted-english-books.site> to find more fascinating and exciting stories!