

HOW SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH IT IS TO HAVE A THANKLESS CHILD

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Act I

Scene 1

A room in King Lear's palace. Enter KENT and GLOUCESTER, with Gloucester carrying his son EDMUND on his arm. Edmund is a haughty, impish little man, with a high, nasal voice. He wears a monocle over one eye. Actually, Edmund should ideally be a ventriloquist's dummy. Gloucester is the ventriloquist, although he is not very good about not moving his lips. Alternatively, Edmund could be played by a live actor, but the stage directions will assume he is a dummy. Kent should have a beard in this scene.

KENT

I thought the King had more
affected the Duke of Albany
than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER

So it had seemed to me, but it
now appears that he will give
equal shares to the husbands of
Regan and Goneril, while
reserving the finest lands for
whatever man shall wed
Cordelia.

KENT

Is this your son, my Lord?

GLOUCESTER

He is my issue, though there is

an issue as to his legitimacy.

KENT

I don't understand

EDMUND

He means I'm a little bastard.

KENT

Oh.

GLOUCESTER

Edmund, say hello to the Earl
of Kent and remember him as my
honorable friend.

EDMUND

As opposed to all your
dishonorable chums.

GLOUCESTER

Perhaps I should be ashamed of
having a son out of wedlock,
but I was a young rake in my
salad days.

EDMUND

And now you're an old wreck,
and your salad is wilted.

GLOUCESTER

All the women liked my looks,
but Edmund's mother appreciated
my finer qualities...

EDMUND

The gold, the silver, the
estate...

GLOUCESTER

Edmund! Do you think your
mother was interested only in
the money I gave her.

EDMUND

No! No! She was also after
the money you didn't give her!

GLOUCESTER

I'm ashamed to hear you talk
that way!

EDMUND

I could talk better if you'd
give me a larger allowance.

GLOUCESTER

You always want money for being
good. Why can't you like your
legitimate brother Edgar? He
never wants anything for being
good.

EDMUND

Yes, he's good for nothing.

GLOUCESTER

Shhhh! The King is coming.

Enter KING LEAR, a stout man with a bulbous nose.
Following him are his eldest daughter GONERIL, her
husband the DUKE OF ALBANY, Lear's middle daughter REGAN,
her husband the DUKE OF CORNWALL, and Lear's youngest
daughter CORDELIA. Also enter various ATTENDANTS.

KING LEAR

Gloucester! Attend the lords
of France and Burgundy!

GLOUCESTER

I shall, my Lord.

Gloucester bows and exits, taking Edmund with him.

KING LEAR

Present the map!

An Attendant holds up a map of England. The King points
to it with his scepter and accidentally pierces it. He
pulls the map off the scepter and hands it back to the

Attendant.

KING LEAR

(handing back the
map)

Careful with that thing!

The King again points to the map, but is careful not to pierce it this time.

KING LEAR

Know that we have divided our kingdom into thirds, and 'tis our intent to shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths, while we unburdened crawl toward death.

Goneril snorts with contempt.

GONERIL

If he's lay off the booze, he could walk toward death.

The King glares at Goneril, but doesn't say anything to her.

KING LEAR

Before we bestow the divisions of our domain, we shall propose this inquiry: tell us, daughters, which of you shall we say loves us most? Goneril, our eldest born, speak first.

GONERIL

I love you more than words can say. Beyond all, no less than life, as much as any child ever loved, and more than that I love you.

KING LEAR

Good. Very good. (He gestures

to the map.) All this land, we confer to you and your husband Albany. What says our second daughter, our Regan, wife of Cornwall. Speak.

REGAN

I find my sister echoes my love, only her words fall short. I won't allow any other feelings, thoughts or senses to interfere with my love for my father.

GONERIL

I meant to say that, but I so absorbed in feeling love for my father, I forgot to mention it.

REGAN

I'm sorry. Did you say something? I was so busy loving my father, I didn't hear a word you said.

Goneril starts chanting.

GONERIL

I love my Dad! I love my Dad!
I love my Dad!

Regan puts her hands over her own ears and chants more loudly:

REGAN

I love him more! I love him more!

Goneril grabs Regan by the neck and starts choking her.

GONERIL

Knock it off! I love the big baboon just as much as you do!

Regan breaks away from Goneril and gulps in her breath before she can speak. She decides not to argue any

longer.

REGAN

(panting for
breath)

Okay... We both... love... the
old goat... equally.

KING LEAR

You touch our heart, both of
you. To Regan and her husband
Cornwall we impart this ample
third of our fair kingdom. And
now our joy, our youngest
daughter Cordelia, what say
you?

CORDELIA

What.

KING LEAR

What say you?

CORDELIA

What!

KING LEAR

You haven't been paying
attention, have you?

CORDELIA

Yes I have.

KING LEAR

Then perhaps you will enlighten
us. What did we just inquire
of you?

CORDELIA

You asked if I'd been paying
attention.

KING LEAR

Before that!!!

CORDELIA

You mean before you asked me to say what?

KING LEAR

Yes!

CORDELIA

I don't remember!

King Lear takes a moment to calm himself down before proceeding.

KING LEAR

We believe we asked you to tell us what you think of us.

CORDELIA

I think you're being awfully silly.

GONERIL

It's clear she doesn't respect you at all!

CORDELIA

Of course I respect him! He's been like a father to me!

KING LEAR

I am your father!

CORDELIA

And that's why I respect you for being like a father to me!

I wouldn't respect you for acting like my father if you weren't my father, would I?

GONERIL

You're not going to give this ungrateful witch any of your kingdom, are you?

REGAN

You can't even consider it! After all the love we've shown

you, we deserve her share!

GONERIL

If you have any respect for
yourself at all, you'll exile
this little traitor!

KING LEAR

Silence!!! We remember, when
we were a lad, our father the
King expounded to us upon our
duties of filial love. "Prince
Lear," he said, "if every day
you demonstrate to us the
complete and total adoration
that a son owes to his
progenitor, then when we die
you shall be the king and live
in ease and luxury. But if
even once you fail to show us
perfect love, then we shall
disown you utterly, abandon you
to the elements, and leave you
to die in misery, cold and
hunger." So I killed him.
Conked him in the cranium right
then and there. No use taking
any chances, I thought.
Cordelia, we have to make sure
you won't be around to conk us
in our cranium!

CORDELIA

Oh, don't be silly! I could
never do that!

KING LEAR

You couldn't?

CORDELIA

Of course not! I don't even
know where our cranium is!

KING LEAR

Here I disclaim all my parental
care!

KENT

Good my Liege

KING LEAR

Peace, Kent! Come not between
the dragon and his wrath! We
do invest our power in Goneril
and Regan, keeping for ourself
one hundred knights and the
name of King. Our loving
daughters shall sustain and
care for us!

KENT

Royal Lear, this is madness!
You are making a terrible
mistake! It is wrong! It is
evil!

KING LEAR

What! You dare to question me!
You vassal! You miscreant!
You have ten days to leave
England forever! Out of my
sight!

KENT

Very well! Freedom lives
hence, and banishment is here!

Kent exits. Enter Gloucester, still carrying Edmund,
followed by the KING OF FRANCE and the LORD OF BURGUNDY.
The Lord of Burgundy is a vain, stingy man, who claims to
be thirty-nine, but is in fact quite a bit older. The
King of France smokes a cigar and smiles between puffs.

CORNWALL

Here are the King of France the
and Lord of Burgundy, my noble
Lord.

KING LEAR

My Lord of Burgundy, you and
the King of France have been

rivals for our daughter,
Cordelia. What is the smallest
dowry you would require to take
her as your wife?

BURGUNY

For this wonderful girl? I
hate to ask anything, and I
certainly wouldn't expect more
than what you've already
offered, your Highness, a third
of your kingdom.

KING LEAR

That was what we offered when
she was dear to us, but now her
price has fallen.

CORDELIA

He's mad because I said he was
like my father.

KING LEAR

This ungrateful wretch wouldn't
say how much she loved me!

BURGUNDY

Is that all? I'm sure she
didn't mean anything wrong.
She's so young, and tender and
innocent. So unspoiled...

KING LEAR

So I've disinherited her!

BURGUNDY

Why that slut!!!

KING OF FRANCE

I'll take her!

KING LEAR

She is yours! I never wish to
see her face again!

Lear exits, followed by everyone except for Burgundy, the

King of France, Cordelia, Goneril and Regan.

BURGUNDY

But why do you want her? She
hasn't any dowry!

KING OF FRANCE

Are you kidding? If I ever get
tired of being King of France,
she'd be worth a fortune in
vaudeville. Say goodnight,
Cordelia.

CORDELIA

Goodnight everybody.

The King of France leads Cordelia off. Burgundy follows
them.

REGAN

Can you believe it? He gave us
everything and disinherited
Cordelia.

GONERIL

Is he crazy or just drunk?

REGAN

Both, I'd say.

GONERIL

We'd better be careful, or he
could turn against us the same
way he turned against Cordelia
and Kent!

REGAN

We shall further think on it.

GONERIL

We must do something!

Scene 2

Edmund sits in a window frame (so that the actor playing Gloucester may operate him from behind and below the window) in the castle of the Earl of Gloucester. Edmund holds a letter in his hand. (Okay, being a ventriloquist's dummy, he can't exactly hold the letter, but it is in his hand.)

EDMUND

Thou, Nature, art my Goddess.
I don't believe in man made
laws. Why should my brother
Edgar get everything, just
because my father had the bad
taste to marry Edgar's mother?
Well, I'll soon take care of
that. Ooops, here comes Dad.

Edmund becomes still. A moment later, Gloucester enters and picks him up.

GLOUCESTER

Hello, Edmund. I can't get
over what happened in Court
today! Kent banished!
Cordelia disinherited!

Edmund waves the letter back and forth, as though fanning himself with it.

EDMUND

Yes, and it certainly is warm
in here, isn't it?

He continues to wave the letter, but Gloucester ignores it. Finally, Edmund hits Gloucester in the face with it.

GLOUCESTER

What is that thing?

EDMUND

What, this? I was hoping you
wouldn't notice it. It's just
a letter from Edgar.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, is that all? I certainly
am upset about what happened in
court today. Kent banished!!!

EDMUND

Yes, there's no reason for you
to be interested in this
letter. I'm sure Edgar was
just kidding when he said he
wanted to kill you!

GLOUCESTER

What?

EDMUND

He said he wanted to kill you
for your money.

GLOUCESTER

Let me see that!

Gloucester grabs the letter, opens it, and reads it
aloud.

GLOUCESTER

"Dear Edmund, I want to kill
Dad for his money. Love,
Edgar." Are you sure Edgar
wrote this? I didn't even know
he could write.

EDMUND

Well, um, he dictated it to me.
That's how I know for certain
it's from him!

GLOUCESTER

This is monstrous! He's a
villain! An abhorred villain!
Unnatural, detested, brutish
villain! Worse than brutish!

EDMUND

He isn't very nice, is he?

Gloucester placed Edmund back in the window, and starts to exit.

GLOUCESTER

(as he exits)

I'll find him and have him punished. My horoscope predicted there was trouble coming. We're in for bad times, I'm afraid!

Gloucester exits.

EDMUND

You don't know the half of it!

Edgar enters through the window Edmund is sitting in, and sits beside Edmund. Edgar is played by another ventriloquist's dummy. (Or, like Edmund, he could be played by a live actor, but the stage directions will assume he is a dummy.) He is an incredibly stupid, bucktoothed hayseed.

EDMUND

Edgar! Just the man I want to see. Do you know something?

EDGAR

Uh, nope! Nope. Probably not.

EDMUND

Someone's been saying bad things about you to our father. Do you have any idea who might have done it?

EDGAR

Well... um... let's see... I'm pretty sure it wasn't me.

EDMUND

Good. We'll rule you out. Has anyone else been criticizing you?

EDGAR

Yup. Uh.. hmmm... Somebody
said... I should be able to
remember this... They said...
um... I know they said
something...

EDMUND

You haven't got a clue, have
you?

EDGAR

That's it! That's what they
said!

EDMUND

Edgar, how can you be so
stupid?

EDGAR

I get a lot of practice.

EDMUND

You're in terrible trouble!
Your life is in danger!

EDGAR

Yup! Well, that's the way it
goes.

EDMUND

You have to hide until I tell
you things are safe.

EDGAR

Um....Thanks!

Edgar exits out the window.

EDMUND

Let me, if not by birth, have
lands by wit. All with me's
meet that I can fashion fit.

Scene 3

In the castle of the Duke of Albany, Goneril talks to OSWALD, her steward.

GONERIL

Did my father strike you for chiding of his Fool?

OSWALD

Aye, Madam.

GONERIL

By day and night, he wrongs me! I'll not endure it. When he returns from hunting, I will not speak with him. Say I am sick.

OSWALD

Yes, Madam.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you. I will write to my sister and tell her to hold my very course. Prepare for dinner!

Goneril exits one way, and Oswald goes off in the other direction.

Scene 4

In another part of the castle of the Duke of Albany, Kent enters, disguised as a peasant. He no longer wears a beard.

KENT

Now banished Kent, although the King thinks you are gone, in this disguise, with your beard shaven off, you may yet do him service unrecognized.

Enter King Lear with KNIGHTS and other ATTENDANTS.

KING LEAR

Home are the hunters, home from the hunt! I performed prodigious feats of marksmanship today, if I might exhale into my own hunting horn. What did I slay today with my mighty bow and arrows?

An Attendant looks at a list of the creatures killed by the King.

ATTENDANT

Let's see: you shot your best bloodhound, one horse, two cows and a serf.

KING LEAR

No boars?

ATTENDANT

No boars.

KING LEAR

What about the serf. Wouldn't you say he was a bit uncultivated... somewhat crude?

ATTENDANT

Well, he wasn't exactly genteel.

KING LEAR

Put him down as a boar.

The Attendant corrects his list.

KING LEAR

(triumphantly)

The King hath killed a boar!

The King notices Kent.

KING LEAR

Who are you?

KENT

A man, no less than I seem.

KING LEAR

No more, either. What do you want?

KENT

To serve you!

KING LEAR

Fine! Serve me a bottle of the good stuff. I'm thirsty.

Kent bows and exits.

KING LEAR

And I want my dinner, and my daughter, and my fool!

ATTENDANT

Since Cordelia went to France, the Fool has pined away.

KING LEAR

No more of that!

Oswald enters and crosses the stage.

KING LEAR

You! Where's my daughter?

Oswald exits, ignoring the King.

KING LEAR

Didn't I just speak? Can't a

monarch get any service in this establishment?

Kent comes back with a bottle of wine upon a tray.

KING LEAR

About time!

King Lear takes a good strong drink from the bottle.

KING LEAR

Where's my Fool? I haven't seen my Fool for two days!

Oswald enters and starts to cross the stage again.

KING LEAR

It's you again. Do you know who I am?

Oswald ignores the King again, but Kent grabs him and brings him before the King.

KING LEAR

Who am I?

OSWALD

(contemptuously)

My Lady's father.

KING LEAR

Your Lady's father??? You dog!

You knave! You cur!

King Lear raises the bottle of wine to hit Oswald with it, then realizes he doesn't want to spill any of the wine, so he carefully puts the wine down, takes the serving tray from Kent, and conks Oswald on top of his head with the serving tray.

OSWALD

I'll not be struck, my Lord!

KENT

Nor tripped, neither.

Kent trips Oswald, and pushes him offstage.

KING LEAR

Well enacted. Nicely done.

Enter Lear's FOOL. The Fool wears motley, has a greasepaint mustache, and carries a cigar. He lopes across the stage to Kent.

FOOL

I'll say. I take my hat off to you. In fact, I give my hat to you.

The fool removes his hat (a coxcomb) and hands it to Kent.

KENT

Why?

FOOL

I don't like it. It doesn't go with my cigar. But it goes with you. And you go with it. And the sooner the better! Go! Scram!

KENT

But I came here to serve the King.

FOOL

You can take him with you. And you can take me too. I don't think I'm appreciated here.

The Fool breaks into song.

FOOL

(singing)

There was a King
Who had two wicked daughters,
Under the greenwood tree!
The only nice one went to
France,

Where ladies wear
Lace underpants.
Hey nonny, knobby knees!

And so my King,
I'm expecting lots of slaughter
Under the greenwood tree.
And that is why I say,
The rain
It rainth every day.
Hey nonny, knobby knees!

KING LEAR
You call that funny?

FOOL
If you think you can do better,
we could change jobs. Or did
we already do that, Nuncle?

KING LEAR
Are you calling me a fool?

FOOL
You've given away all your
other titles. That one you
were born with, Nuncle.

The Fool wags his eyebrows up and down at Lear.

KENT
Why does he keep calling you
"Nuncle"?

KING LEAR
It's short for "mine uncle," a
term of endearment.

FOOL
Actually, it's short for
"Nuncle-head," a term of
contempt. Which reminds me,
Nuncle, I've got a riddle for
you. What's the difference

between a dung heap and a stupid old king who gives everything away to his two wicked daughters?

KING LEAR

A dung heap and a stupid old king? Hmmmm. I know! The answer is that when a fool displeases the king, the king can force the fool to eat the dung heap!

FOOL

That's true. I don't know why I didn't think of that. You know, I'd rather be anything in the world than a fool. Except you. Or am I being redundant?

Goneril enters, looking angry.

KING LEAR

How now, daughter? Where have you been?

GONERIL

Never mind that! It's time we talked about those hundred knights of yours! The way they've been behaving, this place is more like a tavern or a brothel than a palace.

KING LEAR

(smiling)

Yes, I know. I know.

GONERIL

That was a complaint!

KING LEAR

Oh, was it? I'm sorry. I'll have to make a mental note of that. Palace is good; tavern

and brothel are bad.

GONERIL

What do you need all those men
for anyway? I want you to get
rid of half of them.

KING LEAR

If you insist, my child, I
shall notify them of their
termination, and advise them to
depart within a fortnight!

GONERIL

Not a fortnight! Tonight!
This instance!

KING LEAR

Might they not finish their
repast, and join me in a final
quaff of ale before they go?

GONERIL

No! I knew you'd be difficult
about this, so in order to
insure some decent behavior
around here, I just poured out
all your alcohol.

KING LEAR

(enraged)

Devils and darkness! Saddle my
horses! Thou marble-hearted
fiend! Go, go my people!

Lear's knights and attendants scurry off to get ready to
leave Albany's palace. Albany enters, confused by the
commotion. King Lear continues to berate Goneril.

KING LEAR

Blasts and fogs upon thee!
Hear me, Nature! If this
creature ever conceives a
child, let it stamp wrinkles in
her brow, and turn her pains to

laughter and contempt, so that
she may feel how sharper than a
serpent's tooth it is to have a
thankless child! Away! Away!
I have one daughter left.

Exit Lear, followed by his Fool and Kent. Only Albany
and Goneril remain on stage.

ALBANY
What's the matter?

GONERIL
Oh, I poured out all his booze.

Goneril shouts for her steward.

GONERIL
Oswald!

Oswald enters.

GONERIL
Did you write that letter to my
sister?

OSWALD
Aye, Madam.

GONERIL
Then go and deliver it to her!
Get you gone!

Oswald exits.

ALBANY
I don't like this. How far
your eyes may pierce I cannot
tell; striving to better, oft
we mar what's well.

Outside of Albany's palace, Lear prepares to leave for Gloucester, where he hopes to find Regan. Lear gives instructions to Kent, while the Fool watches.

KING LEAR

Go you before with these
letters. Tell my daughter
Regan and her husband Cornwall
that I am coming.

KENT

I will not sleep, my Lord,
until I have delivered your
letter.

Kent exits.

FOOL

Do you really think Regan is
going to treat you any better
than Goneril did?

KING LEAR

She would not refuse me a
libation to wet my parched
throat.

FOOL

I suppose she might give you a
glass of water.

KING LEAR

Water!!!! No beast would show
such odious ingratitude!

FOOL

You know, you're a pretty funny
fellow. With a little
training, you could be both
Lear and his Fool and I could
go home!

KING LEAR

Let me not go mad.

FOOL

I'll teach you a riddle. This is a classic, one of the finest riddles of all time. Do you know why there are no more than seven stars in the Pleiades?

KING LEAR

Because there are not eight?

FOOL

That's a pretty good answer. I was going to say, "To keep his pants up." But I like your answer better. You're pretty smart for a man who's as stupid as you are.

KING LEAR

Let me be not mad, sweet heaven. I would not be mad! I had an uncle who was mad... Uncle Theophilus. He believed that if he killed a lion, tore out its heart and ate it while yet it beat, he would gain the strength and courage of the lion.

FOOL

Did it work?

KING LEAR

We never found out. Uncle Theophilus could never kill anything larger than a duck.

FOOL

So if a lion had eaten your Uncle Theophilus, would the lion have gained the strength and courage of Uncle Theophilus, or the strength and courage of a duck?

KING LEAR

I fear there was little
difference, my boy. Very
little indeed.

Enter a GENTLEMAN in Lear's service.

KING LEAR

Are the horse's ready?

GENTLEMAN

Ready, my Lord.

KING LEAR

Come, boy.

Everyone exits.

Act II

Scene 1

A room in the Earl of Gloucester's castle. Edmund is
sitting in a window. CURAN, a courtier, enters.

EDMUND

Save thee, Curan.

CURAN

And you, Sir. I have been with
your father.

EDMUND

Oh? Did he say what he plans
to do to my brother, when he
finds him?

CURAN

No.

EDMUND

Edgar is a vile, treacherous,
depraved, scheming, murderous
villain, but aside from that,
he's a good boy. I hope my
father won't torture him too
severely before he kills him.

CURAN

Did you know the Duke of
Cornwall, and Regan his Duchess
are coming here this night?

EDMUND

No, but I'm looking forward to
seeing them again. They're
such a nice couple.

CURAN

Fare you well, sir.

Curan exits. Edmund looks around to make certain no one
is watching, then he calls to his brother.

EDMUND

Brother! Brother, come out!
The coast is clear! Edgar!

Edgar emerges from behind the window and sits next to
Edmund.

EDMUND

Where were you?

EDGAR

I don't know. I found such a
good hiding place, I couldn't
find myself. Does this mean I
win?

EDMUND

Win what?

EDGAR

Didn't I just beat you in a
game of hide and seek?

EDMUND

No!

EDGAR

Oh. You beat me?

EDMUND

You were hiding from our
father!

EDGAR

Oh! I beat him!

EDMUND

He wants to kill you!

EDGAR

Well, he is a sore loser, isn't
he!

EDMUND

He thinks you are a traitor.
Do you know what a traitor is?

EDGAR

A kid who likes to swap
baseball cards?

EDMUND

You'd better leave the castle
before he kills you - or before
I save him the trouble.

EDGAR

Where will I go?

EDMUND

I'm sure you'll think of
something.

EDGAR

Could be. They say there's a
first time for everything.

EDMUND

Get out of here!!!

Edmund gives Edgar a shove. Edgar disappears out the window. Edmund looks after him for a moment, to make certain Edgar is gone, then he shouts for his father:

EDMUND

Father! Father! Come quickly!
Edgar's escaping!

A moment later, Gloucester rushes on stage and picks up Edmund.

GLOUCESTER

Where? Where's the villain?

EDMUND

Gone!

GLOUCESTER

Why didn't you stop him?

EDMUND

I tried! But he pulled a knife
on me! And a sword! And a
cudgel! And an axe!

GLOUCESTER

All that? It's lucky he didn't
kill you!

EDMUND

He tried. But all those
weapons were so heavy, when he
raised them over his head to
strike, he overbalanced and
fell out the window!

GLOUCESTER

You had a close call!

EDMUND

Yes, but I would gladly risk my
life again and again for my
beloved father, even though I'm

only his poor illegitimate son
who won't even inherit any of
his property when he kicks the
bucket!

GLOUCESTER

Don't you worry about that!
I've already changed my will,
and I'm leaving everything to
you!

EDMUND

Oh! This is so unexpected!

GLOUCESTER

Really?

EDMUND

Yes! I thought you'd need at
least a dozen more hints.

Gloucester looks offstage, and sees that Regan and
Cornwall are about to enter.

GLOUCESTER

Look who's coming!

Enter Regan and Cornwall. Cornwall grasps Gloucester by
the hand.

CORNWALL

My noble friend. We have heard
the grievous news!

EDMUND

What do you mean, grievous?
I'm gonna be rich!

REGAN

He means the news that Edgar
sought his father's life! How
are you, my Lord?

GLOUSTER

My poor old heart is cracked!
It's cracked.

EDMUND
(perking up)
Really?

Edmund listens to Gloucester's heart, and is disappointed to hear it beating normally.

REGAN
Didn't Edgar associate with those riotous knights that serve my father! I blame them! They're a bad influence! In fact, that's one of the things we came to talk to you about.

GLOUCESTER
(bowing)
I serve you, Madam. Your Graces are right welcome.

Everyone exits.

Scene 2

Outside Gloucester's castle, Kent and Oswald enter from opposite sides of the stage. Oswald does not recognize Kent.

OSWALD
Good dawning to thee, friend.
Art of this house?

KENT
Aye.

OSWALD
Where shall I put my horse?

KENT
Are you staying here a while?

OSWALD

Yes.

KENT

Then put your horse in your room.

OSWALD

Put him in my room? What about the smell???

KENT

He'll get used to it.

OSWALD

Why do you insult me? I don't even know you.

KENT

I know you. Don't you remember me, oaf? I tripped you up at your mistress's castle. Draw your sword!

Kent draws his sword. Oswald screams for help and scampers away from Kent.

OSWALD

Help! Help!

Enter Gloucester, carrying Edmund, followed by Regan and Cornwall. Cornwall and Gloucester separate Kent and Oswald.

EDMUND

What's going on here?

REGAN

These are the messengers from my sister and the King.

KENT

This man is a knave, a cowardly rascal, and a whoreson lying villain. Draw your sword, oaf!

Kent tries to go after Oswald, but Cornwall and Gloucester keep them apart.

KENT

Whatever message this man brings cannot be trusted.

EDMUND

(to Regan)

What message did he bring?

REGAN

That my father's men are ruffians who are always starting fights.

Kent looks at his own drawn sword and realized that he cannot deny the charge.

KENT

Okay, that can be trusted. But he is still a filthy, lily-livered rouge!

CORNWALL

(calling off-stage)

Fetch the stocks! We'll teach this man a lesson!

KENT

And well he deserves to learn it!

CORNWALL

Not him! You!!!

KENT

Me!!!

REGAN

(calling offstage, as her husband did)

Fetch the stocks!

KENT

But I serve the King!

REGAN

You are not fit to serve! I cannot abide an uncouth ruffian. Servants to the royal family must have stature, dignity, and above all refinement.

Enter three Servants: The FIRST SERVANT is a mean bossy man with his hair in bangs. The SECOND SERVANT has particularly fuzzy hair. The THIRD SERVANT is a fat, bald idiot. The Third Servant has his hands in the holes of a set of stocks, as though he were imprisoned. However, because this set of stocks is designed to hold legs rather than arms, the holes are large enough so that Third Servant can easily remove his arms, when he wants to. The Three Servants greet Regan one at a time.

FIRST SERVANT

Your Highness!

The First Servant kneels, with his head bowed, upstage of the other Servants.

SECOND SERVANT

Your Highness!

The Second Servant, kneels with his head bowed, downstage of the other Servants.

THIRD SERVANT

We're Low-ness!

The Third Servant tries to kneel between the other Servants, but when he does so, he hits his companions on their head with the stocks. They scream in pain and jump to their feet. The First Servant hits the Third Servant on the top of his head, and the Third Servant squeals. Then they all turn back to Regan.

FIRST SERVANT

Here are the stocks you asked

for.

THIRD SERVANT

Guess where we got it? At the stock market!!!

The Third Servant chuckles, and the First Servant slaps him. When the First Servant turns back to face Regan and Cornwall, the Third Servant withdraws his right hand from the stocks and hits the First Servant on the back of the head. The Third Servant quickly puts his hand back in the stocks. The First Servant turns angrily, sees that the Third Servant has his hands in the stocks, and decides the Second Servant must have struck him.

FIRST SERVANT

What's the big idea of hitting me?

The First Servant slaps the Second Servant.

SECOND SERVANT

Hey, he's the one who smacked you. He took his hand out of the stocks!

The Second Servant points at the Third Servant, and the First Servant eyes him suspiciously.

FIRST SERVANT

Do you promise me you can't get your hands out of those stocks?

The Third Servant takes out his right hand and holds it palm out as he swears.

THIRD SERVANT

I swear it!

The First Servant hits the Third Servant on the head.

EDMUND

Good help is hard to find.

CORNWALL

(pointing at

Kent)
Put this man in the stocks!

KENT
You wouldn't treat your
father's dog this way!

The Servants lock Kent's legs in the stocks.

EDMUND
That's true. I've never seen a
dog in the stocks.

CORNWALL
We'll leave him there till
noon.

REGAN
Till noon? Till night, my
Lord, and all night too!

Regan and Cornwall exit with their servants. Edmund
looks at Kent, then turns to Gloucester.

EDMUND
Can we take off his shoes and
tickle his feet?

GLOUCESTER
I don't think that would be a
good idea.

EDMUND
You're right, they're probably
filthy.

Gloucester approaches Kent.

GLOUCESTER
I'm sorry you are being treated
this way. The Duke's to blame!

Gloucester exits with Edmund.

KENT

Fortune, goodnight. Smile once
more, turn thy wheel.

Scene 3

The same location, outside Gloucester's castle, with Kent
in the stocks. Edgar looks up from behind a wall, where
he has been hiding.

EDGAR

I heard... I heard... I'm
sure I heard something.

Kent notices Edgar.

KENT

Hello. Are you not Edgar who
is proclaimed a traitor
throughout the land, condemned
to die the death for plotting
to kill his own father, the
Earl of Gloucester?

EDGAR

Uh, could you repeat the
question?

KENT

Are you not Edgar who is
proclaimed a traitor throughout
the land, condemned to die the
death for plotting to kill his
own father, the Earl of
Gloucester?

EDGAR

That's starting to ring a bell.

KENT

All your father's soldiers seek
to lay their hands on you and
subject you to the most vile

torture.

EDGAR

Yup. That's the way it goes,
all right.

KENT

Did you really plot against
your father?

EDGAR

I doubt it. I'm not too good
at plotting.

KENT

You're not?

EDGAR

Nope. I have trouble plotting
to wake up in the morning.

KENT

Then you had better disguise
yourself. Grime your face with
filth, rend your clothing, and
call yourself poor Tom of
Bedlam, the mad beggar. Can
you do that, for your life
depends upon it!

EDGAR

Let's see, I grime my filth
with clothing, rend my face,
and call a beggar names until
he's mad at me. That shouldn't
be a problem.

KENT

Edgar, how can you be so
stupid?

EDGAR

I think it runs in the family.

KENT

Go hide! And remember, if
anyone finds you, you're poor
Tom!

EDGAR

Poor Tom! Poor Tom.

Edgar exits.

Scene 4

The same location, outside Gloucester's castle, with Kent
still in the stocks. Enter King Lear, talking to his
Fool.

KING LEAR

'Tis strange that they should
so depart from home, and not
send back my messenger.

Kent calls to Lear from the stocks, and Lear notices him
for the first time.

KENT

Hail to thee, noble master.

KING LEAR

Ha? My messenger!!! Did you,
by any chance, voluntarily
elect to confine your limbs
within these wooden fetters?

KENT

No.

KING LEAR

Then am I to assume, as it
were, that someone else has
placed you here?

KENT

That would be a correct

assumption.

KING LEAR

Vengeance, plague, death and
confusion! This is an insult
to my royal personage!

KENT

It wasn't exactly a compliment
to me, either.

KING LEAR

Who hath committed this violent
outrage?

KENT

Regan and Cornwall.

KING LEAR

No!

KENT

Yes!

KING LEAR

No, I say!

KENT

I say yes.

KING LEAR

It is worse than murder! Stay
here!

KENT

I don't have much choice in the
matter.

King Lear goes off to enter the castle. Kent speaks to
the Fool.

KENT

Where are all the King's
followers?

FOOL

You're looking at him.

KENT

You?

FOOL

Yeah, and I'm leaving if I get
a decent offer from the King of
France. I'd make a great
French Fool.

The Fool starts imitating the sort of juvenile, silly,
over-the-top comedian who might appeal to a French King.

FOOL

(doing an
imitation)

Oh boy! I love France.

France, with the thing and the
thing and the snails to eat!

KENT

I believe the current King of
France favors Cordelia's humor.

FOOL

(dropping the
imitation)

That's any even better reason
to go.

KENT

But why have King Lear's
followers deserted him?

FOOL

If they put you in the stocks
for asking that question, you
deserved it. Kings are
supposed to be strong and
powerful. That's what makes
them popular. This King is as
powerful as a ninety year old
prostitute with an advanced
case of syphilis, but not

nearly as popular... or
attractive...or hygienic.

King Lear returns, accompanied by Gloucester, who is
carrying Edmund.

KING LEAR

Where is my offspring, my
child, my little daughter, my
issue Regan?

EDMUND

What was that last part?

KING LEAR

Issue Regan! Issue Regan!

EDMUND

No, I isn't regin'.

KING LEAR

Let me be clear.

EDMUND

You can try, but you better
sober up first.

KING LEAR

Silence, you little blockhead!
I demand to see my daughter.

GLOUCESTER

But your majesty, you can't...

KING LEAR

(interrupting)

No buts! The King can see
anyone or anything!

EDMUND

Especially after he's had a
snootful... which in your case
must be about six quarts.

KING LEAR

The King would speak with
Cornwall and his wife!

Enter Cornwall and Regan, followed by their three
servants. During the ensuing dialogue, the servants
unlock the stocks and set Kent free. Then the servants
exit.

CORNWALL

Hail to your Grace.

REGAN

I am glad to see your Highness.

KING LEAR

I think you are indeed...
unlike your sister, that sharp-
toothed vulture. You would not
give credence to the depths of
her depravity...

REGAN

(interrupting)

Oh no! Not Goneril!

KING LEAR

I hate her!

REGAN

I'm sure you misunderstood her.
You are old, and are likely to
misunderstand. I pray you,
return and tell her you have
wronged her.

KING LEAR

Apologize to her??? What would
you have me say?

King Lear gets down on his knees.

KING LEAR

(sarcastically)

Dear Daughter, I confess that I
am old. Age is unnecessary.

On my knees, I beg that you
will grant me fresh rags to
wear, straw to sleep upon, and
a tiny crust of stale bread to
eat.

Goneril enters as Lear completes his speech. She answers
him.

GONERIL

All right, but no booze!

Regan hurries to Goneril, and the two sisters kiss each
other on the cheek.

REGAN

How good of you to come and
take back our father.

GONERIL

Only if he promises to mend his
ways.

The two sisters turn to address their father.

REGAN

Exactly! You should act your
age....

GONERIL

Spend your evenings in a
rocking chair...

REGAN

Playing checkers...

GONERIL

Singing hymns...

REGAN

And drinking lemonade.

KING LEAR

(in a towering
rage)

You unnatural hags! I will
have such revenges on you both
that all the world shall... I
will do such things, what they
are yet I know not, but they
shall be the terrors of the
Earth! You think I'll weep.
No, I'll not weep. I have full
cause of weeping, but this
heart will break into a hundred
thousand fragments before I'll
weep! Oh Fool, I shall go mad!

Lear exits, followed by his Fool and Kent.

GLOUCESTER

Wait!

Gloucester runs after them.

CORNWALL

Let us withdraw. A storm is
coming.

GONERIL

Whatever happens to our father,
he's brought it on himself.

Gloucester returns.

GLOUCESTER

The King is in high rage.

GONERIL

It's his own fault!

REGAN

If he wants to run out into the
storm, let him. Maybe this
will teach him a lesson.

CONRWALL

Shut up the doors, my Lord.
'Tis a wild night. My Regan
counsels well. Come out of the
storm.

Everyone exits.

Act III

Scene 1

A heath outside of the Earl of Gloucester's castle. A storm is raging, very, very, loudly. Enter Kent from one side of the stage and an ITALIAN GENTLEMAN from the other side. They have to shout to hear each other above the storm.

KENT

Who's there, besides foul weather?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Owl leather? I haven't got any owl leather!

KENT

Not leather! Weather! Weather!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Sure it's wetter. That's what happens when it rains. Everything gets wetter.

KENT

(aside)

I know this man. He is brother to the King's Fool.

Kent turns back to the Italian Gentleman and shouts to be heard above the storm.

KENT

I seek the King!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

You seek the King?

KENT

I seek! I seek!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Well if you're sick, you
shouldn't be out here in this
storm!

KENT

I have to find King Lear. I've
heard Cordelia is coming to
Dover with an army from France.
If you see the King, take him
to Dover. Do you know where
Dover is?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Sure. It's d'over there!

The Italian Gentleman points in the direction of Dover.

KENT

Fie on this storm! I will go
seek the King.

Kent exits in one direction and the Italian Gentlemen
exits the other way.

Scene 2

The storm continues to rage loudly in another part of the
heath. Enter King Lear and his Fool.

KING LEAR

Blow, winds, and crack your
cheeks. Rage, blow! Spit
fire! Come drench the wretched

father of Regan and Goneril!

>From high offstage, someone throws a cup of water, representing rainfall, onto Lear. (Lear is standing toward the side of the stage, so the water is able to reach him.)

FOOL

If I didn't have my reputation as a professional comic to think of, I'd say you were all wet.

KING LEAR

I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness. I never gave you kingdom, called you children. Not like my daughters, Regan and Goneril.

Another cupful of water is thrown from high offstage, wetting King Lear.

KING LEAR

Here I stand, your slave, a poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man.

FOOL

Don't forget wet.

KENT

Alas, sir, are you here? Things that love night love not such nights as these.

KING LEAR

This night has joined forces with my two pernicious daughters, Regan and Goneril!

A cup of water is thrown from offstage onto the King.

KING LEAR

I am a man more sinned against

than sinning!

FOOL

And more wetted against than
wetting.

KENT

I know a hovel nearby, where we
may seek shelter from the
storm.

The King walks over to the Fool, and puts his arm around
him.

KING LEAR

My poor fool. Look how we are
treated by Regan and Goneril!

A cupful of water hits the King and the Fool.

KING LEAR

My wits begin to turn.

FOOL

In which direction? You know,
I can remember when I had
enough sense to come in out of
the rain. Ah, those were the
days.

KING LEAR

Come on, my boy. How dost, my
boy? Art cold? I am cold
myself.

King Lear turns to Kent.

KING LEAR

Come, bring us to this hovel!

Kent leads the others off stage.

Scene 3

Gloucester's castle. Enter Gloucester, carrying Edmund.

GLOUCESTER

Alack, alack, Edmund. I like
not this unnatural dealing.

EDMUND

You sound like you've been
playing cards with King Lear.

GLOUCESTER

No, I mean the way the King's
daughters have been dealing
with him. Letting him out into
the storm! Can you believe a
child would treat a parent to
cruelly?

EDMUND

It is shocking, isn't it! Most
savage and unnatural!

GLOUCESTER

Can you keep a secret?

EDMUND

My lips are sealed, which is
more than I can say for yours.

GLOUCESTER

I have some secret
intelligence!

EDMUND

And you've kept it secret for
years!

GLOUCESTER

It's all spelled out in a
letter I received, which I've
hidden in my room. It says the
Dukes of Albany and Cornwall
aren't getting along. And
what's more, Cordelia is coming

back from France with an army!
It looks like there will be a
bitter three-way struggle for
England. Be very careful
Edmund! Trust no one!

EDMUND

Oh, I won't! I won't!

Gloucester puts Edmund down in a window, and exits.
After Edmund has exited, the actor playing Edmond sneaks
back behind and under the window, unseen by the audience,
so that he can operate Edmund.)

EDMUND

I wonder what Regan and
Cornwall will give me for that
letter. It should draw me that
which my father loses; not less
than all. The younger rises
when the old doth fall.

Edmund exits.

Scene 4

The heath in front of a hovel, near Gloucester's castle.
The storm continues to rage, although not quite so loudly
as before. Enter King Lear, Kent and the Fool. Lear is
more relaxed for the moment.

KENT

Here is the place, my Lord.

Kent opens the door to the hovel, but Lear ignores him.

KENT

Good my Lord, enter. The
night's too rough for nature to
endure.

KING LEAR

Let me alone.

KENT

My Lord, enter here.

KING LEAR

You go in. I prefer the storm.

It's touch is kind compared
with my ungrateful daughters,
Regan and Goneril!

>From high offstage, a cupful of water is thrown on King
Lear.

KING LEAR

In such a night, to shut me
out! Pour on! I will endure!

KENT

My Lord, please go in out of
the storm.

KING LEAR

After you. This storm's fury
is gentle as a cooing dove
compared with my ungracious
daughters, Regan and Goneril?

Another cupful of water splashes on King Lear.

KING LEAR

Your poor old father gave you
all!

Edgar sticks his head out from the open door of the
hovel.

EDGAR

Excuse me, but would you mind
closing the door? It's getting
cold in here!

KENT

It's poor Tom o' Bedlam!

EDGAR

Oh. Hello, Tom. You can come in, if you want to.

KENT

No, no! You're Tom!

EDGAR

I am? Okay, then I can come in if I want to. But I'm already in.

FOOL

This guy's nuts!

KING LEAR

It must have been his cruel daughters, whose filial ingratitude made him mad.

FOOL

What were their names again?

The Fool is intentionally trying to get the King to say "Regan and Goneril."

KING LEAR

Regan and Goneril!!!

A cupful of water splashes on Lear.

FOOL

I'm going inside.

The Fool goes inside, and Edgar disappears inside with him.

KENT

Go in, my Lord, I pray you.

Enter Gloucester, searching in the storm.

GLOUCESTER

Who's there?

KENT

The King and his servant!

GLOUCESTER

My Lord, I had hoped to find you. Your daughters will not let me bring you back to the castle, but you shall have shelter here. I will bring you food and fire when I can.

Gloucester enters the hovel, and comes out a moment later holding Edgar.

GLOUCESTER

Who is this? I believe I have seen his face somewhere else.

EDGAR

No, it's always been right between my ears!

KENT

He calls himself Tom o' Bedlam. Do not concern yourself with him. He is mad.

KING LEAR

His daughters drove him to dementia.

EDGAR

Nope, nope. I'm pretty sure I walked here.

KING LEAR

I say it was his nefarious daughters!

The Fool sticks his head out of the hovel.

FOOL

Daughters? What were the names of your wicked daughters?

Lear pulls the Fool out of the hovel, and makes the Fool

stand where Lear has been standing when he's been hit by all the water. Then Lear goes over to the other side of the stage, where he thinks he will be out of reach of the water.

KING LEAR

Regan and Goneril!

A cupful of water is thrown onto Lear from the other side of the stage.

GLOUCESTER

Go in! Go in! Keep warm!

Lear reaches to take Edgar from Gloucester.

KING LEAR

I want to converse with this wise philosopher about his daughters and their dire cruelty.

EDGAR

Yup. That's the way it goes.

GLOUCESTER

Take him!

KING LEAR

Come, good Athenian.

King Lear takes Edgar and goes into the hovel. Kent and Gloucester and the Fool follow him in.

Scene 5

Inside Gloucester's castle. Enter Cornwall carrying Edmund. Cornwall puts Edmund down where he can be operated behind the scenes by the actor playing Gloucester.

CORNWALL

I will have my revenge ere I

depart his house.

Edmund hands Cornwall the letter which Gloucester was hiding.

EDMUND

Here's the letter. I hope your realize it isn't easy for me to rat on my own father.

CORNWALL

It hath made thee Earl of Gloucester.

EDMUND

That makes it a little easier.

CORNWALL

I will put my trust in you, and you shall find a dearer father in my love.

EDMUND

Thank you. Thank you.

Cornwall departs.

EDMUND

If he's on the level, he's a bigger chump than my old man.

Edmund exits through the window he has been sitting in.

Scene 6

Inside the hovel on the heath. There are several stools and benches, and a cot. Enter Kent and Gloucester, talking.

GLOUCESTER

Here is better than the open air. I will go back to the

castle and bring you what
comfort I can.

KENT

The gods reward you for your
kindness.

Exit Gloucester. Enter King Lear, carrying Edgar, and
the Fool. King Lear puts Edgar down in a window, next to
Kent, then King Lear moves away to sit down. Edgar
speaks to Kent privately.

EDGAR

Say, what's wrong with the guy
with the big red nose?

KENT

That's the King!

EDGAR

Oh. So that's it. That
explains it.

KENT

Explains what?

EDGAR

It explains he's the King!

KENT

He has lost his reason!

EDGAR

I didn't think Kings needed a
reason.

KENT

I mean he is mad!

EDGAR

Oh. I thought that was me.

KENT

No, no! You only pretend to be
mad!

EDGAR

Oh! Right. That's right. How
am I doing?

KENT

Most excellently!

EDGAR

Well, you know what they say.
Some of us got it, and some of
us can't give it away!

Abruptly, the mad King decides to stage a trial.

KING LEAR

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!
It is propitious that we
proceed with the inquisition of
those two daughters of
iniquity: Goneril and Regan!

FOOL

I dare you to step outside and
say that!

KING LEAR

You learned sages shall be
judges!

King Lear points to the Fool and Edgar.

FOOL

Okay, I judge you're mad, and
he's an idiot.

KING LEAR

I shall now interrogate the
prisoners at the bar.

FOOL

Where else?

King Lear points to an old, warped, wooden stool which he
(in his madness) thinks is Goneril.

KING LEAR

I take my oath before this
honorable assembly that this is
Goneril, who kicked the poor
King her father!

The Fool gets up and goes over to question the stool.

FOOL
Is your name Goneril?

KING LEAR
She cannot deny it!

FOOL
I beg your pardon. I mistook
you for a stool. I hope you'll
be chair-itable and forgive me.

KING LEAR
And here stands her evil
sister!

The King points to another wooden stool.

FOOL
I can see the family
resemblance.

King Lear addresses the Fool and Edgar, as though he were
addressing judges.

KING LEAR
I submit to you...

FOOL
(interrupting)
It's about time you submitted
to me!

KING LEAR
These dreadful daughters have,
ipso facto, ...

FOOL
(interrupting)
I've got a brother named Ipso.

Or is it Facto?

KING LEAR

These dreadful daughters would deny their father even that shred of mercy shown to Socrates. His executioners gave him a quick death by hemlock!

EDGAR

Who?

FOOL

Hemlock, Prince of Denmark.

KING LEAR

My daughters want me to suffer a prolonged death by lemonade. They would deny their father that sweet surcease of sorrow afforded by the loving hand of gentle alcohol.

FOOL

Maybe they just don't want you stop shooting pink elephants when company comes.

KING LEAR

It's a lie! A gross and palpable canard! I never shot a pink elephant in my life!

FOOL

Not even in your pink pajamas?

KING LEAR

Quite the antithesis. My aim is hopeless when I've been imbibing.

KENT

My good lord, lie here and rest awhile.

Kent leads King Lear over to the cot, where the King lies down.

KING LEAR

Make no noise. Draw the curtains. I will drink my supper in the morning.

Lear falls asleep, and Kent pulls a blanket over him. .
There is a moment of silence, then the Fool speaks.

FOOL

I wonder what my brothers are up to. I think I'll go look for them as soon as this scene is over.

Enter Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER

Where is the King?

KENT

Here, sir, but his wits are gone.

GLOUCESTER

I have reason to believe his daughters plan to murder him!
Get him to Dover at once!
Come, come away!

Everyone exits.

Scene 7

Inside Gloucester's castle. Enter Cornwall carrying Edmund, followed by Regan, Goneril and the Three Servants. Cornwall speaks first to Goneril and then to Edmund.

CORNWALL

Post speedily to my lord your
husband. Show him this letter.
The army of France is landed!
Edmund, you had better leave
with Goneril. The revenge we
will take upon your father is
not fit for your beholding.

Goneril takes the letter from Cornwall, and also takes
Edmund. She exits, carrying Edmund. Cornwall turns to
the servants.

CORNWALL

Go, seek the traitor
Gloucester.

The three servants exit.

CORNWALL

It might not be wise to take
his life, but we shall punish
him for aiding the French
invaders.

Enter the servants, holding Gloucester.

CORNWALL

Bind him to that chair!

The servants force Gloucester into a chair and tie him to
it.

GLOUCESTER

What will you do to me?

CORNWALL

We know you have been
conspiring with the French who
even now invade our lands!

REGAN

Where is the King? Where has
he gone?

GLOUCESTER

To Dover.

REGAN

Why to Dover?

GLOUCESTER

Because I would not see your
cruel nails pluck out his poor
old eyes!

CORNWALL

See it shalt thou never!

Cornwall takes out a dagger as he approaches the chair in which Gloucester is tied. He speaks to the servants, who are beginning to look very upset.

CORNWALL

Hold the chair!

FIRST SERVANT

What are you going to do?

CORNWALL

Pluck out his eyes!

THIRD SERVANT

Don't you mean poke him in the
eye?

CORNWALL

I said pluck and I meant pluck!

FIRST SERVANT

You can't do that!

CORNWALL

Why not?

THIRD SERVANT

It isn't funny!

FIRST SERVANT

Now if you were to poke him in
the eye, that would be funny.
There's nothing funnier than a

finger in the eye.

THIRD SERVANT

Unless its fingers in two eyes!

CORNWALL

I am not trying to be funny!

FIRST SERVANT

Okay, but don't ruin it for the rest of us!

The first and third servants have moved in front of Gloucester.

CORNWALL

Get out of my way, your dogs!

The third servant barks at Cornwall.

THIRD SERVANT

Ruff! Ruff!

FIRST SERVANT

Look, boss, why don't you try a poke. You might like it.

CORNWALL

You mean like this?

Cornwall slowly presses his fingers against Gloucester's eyes. Then he pushes his fingers in, blinding Gloucester. Gloucester screams in agony!

GLOUCESTER

Augh! I cannot see! I cannot see!

FIRST SERVANT

Why not?

GLOUCESTER

Because he has plucked out my eyes!

Cornwall takes his sword and hands it to the second

servant, who has been cowering over to one side.

FIRST SERVANT

You shouldn't have done that!

THIRD SERVANT

That wasn't funny at all!

CORNWALL

You! Take this sword and kill these impudent villains!

SECOND SERVANT

Which impudent villains?

CORNWALL

Those impudent villains!

He points to the other servants.

SECOND SERVANT

Couldn't I just poke them in the eye?

CORNWALL

Kill them, unless you wish to die yourself!

SECOND SERVANT

Okay. Sorry guys!

The second servant swings the sword back over his head in order to deliver a blow, and he accidentally stabs Cornwall.

CORNWALL

Augh!

REGAN

Give me that sword!

Regan grabs the sword and runs through all three servants at once! They are all pierced by the sword like three pieces of meat on a shish kabob.

FIRST, SEOND & THIRD

SERVANTS

Oh! We are slain!

They die in unison.

GLOUCESTER

Where is Edmund? He will
avenge this atrocity!

REGAN

Edmund hates you! It was he
that informed us of your
treason!

GLOUCESTER

Then Edgar was abused!

Regan unties Gloucester from the chair and shoves him
from the room.

REGAN

Go out the gate! Smell your
way to Dover!

As soon as Gloucester is gone, Regan turns to Cornwall,
who is mortally wounded.

REGAN

How are you, my lord?

CORNWALL

Hurt. I bleed apace. Give me
your arm.

Regan help him from the room.

Act IV

Scene 1

On the heath, on the way to Dover, Edgar sits on a stone wall. He hears something and looks offstage.

EDGAR

Who comes here?

Gloucester, who is now blind, is led on stage by a very OLD MAN. The old man is very weak and tired, and he can barely walk.

OLD MAN

You must let me help you, my good lord. I have been your tenant and your father's tenant for eighty years.

GLOUCESTER

Go away. No one can help. As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport.

Gloucester feels his way around the stage, and bumps into Edgar. He picks him up.

EDGAR

Look on the bright side. Things could be worse. And they probably will be.

OLD MAN

You call that the bright side???

EDGAR

Um. I don't really know. I've never been on the bright side, myself.

GLOUCESTER

Who is this? His voice is familiar.

OLD MAN

It's poor mad Tom.

GLOUCESTER

Then let him guide me to Dover.

OLD MAN

But he is mad!

GLOUCESTER

And you are old. I trust his
youth above your wits. Mad
Tom, can you tell me how to get
to Dover?

EDGAR

Dover? Let's see. You want to
get to Dover? Are you sure you
don't want to get here.
Because I could tell you how to
get here.

GLOUCESTER

No, I don't want to get to
here. I want to get to Dover.

EDGAR

And this isn't Dover, is it?

GLOUCESTER

No.

EDGAR

Well then, if you want to go to
Dover, I guess you should start
by going away from here!

GLOUCESTER

Never mind. We will find it
together. And when we get to
Dover, you will take me to a
cliff high over the ocean. If
we can find that cliff, I will
need no one to lead me from
there.

EDGAR

Uh, yup! That's the way it
goes. I will lead you.

GLOUCESTER

Good.

EDGAR

Will you lead me?

OLD MAN

Dover is that way!!!

The old man grabs Gloucester and pushes him off in the direction of Dover. Gloucester stumbles off, carrying Edgar. The old man exits in the other direction.

Scene 2

On the road to Albany's castle. Enter Goneril, carrying Edmund.

GONERIL

Welcome, my lord, to our castle. I marvel that my mild husband did not meet us on the way.

She puts him down in a window.

EDMUND

Your husband is a gentle man, isn't he?

GONERIL

He thinks too much of others. I'll bet you don't think too much of others.

EDMUND

Well, I don't think too much of your husband. That's for sure!

Enter Oswald, the servant.

GONERIL

Where is your master?

OSWALD

He is within. I do not know what has come over him. When I told him the French army had landed, he smiled. When I told him you were coming, he scowled.

GONERIL

He is a spineless coward!

Oswald exits.

GONERIL

Edmund, go back to the Duke of Cornwall and lead his army. I will command my husband's forces.

EDMUND

We'll beat those French invaders.

GONERIL

You're so firm!

EDMUND

I am! I am!

GONERIL

You are a man after my own heart!

EDMUND

And that's not all I'm after!

GONERIL

Bend your head.

Edmund bends his head, and Goneril kisses him passionately. When the kiss is over, she nearly swoons.

GONERIL

Fare thee well.

She kisses him again. This time Edmund swoons and falls backward out the window. Albany enters.

GONERIL

(aside)

Oh the difference between man
and man!

Goneril turns and addresses her husband.

GONERIL

They say it is a poor dog that
is not worth the whistling.
Why haven't you sent for me? I
am worth the whistle.

ALBANY

Oh, Goneril, you are not worth
the dust which the rude wind
blows in your face. What have
you and your sister done to
your poor father?

GONERIL

No more nor less than he
deserved. I have treated him
according to his merits, what
little they are. Would you
have me welcome him and the
French to take all that we own?

ALBANY

If you had left him a shred of
dignity, the French would not
have come!

Enter a messenger.

MESSENGER

My lord, the Duke of Cornwall
is dead, slain by his servants
as he blinded Gloucester!

ALBANY

What? Gloucester, blinded!
And Cornwall dead?

GONERIL

(aside)

I don't like this. It means
that Regan is free to pursue
Edmund.

Goneril exits.

ALBANY

Why didn't Edmund protect
Gloucester?

MESSENGER

It was he that informed against
his father.

ALBANY

Come, my friend, and tell me
more of what you know.

Exit Albany and the messenger.

Scene 3

Near Dover, Kent enters with the Italian Gentleman from
Act 3, Scene 1.

KENT

Why has the King of France so
suddenly gone back? Know you
the reason?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

I think he left the water
running in France.

KENT

Did you tell Cordelia that King Lear was coming to Dover?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Yeah. He thought that was very funny. He laughed so hard he cried.

KENT

He??? Cordelia is the King's daughter!!!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

He is?

KENT

She is! She's a woman!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

That's funny. I wonder why she was dressed up as a big, hairy man. Hey, I got it. I bet she was in a shipwreck!

KENT

A shipwreck?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Sure. Her brother drowned, but she's washed up on an island where her father's a magician. So she dresses up like a boy to work for the Duke who she's in love with. Only the Duke thinks he's in love with someone else, so she runs into the forest and has a dream that the fairies turned into a big hairy man! And that's why the King's daughter is a man!

KENT

Don't you think it is more likely that instead of giving the news to Cordelia, you gave it to a man by mistake?

The Italian Gentleman thinks this over, but decides it is ridiculous.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

No. That's silly.

KENT

I must find the King and persuade him to come to Cordelia. He is so plagued with guilt, he refuses to see her. I pray you, go along with me.

Exit Kent with the Italian Gentleman.

Scene 4

In Dover, at the camp of the French army, Cordelia enters with SOLDIERS and the Italian Gentleman. She speaks to a Soldier.

CORDELIA

Alack! I hear my father was seen running around the beach with brown weeds in his hair.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

That's too bad.

CORDELIA

Yes. With his complexion, he'd look much nicer with violets, don't you think?

A MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

News, Madam. The British Army has been spotted.

CORDELIA

I was spotted when I was six years old. I had chicken pox.

MESSENGER

I mean the British are at hand!

CORDELIA

Good! They can help us find my father!

MESSENGER

They want to send us back to France.

CORDELIA

That's very generous of them, but I've already booked our return passage.

MESSENGER

No! They mean to fight!

CORDELIA

Then let them fight, just so long as they don't bother us. Why are soldiers always fighting? They're just like little boys.

MESSENGER

They are angry because we French are on their shores.

CORDELIA

Then tell them as soon as we find my father, we'll take him back to London, and they can have the shores all to themselves. Come on, let's go find the King. Soon may I see him.

Cordelia exits, followed by the soldiers and the Italian

Gentleman.

Scene 5

In Gloucester, Regan enters with Oswald.

REGAN

But are my brother's powers set
forth?

OSWALD

Aye, Madam.

REGAN

Will he lead them against the
French?

OSWALD

If forced to it, although to my
mind, your sister is the better
soldier.

REGAN

I assume she has been in close
contact with Edmund.

OSWALD

I am certain of it.

REGAN

How close?

OSWALD

That I cannot say.

REGAN

Cannot, or will not?

OSWALD

I am your sister's faithful
servant!

REGAN

But is she a faithful mistress?
I have seen the way she looks
at Edmund. Did you know he has
been sent to find his father
and kill him? Gloucester never
should have been permitted to
live. We should have cut out
his heart instead of his eyes!

Regan hands a sealed letter to Oswald.

REGAN

If you see Edmund, will you
give him this letter? Why do
you smile? Do you also have a
letter for him from my sister?
She would do well to remember
she already has a husband.

OSWALD

I will deliver your letter.

REGAN

And if you chance to hear of
that blind traitor, preferment
falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD

If I meet him, I will show what
party I follow.

REGAN

Fare thee well.

Regan and Oswald exit in opposite directions.

Scene 6

Near Dover, Gloucester enters, carrying Edgar.

GLOUCESTER

When shall I come to the top of
that same hill?

EDGAR

I guess you get to the top when
you can't go any higher.

Gloucester is becoming exhausted.

GLOUCESTER

I do not think I can go any
farther.

EDGAR

Well, then, you must be at the
top now.

GLOUCESTER

It is odd. I thought I was
walking on even land.

EDGAR

Well if it's odd, then it can't
be even.

GLOUCESTER

So we must have been climbing.
Are we truly atop the cliffs at
Dover?

EDGAR

I don't know. How can you
tell?

GLOUCESTER

If we were truly at Dover, the
people below us would be so
small, they would look like
ants.

Edgar looks down at the floor.

EDGAR

Those look like ants to me all
right.

GLOUCESTER

Then I must be at the very
edge. You must go further off.

Gloucester puts Edgar down.

GLOUCESTER

This world I do renounce!

Gloucester attempts to jump off what he thinks is a cliff, but since he is on level ground, he merely falls to the floor of the stage. After a moment, he feels around and finds Edgar. He picks him up and speaks to him.

GLOUCESTER

What happened?

EDGAR

You fell down.

GLOUCESTER

All the way down from where I
stood at the top of the cliff?
How is it I live?

EDGAR

I don't know. One time I fell
off a steep cliff, and when I
got to the bottom, there was a
big crowd of people looking at
me, and some fellow asked me
what happened, and I said, "I
don't know, I just got here
myself."

GLOUCESTER

Who are you? You sound like
the madman I left at the top of
the cliff, but you could not be
he. I left him high above.
But who comes here?

Enter King Lear, who is quite mad.

KING LEAR

Who wants to know? They said I was a mighty monarch, lusty and strong, and so robust that I could stay out every night 'til dawn, quaffing ale and playing cards, and never suffer the slightest ill health. But they lied. I caught a nasty case of the sniffles once. I believe I sniffle still.

GLOUCESTER

I remember that voice! Is it not the King?

KING LEAR

Aye, every inch a king, but far from home. This sandy shore reminds me of a journey I once made to the far Antipodes, in search of a rare fermented brew known as Ambrosia. While scouting through the underbrush, I brushed against a beautiful blonde. Her hair was like waves of the finest amber beer, her lips were red as wine. Unfortunately, from the waist down she was a horse. A centaur! We chatted about the local wildlife, and about the libations that made the life so wild. And soon I lost my heart to her upper half.

GLOUCESTER

What was her name?

KING LEAR

(lost in the mists of memory)
What?

GLOUCESTER

The centaur! What was her name?

KING LEAR

Lilypetal Blossomtide. Many
were the moonlit nights we
wandered through the dusky
woods and dappled dales,
conversing upon the finer
points of our philosophies.
Then one evening, when I
chanced to arrive at our
rendezvous ahead of schedule, I
found her lower half engaged in
an act of sexual congress with
a horse. Needless to say, I
was distraught! She begged me
to forgive her. She vowed that
she would never again descend
to such debauched carnality. I
said to her, "Lilypetal, swear
thou unto me! Shalt thou e'er
again..." We always spoke
formally to each other. "Shalt
thou e'er again act in any
manner like unto a horse?" And
she answered, "Nay!" I left
the Antipodes that very hour,
and never heard from her again!

Lear turns back to Gloucester.

KING LEAR

Give me an ounce of civet, good
apothecary, to sweeten my
imagination.

GLOUCESTER

Oh, let me kiss that hand.

KING LEAR

Let me wipe it first. It
smells of mortality.

GLOUCESTER

Do you know me?

KING LEAR

I remember your eyes. I
believe you had two of them.
Yes, I remember them well.
Unfortunately, I cannot say the
same for the rest of you. But
you look like an honest man.
You look like what happens to
an honest man. If I find your
eyes, I shall return them, for
I too am an honest man.

GLOUCESTER

You poor creature.

KING LEAR

We are all poor creatures.
When we are born, we cry that
we are come to this great stage
of fools! We cry. We weep.

Enter the Italian Gentleman, accompanied by a curly-
headed MUTE attendant. They approach the King.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Have you seen the King? His
daughter wants us to find him.

KING LEAR

Which daughter is that?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

The one who wants us to find
him.

KING LEAR

Do you have any idea what the
King looks like?

The Mute nods enthusiastically. He puffs out his cheeks,
rolls his tongue up in his mouth, and crosses his eyes.
He looks ghastly.

KING LEAR

What makes you think the King

looks like that?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

We heard he was crazy, and
that's as crazy as we know how
to look.

KING LEAR

I believe I may be of
assistance. Would you be so
good as to gaze over in yonder
direction?

The King points off in one direction, and as the Italian Gentleman and the Mute look off in that direction, the King runs off the other way. The Italian Gentleman turns around, and is surprised to find that the man who gave him directions is gone. He spins the Mute around.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Hey, where'd he go?

The Mute searches the stage for King Lear.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

I bet he went to find the King
for us!

GLOUCESTER

That was the King!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

It was? Go get him! The war's
about to start. Hurry!

The Mute runs offstage after King Lear.

GLOUCESTER

You'd better hurry if the war's
about to start.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Yeah, we've got to move fast if
we want to get good seats.

As the Italian Gentleman exits, Oswald enters from the

other direction. He spots Gloucester, and takes out his sword.

OSWALD

Who have we here? The proclaimed prize! Thou old, unhappy traitor! The sword is out that must destroy thee.

EDGAR

Now that isn't a very friendly thing to say.

OSWALD

Stand aside, you dunghill, or I will kill you as well!

GLOUCESTER

Take my dagger and defend us!

Gloucester takes out a dagger and holds it in Edgar's hand. Blindly, he carries Edgar in the direction of Oswald's voice. Oswald grabs Edgar's arms and grapples with him, but the dagger finds its way into Oswald, who is mortally wounded.

EDGAR

I may be stupid, but no one ever said I wasn't strong.

OSWALD

Thou hast slain me!

Oswald takes out the letters to Edmund he received from Regan and Goneril and tries to hand them to Edgar.

OSWALD

If you wish to be rewarded, deliver these letters to Edmund, the Earl of Gloucester. You will find him on the English side. Oh, untimely death!

Oswald dies.

GLOUCESTER

Is he dead?

EDGAR

I'll ask him. Are you dead?

There is no answer from Oswald.

EDGAR

He won't answer.

GLOUCESTER

Then I think we can assume he's
dead. I'll take those letters
he was talking about.

Gloucester feels about on Oswald's body until he finds
the letters and takes them.

GLOUCESTER

We'd better get out of here
before the war starts.

EDGAR

I hear the beaten drum. Come,
Father.

They exit.

Scene 7

At the French Camp in Dover, Cordelia enters talking to
Kent. Kent is still disguised in the rough garb of a
peasant.

CORDELIA

Oh thou good Kent, Thank you so
much for taking such good care
of my father.

KENT

I wish it had been better care.
Under my care he has lost his
authority, his followers, his
health and even his sanity.
The only thing he has not lost
under my care is his life.

CORDELIA

Well, I'm sure you did the best
you could.

KENT

He is now just a pathetic,
miserable wretch.

CORDELIA

No one can blame you for that.

KENT

I blame myself.

CORDELIA

No one can blame you for that
either. Now, why don't you go
change out of those filthy
rags?

KENT

I would rather stay in disguise
while I might still do some
good.

CORDELIA

All right, Kent, I won't reveal
your secret identity.

Enter a DOCTOR who has been looking after King Lear.
Cordelia questions him.

CORDELIA

How is the King?

DOCTOR

He sleeps. I have asked some
men from your camp to bring him

to you. Look, here they come!

The Italian Gentleman and the Mute enter, carrying the sleeping King Lear in a chair. The Italian Gentleman and the Mute struggle with the weight of the King.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Boy, this King's a heavy sleeper!

DOCTOR

Has he been sleeping comfortably?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

I don't know. I'll ask him.

The Italian Gentlemen shakes the King roughly, but King Lear does not wake up.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Hey, King! Wake up! The doctor wants to know if you've been sleeping comfortable!

DOCTOR

That's no way to speak to a King!

CORDELIA

That's right. Let me do it.

She curtsies daintily, like a perfect princess, before the King. Then she gets up and shakes her father roughly.

CORDELIA

Dad! Wake up! The doctor wants to know if you've been sleeping comfortable.

But Lear doesn't wake up. Cordelia looks down on him, her heart filled with pity.

CORDELIA

You know, I still can't believe
my sisters let him stay out all
night in that terrible storm!
I would have let my enemy's dog
stay indoors by my fire on a
night like that, even if he had
bitten me.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

That's not nice of your enemy
to bite you, but it's good you
let the dog sit by the fire.

CORDELIA

No, I meant if the dog bit me.
Wouldn't you have let your
enemy's dog sit by your fire
during that storm, even if your
enemy's dog had bitten you?

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

I don't think my enemy has a
dog.

CORDELIA

Well, I'm sure my enemy would
lend your enemy his dog.

DOCTOR

I am concerned that the King
will not wake up!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Maybe we should get your
enemy's dog to bite him.

The Mute bites the King on the arm. The King cries in
his sleep, and begins to slowly awaken.

KING LEAR

Drat!

CORDELIA

How does my noble lord?

KING LEAR

(not yet fully
awake)

You do wrong to take me out of
the grave. Thou art a soul in
bliss, but I am bound upon a
wheel of fire, that my own
tears do scald like molten
lead. And I believe somebody
bit me.

DOCTOR

He's scarcely awake. Let him
alone awhile.

KING LEAR

Where have I been? Where am I?

He tries to get up, but stumbles to his knees.

CORDELIA

You don't have to kneel to me!

KING LEAR

Pray do not mock me. I am a
very foolish fond old man, and
to deal plainly, I fear I am
not in my perfect mind. A
slight touch of delirium
tremens. Do not laugh at me,
but I think this lady to be my
child Cordelia.

CORDELIA

That's what I think too!

KING LEAR

I suppose you'll want to poison
me with lemonade.

CORDELIA

I don't have any lemonade.
Would you like to be poisoned
with ale?

KING LEAR

I will drink it! You must despise me. Your sisters hate me without reason, but you have cause.

CORDELIA

No cause! No cause!

KING LEAR

Am I in France?

CORDELIA

No, you're right here! Come on, let's go for a walk and I'll introduce you to the army!

KING LEAR

You must bear with me. Forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.

King Lear exits with Cordelia. Everyone else follows them off.

Act V

Scene 1

At the British camp, near Dover, Regan enters carrying Edmund. She puts him down on a wall.

REGAN

Tell me but truly, do you not love my sister?

EDMUND

Of course I do. I love her like a sister. Your sister, to be precise.

REGAN

But have you not found your way
to her husband's place?

EDMUND

That thought abuses you!

REGAN

But you haven't answered the
question!

EDMUND

That's because I don't want you
to abuse me. But on my honor,
I would never dream of making
love to your sister.

REGAN

On your honor? How far can
your honor be trusted?

EDMUND

How far do you think?

REGAN

Not very far!

EDMUND

Well, there's your answer!

REGAN

If you know what is good for
you, you will not be familiar
with her!

EDMUND

Careful! The lady in question
- or should I say the
questionable lady - is
approaching with her husband!

Goneril enters with Albany.

ALBANY

The King has joined the French
forces not far from here. I

cannot allow the French to
conquer England. However, my
quarrel is not with King Lear
or with Cordelia.

EDMUND

No, no, of course not!

GOERIL

(brazenly lying)

I am certain we are all in
agreement on that point.

EDMUND

I will meet you presently at
your tent to discuss our
strategy.

Regan picks up Edmund and carries him out holding him
with obvious affection. Goneril follows them off stage,
showing her jealousy. Albany is left alone on stage.
Then Edgar pops up from behind the wall. He has in his
hands the letters he and his father took from Oswald.

EDGAR

Excuse me, but I've got some
letters here for Edward.

They're supposed to be pretty
important. My father said he
thought I ought to give them to
the Duke of... Duke of...

Let's see, who was it?

ALBANY

I am the Duke of Albany. Give
the letters to me!

EDGAR

That sounds about right.

Albany takes the letters from Edgar.

ALBANY

If, after the battle, I need to
speak to you about these, I
will sound a trumpet.

EDGAR

That's pretty good. I do bird
calls myself.

ALBANY

Fare thee well.

Edgar gets down behind the wall. A moment later Regan
re-enters carrying Edmund.

REGAN

Edmund has news for you!

She puts Edmund down on the wall.

EDMUND

The enemy is in view! Draw up
your powers!

ALBANY

I will do so!

Albany exits with Regan, leaving Edmund alone on stage.

EDMUND

I have sworn my love to both
these sisters. Which of them
shall I take? Both? One? Or
neither? Neither can be
enjoyed if both remain alive.
Oh, why did I have to be born
such a handsome man? It will
be the death of me yet. Well,
if Goneril wants me, she'll
have to do something about
getting rid of her husband
Albany. And she better do it
before he does something
stupid, like showing mercy to
Lear and Cordelia. I'll have
to do something about them.

Edmund exits behind the wall.

Scene 2

At a battlefield, the Italian Gentleman and the Mute enter, followed by Gloucester carrying Edgar. Edgar is dressed in battle armor.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Let's sit in the shadow of this tree! We can see the war good from here!

Everyone sits. The Italian Gentleman and the Mute take out pennants with "FRANCE" written on them. They wave the pennants as though they were at a football game.

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Go France! Go France!

>From offstage, we hear a FRENCH SOLDIER giving an order to retreat:

FRENCH SOLDIER

(off stage)

Retreat! Retreat!

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Oh-oh! I say, "Go France," and the French decide to go. You know what this means?

The Mute nods "yes." He and the Italian Gentleman put down their "FRANCE" pennants" and pick up pennants which say "ENGLAND."

ITALIAN GENTLEMAN

Go England!

EDGAR

Maybe we should go.

GLOUCESTER

Why go? A man may rot even here.

EDGAR

Well, sure, if you like rotting. I don't think I'm ripe yet.

GLOUCESTER

That's true too.

Scene 3

At the English camp, ENGLISH SOLDIERS enter. One of them carries Edmund, and puts him down on a wall. Other soldiers bring in King Lear and Cordelia as prisoners.

EDMUND

Officers, take them away!

CORDELIA

Thank you. Could you take us away to London, please?

KING LEAR

No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison, to our durance vile. We two alone will sing like birds in the cage. When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness. We'll tell old tales and laugh at gilded butterflies.

CORDELIA

(laughing)

Oh, I always think gilded butterflies are so funny!

KING LEAR

Yes, we'll hear poor rouges talk of court news. And we'll

talk with them too who loses
and who wins, who's in, who's
out; and take upon us the
mystery of things.

CORDELIA

I love a good mystery. Did you
see "Hamlet"? That was a
complete mystery to me!

EDMUND

Take them away!

A soldier starts to take Cordelia, but Lear pushes him
aside.

KING LEAR

Unhand her, you ruffian! Come,
Cordelia, my little fleur-de-
lis!

King Lear gallantly leads Cordelia out. Edmund speaks to
the CAPTAIN of the soldiers.

EDMUND

Captain, follow them to prison!
You know what to do!

CAPTAIN

I'll do it, my Lord.

Exit the Captain. Enter Albany, Goneril and Regan, along
with more ENGLISH SOLDIERS. Regan looks very ill and
occasionally clutches her stomach. Albany speaks gruffly
to Edmund.

ALBANY

Sir, I require that you give me
your prisoners, the King and
Cordelia.

EDMUND

I thought it would be best to
lock them up away from here for
their own protection. You know

how viscous red-blooded
soldiers can get when a war
gets their red blood flowing.
No, I suppose that's something
you've never experienced.
Anyway, I've put them safely
away under lock and key.

ALBANY

That is something for me to
decide, not you.

REGAN

You forget that he led my army!
If I choose, I can make him my
equal!

GONERIL

You really think you can bring
him that far down?

REGAN

I intend to marry him!

GONERIL

And do you intend to enjoy your
marriage?

ALBANY

You cannot marry him, Regan.
He is already spoken for. By
my wife!!!

EDMUND

Ooops!

Albany reveals the letters which Edgar gave him.

ALBANY

Edmund, I arrest you for
capital treason! These letters
prove you made love to both my
wife and her sister. What do
you have to say for yourself?

EDMUND

You've got to understand. I
come from a broken home!

ALBANY

And you're the one who broke
it!

EDMUND

I just wanted to experience the
affection I never had as a
child!

ALBANY

By making love to my wife?????

EDMUND

Well, I never had that
experience as a child.

ALBANY

Sound the trumpet! Let the
witness appear who can tell us
of these letters!

A Soldier sounds a trumpet, as Regan clutches her
stomach.

REGAN

I feel sick.

GONERIL

(aside)

If not, I'll never trust my
medicines.

EDMUND

I would like to prove my
innocence!

ALBANY

Can you?

EDMUND

No, but I'd really like to.

ALBANY

Sound the trumpet again.

The Soldier sounds the trumpet again.

REGAN

I must leave. I'm sick.

ALBANY

Take her to my tent, and sound
the trumpet again.

A Soldier helps Regan to leave as another Soldier sounds the trumpet. When the Soldier who helped Regan leave returns, he is carrying Edgar. Edgar is wearing battle armor, including a helmet which hides his face. He has a sword in his hand.

SOLDIER

(carrying Edgar)

This man claims he was told to
come when we sounded the
trumpet.

The Soldier puts Edgar down on the wall next to Edmund.

ALBANY

He will prove you are a
traitor! Take up this sword!

Albany puts a sword into Edmund's hand.

EDMUND

I can't fight him. It isn't
fair. He has a helmet, and I
don't.

ALBANY

Then we will remove his helmet.

Albany tries to pull off Edgar's helmet, but it's stuck.
He asks for help from the Soldiers.

ALBANY

It's stuck! Help me pull it

off.

Some of the Soldiers hold Edgar's body, while others pull at the helmet. Suddenly, the helmet pops off, and Edgar goes flying into Edmund, stabbing him fatally.

GONERIL

Edmund!

EDMUND

I am slain!

ALBANY

He is justly served! These papers prove you planned to murder me to win his love!

GONERIL

What if I did? Who will judge me?

ALBANY

I will.

Goneril runs off stage.

ALBANY

Go after her! She's desperate.

A Soldier follows Goneril.

EDMUND

I'm dying! Who was it that killed me?

Edgar turns to face his brother.

EDMUND

It's my brother, Edgar!

ALBANY

It's true! You are Edgar. I recognize you now! Where is your noble father?

EDGAR

He's dead. He died right after
I told him who I really am.
"I'm really me!" I said.

ALBANY

And his poor old heart could
not take the news.

EDGAR

No, his heart took it fine. He
was really happy to learn I was
me. But then he walked off the
side of a cliff. He was blind,
you know. Yup, that's the way
it goes.

Enter the Soldier who followed Goneril. He carries a
bloody dagger.

SOLDIER

She's dead!

ALBANY

Who?

SOLDIER

Goneril! Your wife! She
confessed that she had poisoned
her sister Regan, out of
jealous love for Edmund, and
then she stabbed herself! They
both are dead.

EDMUND

Two jealous women! When I meet
up with them in the afterlife,
I know there's going to be hell
to pay!

Enter Kent.

ALBANY

Who comes here?

KENT

The Earl of Kent. When I was banished, I disguised myself as a lowly slave so that I could continue to serve the King. I have heard he is your prisoner. If so, make me your prisoner too, so that I may end my life with him.

ALBANY

The King! Where is the King?

EDMUND

He's at the castle, locked up with Cordelia. But you'd better hurry. I'm afraid I let my mischievous side get the better of me.

ALBANY

What do you mean?

EDMUND

I ordered them to be hanged.

ALBANY

What? You call that mischievous? How could you? This was supposed to be a comedy!

EDMUND

All right, all right! So I miscalculated. What are you going to do, kill me twice? Do you think I like the way things turned out?

Edmund dies. Then, before anyone can do anything, Lear enters carrying the body of Cordelia. An English soldier follows him.

KING LEAR

Howl, howl howl, howl! She's gone for ever. I know when one is dead, and when one lives.

She's dead as earth! My poor fool, Cordelia. Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, and funny. An excellent thing in a woman, or in anybody. I killed the slave that was hanging thee.

SOLDIER

It's true, my lords. He did.

KING LEAR

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, never, never, never, never. I'd give up drink to have you live again. I'd even give up comedy.

Lear dies. Albany rushes to him.

ALBANY

He's dead!

KENT

Vex not his ghost. Do not stretch him out any longer upon the rack of this tough world. The wonder is, he that endured so long.

Albany gives orders to his soldiers.

ALBANY

Bear them from hence. I want no more of politics. Kent you must rule this realm.

KENT

I am too old and sick. I can't live long.

ALBANY

But who shall be King? If not

you or I, then that leaves
only...

Kent and Albany stare at Edgar.

EDGAR

Yup. That's the way it goes,
all right. The weight of this
sad time we must obey: speak
what we feel, not what we ought
to say. The oldest hath borne
most: we that are young shall
never see so much, nor live so
long.

Everyone bows their head solemnly. Then the Fool bounds
in.

FOOL

Hey, everyone, I'm back! Did I
miss anything?

The curtain falls.

THE END

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