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William Shakespeare
Excerpt
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KING LEAR

The scene: Britain

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

LEAR, *king of Britain*
 KING OF FRANCE
 DUKE OF BURGUNDY
 DUKE OF CORNWALL, *husband to Regan*
 DUKE OF ALBANY, *husband to Goneril*
 EARL OF KENT
 EARL OF GLOUCESTER
 EDGAR, *son to Gloucester*
 EDMUND, *bastard son to Gloucester*
 CURAN, *a courtier*
 OSWALD, *steward to Goneril*
 OLD MAN, *tenant to Gloucester*
 DOCTOR
 FOOL

GONERIL }
 REGAN } *daughters to Lear*
 CORDELIA }

*Gentleman, Herald, Captains, Knights of Lear's
 train, Messengers, Soldiers, Attendants, Servants*

KING LEAR

[1. 1.] *The throne-room in King Lear's palace*

'Enter KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND'

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

Gloucester. It did always seem so to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most, for equalities are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

Kent. Is not this your son, my lord?

Gloucester. His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to 't.

10

Kent. I cannot conceive you.

Gloucester. Sir, this young fellow's mother could; whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

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

Gloucester. But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily to the world 20 before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged. Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

Edmund. No, my lord.

Gloucester. My lord of Kent. Remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

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Edmund. My services to your lordship.

Kent. I must love you, and sue to know you better.

30. *Edmund.* Sir, I shall study deserving.

Gloucester. He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. [*A sennet sounded*] The king is coming.

'Enter one bearing a coronet.' *'Enter King LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and attendants'*

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

Gloucester. I shall, my liege.

[*he goes out, attended by Edmund*]

Lear. Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
 Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
 In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
 To shake all cares and business from our age,
 Conferring them on younger strengths while we

40 Unburdened crawl toward death. Our son
 of Cornwall,

And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
 We have this hour a constant will to publish
 Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
 May be prevented now. The princes, France
 and Burgundy,

Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
 Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
 And here are to be answered. Tell me, my daughters
 (Since now we will divest us both of rule,
 Interest of territory, cares of state),

50 Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
 That we our largest bounty may extend
 Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
 Our eldest-born, speak first.

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KING LEAR

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Goneril. Sir, I love you more than word can wield
 the matter;

Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty;
 Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;
 No less than life with grace, health, beauty, honour;
 As much as child e'er loved, or father found:
 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable.
 Beyond all manner of "so much" I love you. 60

(*Cordelia.* What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and
 be silent.

Lear. [*showing the map*] Of all these bounds, even
 from this line to this,

With shadowy forests and with champaigns riched,
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
 We make thee lady. To thine and Albany's issues
 Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
 Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall?

Regan. I am made of that self metal as my sister,
 And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
 I find she names my very deed of love: 70

Only she comes too short, that I profess
 Myself an enemy to all other joys
 Which the most precious spirit of sense possesses,
 And find I am alone felicitate
 In your dear Highness' love.

(*Cordelia.* Then poor Cordelia!
 And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
 More ponderous than my tongue.

Lear. To thee and thine, hereditary ever,
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,
 No less in space, validity, and pleasure 80
 Than that conferred on Goneril. Now, our joy,
 Although our last and least, to whose young love
 The vines of France and milk of Burgundy

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KING LEAR

I. I. 84

Strive to be interested, what can you say to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cordelia. Nothing, my lord.

Lear. Nothing?

Cordelia. Nothing.

Lear. Nothing will come of nothing; speak again.

90 *Cordelia.* Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
 According to my bond, no more nor less.

Lear. How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech
 a little,

Lest you may mar your fortunes.

Cordelia. Good my lord,

You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I

Return those duties back as are right fit,

Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say

They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,

100 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
 Half my love with him, half my care and duty.

Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,

To love my father all.

Lear. But goes thy heart with this?

Cordelia. Ay, my good lord.

Lear. So young, and so untender?

Cordelia. So young, my lord, and true.

Lear. Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower!

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,

The mysteries of Hecate and the night,

110 By all the operation of the orbs

From whom we do exist and cease to be,

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,

Propinquity and property of blood,

And as a stranger to my heart and me

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KING LEAR

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Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved,
 As thou my sometime daughter.

Kent. Good my liege—

Lear. Peace, Kent!

120

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
 I loved her most, and thought to set my rest
 On her kind nursery. [*To Cordelia*] Hence, and
 avoid my sight!—

So be my grave my peace as here I give
 Her father's heart from her. Call France! Who stirs?
 Call Burgundy! [*A courtier hurries forth*] Cornwall
 and Albany,

With my two daughters' dowers digest the third;
 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
 I do invest you jointly with my power,
 Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
 That troop with majesty. Ourself, by monthly course,
 With reservation of an hundred knights
 By you to be sustained, shall our abode
 Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain
 The name and all th' addition to a king: the sway,
 Revenue, execution of the rest,
 Belovéd sons, be yours; which to confirm,
 This coronet part between you.

Kent. Royal Lear,

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

Lear. The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft.

Kent. Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
 The region of my heart! Be Kent unmannerly

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KING LEAR

I. I. 145

When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
 Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
 When power to flattery bows? To plainness
 honour's bound

When majesty stoops to folly. Reserve thy state,
 And in thy best consideration check

150 This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment,
 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,
 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
 Reverb no hollowness.

Lear. Kent, on thy life, no more!

Kent. My life I never held but as a pawn
 To wage against thine enemies; ne'er feared to lose it,
 Thy safety being motive.

Lear. Out of my sight!

Kent. See better, Lear, and let me still remain
 The true blank of thine eye.

Lear. Now by Apollo—

Kent. Now by Apollo, king,

160 Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

Lear. O vassal! miscreant!
 [*laying his hand on his sword*]

Albany. } Dear sir, forbear!
Cornwall. }

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

Lear. Hear me, recreant,
 On thine allegiance, hear me!

That thou hast sought to make us break our vow—
 Which we durst never yet—and with strained pride
 To come betwixt our sentence and our power—

170 Which nor our nature nor our place can bear,—

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KING LEAR

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Our potency made good, take thy reward.
 Five days we do allot thee for provision
 To shield thee from disasters of the world,
 And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
 Upon our kingdom. If, on the tenth day following,
 Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,
 The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
 This shall not be revoked.

Kent. Fare thee well, king; sith thus thou wilt appear,
 Freedom lives hence and banishment is here. 180

[*To Cordelia*] The gods to their dear shelter take
 thee, maid,
 That justly think'st and hast most rightly said.
 [*To Goneril and Regan*] And your large speeches may
 your deeds approve,
 That good effects may spring from words of love.
 Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
 He'll shape his old course in a country new. [*he goes*]

'Flourish'. Re-enter GLOUCESTER, with FRANCE,
 BURGUNDY, and Attendants

Gloucester. Here's France and Burgundy, my
 noble lord.

Lear. My lord of Burgundy,
 We first address toward you, who with this king
 Hath rivalled for our daughter. What in the least 190
 Will you require in present dower with her,
 Or cease your quest of love?

Burgundy. Most royal majesty,
 I crave no more than hath your highness offered—
 Nor will you tender less?

Lear. Right noble Burgundy,
 When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
 But now her price is fall'n. Sir, there she stands.

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KING LEAR

I. I. 197

If aught within that little seeming-substance,
 Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,
 And nothing more, may fitly like your grace,

200 She's there, and she is yours.

Burgundy. I know no answer.

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

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

Lear. Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that
 made me,

I tell you all her wealth. [*To France*] For you,
 great king,

I would not from your love make such a stray
 To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you

210 T' avert your liking a more worthier way
 Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed
 Almost t' acknowledge hers.

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

220 Fall into taint; which to believe of her
 Must be a faith that reason without miracle
 Should never plant in me.

Cordelia. I yet beseech your majesty—
 If for I want that glib and oily art
 To speak and purpose not, since what I well intend,