



King Lear
by
William Shakespeare

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A Short Story for ESOL & Functional
Skills Learners



King Lear is the old King of Britain. He has three daughters: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Lear decides that he is too old to rule and wants to divide his kingdom between his daughters.



Lear asks each daughter to tell him how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan give long speeches and say that they love their father more than anything. Lear is very pleased with their words.



Cordelia is Lear's youngest and favourite daughter. She truly loves her father, but she refuses to flatter him with false words. Lear becomes very angry and disowns her.



Lear gives Cordelia's part of the kingdom to Goneril and Regan. The loyal Earl of Kent tells Lear that he is making a terrible mistake. Lear becomes angry with Kent too and orders him to leave the country.



The King of France still wants to marry Cordelia because he loves her for who she is. Cordelia marries him and leaves Britain. Kent secretly returns in disguise because he still wants to serve Lear.



Lear has given away his kingdom, but he still expects to be treated like a king. He plans to stay with Goneril and Regan and travel with one hundred knights. Soon, Goneril complains about Lear and his men.



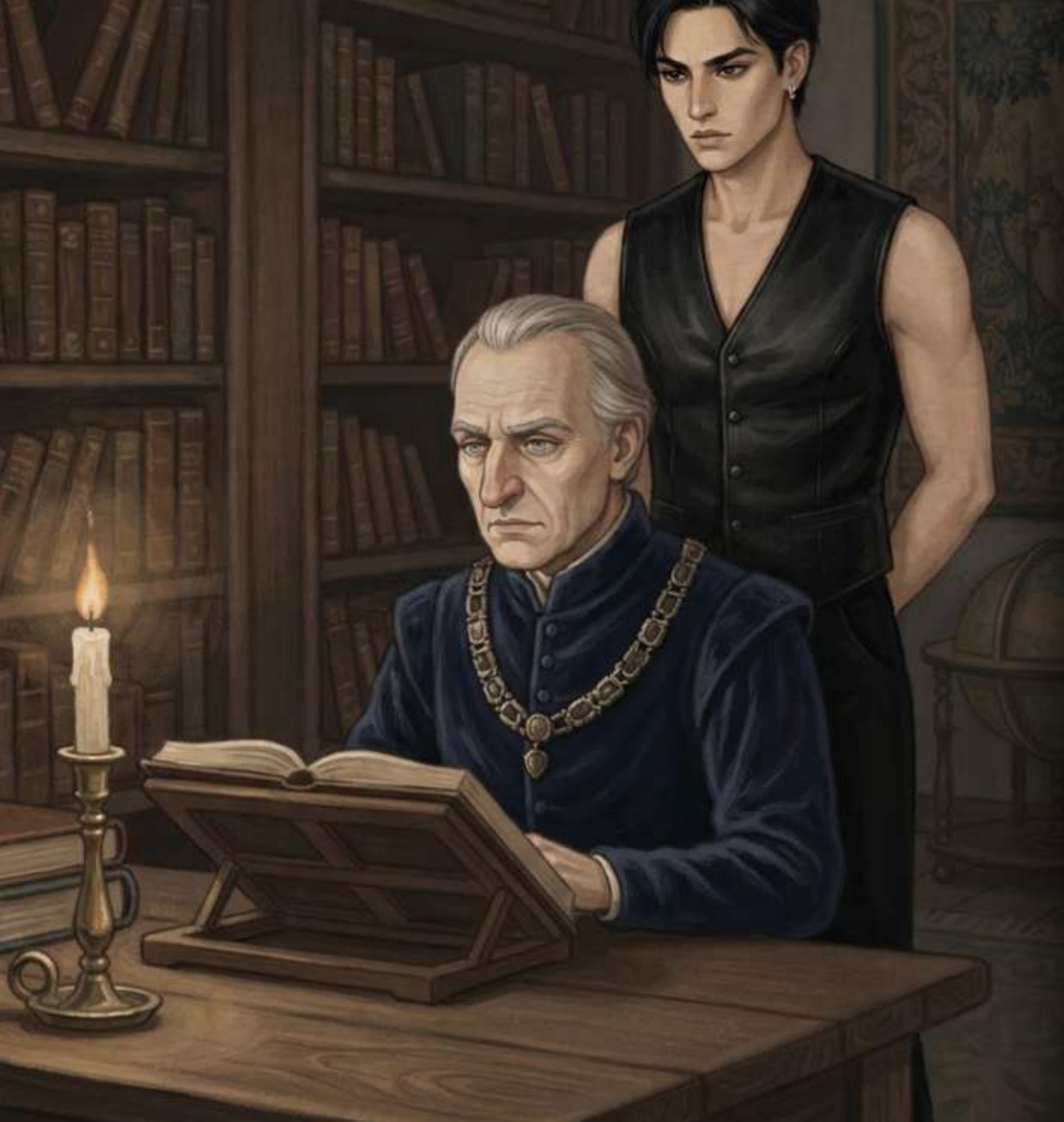
Goneril tells Lear to reduce the number of his knights. Lear is shocked and angry, so he leaves and goes to stay with Regan. He believes that Regan will treat him better.



However, Regan supports Goneril. The two sisters tell Lear that he does not need his knights. Lear finally begins to understand that the daughters who said they loved him most have betrayed him.



Heartbroken, Lear goes out into a terrible storm. His loyal Fool and the disguised Kent stay with him. Lear becomes confused and begins to lose his mind.



There is another troubled family in the kingdom. The Earl of Gloucester has two sons, Edgar and Edmund. Edgar is loyal, but Edmund is jealous and wants his brother's position and power.



Edmund writes a false letter and tricks Gloucester. Gloucester believes that Edgar is planning against him. Edgar has to run away and disguises himself as a poor man called Poor Tom.



During the storm, Lear meets Edgar dressed as Poor Tom. Lear sees how poor and helpless people suffer. For the first time, he begins to understand the difficulties of ordinary people.



Gloucester remains loyal to Lear and secretly tries to help him. Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, discover this. They cruelly blind Gloucester as punishment.



After losing his sight, Gloucester learns the truth. Edmund has betrayed him, and Edgar was innocent. Edgar secretly stays close to his father and helps him.



Meanwhile, Edmund becomes powerful. Both Goneril and Regan fall in love with him. Goneril is already married to the Duke of Albany, but she wants Edmund for herself.



Cordelia hears about her father's suffering and returns from France with an army to help him. She finds Lear, who is now weak and broken. Lear understands his terrible mistake and asks Cordelia to forgive him.



Cordelia forgives her father because she has always truly loved him. Lear is happy to be with her again. However, Cordelia's army loses the battle, and Lear and Cordelia are captured.



Edmund secretly orders Cordelia to be killed in prison. Edgar fights Edmund and defeats him. Before Edmund dies, he admits what he has done and tries to stop Cordelia's death.



But it is too late. Cordelia has been killed. Goneril poisons Regan because they both love Edmund, and then Goneril takes her own life.



Lear carries Cordelia's body and is overcome with sadness. He cannot bear the loss of the daughter who truly loved him, and he dies beside her. Lear finally understood the difference between flattering words and true love, but he understood it too late.