

**OXFORD PROGRESSIVE ENGLISH READERS**

# **William Shakespeare's Plays**

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## **King Lear**

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7/7/2011**

<http://sopheaktra4share.wordpress.com/>

# King Lear

## I. Loving Daughters

Hundreds of years ago, there was a King of Britain called Lear. He ruled for many years until he was over eighty years old. Then he began to feel tired. One day, he asked all his highest ministers to come to the royal court. He also invited his 3 daughters: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia.

‘My lords, I am tired,’ he said to his ministers. ‘I no longer wish to rule this country. I want to live the rest of my life peacefully and quietly, and prepare myself properly for my death.’ The old man paused and looked at his daughters: Goneril, the oldest, who was married to the Duke of Albany; Regan who was married to the Duke of Cornwall; and his youngest and favorite child, Cordelia, who was not yet married. ‘Daughters,’ he said, ‘I am going to divide this kingdom into three parts, one for each of you to rule.’ His ministers looked at each other in surprise. They were quite shocked when the king continued, ‘But before I decide who gets the biggest part, I plan to find out which one of you loves me the most. Goneril, you speak first.’

Goneril was as surprised as everyone else by her father’s strange request, but she just thought that he was behaving this way because he was a very old man.

‘I love you more than I can say in word. I love you more than my life and more than freedom.’ she said. ‘I love you more than any child has ever loved her father.’ The king was delighted. That was just what he wanted to hear. Pointing to a map in front of him, he drew a line round one-third of his kingdom and gave it to her.

‘Now it is Regan’s turn,’ he said. Regan was determined to win as much, if not more, of the kingdom as her sister. She knew the kind of speech that would make her father happy.

‘I love you quite as much as Goneril does,’ she said, ‘and more, for I’m only happy when I’m with you.’ How lucky I am to have such loving children, thought Lear, very please. He gave Regan one-third of his kingdom too.

‘Now, little Cordelia, what have you to say to your old father?’ he smiled. He wanted Cordelia to say even nicer things to him, because he loved her more than either of the others. But Cordelia knew her sisters had lied to the old man. They had tricked their father, knowing that he was old and that his mind was no longer clear. Cordelia loved her father, but she was sure that it was wrong to use her love to win his kingdom from him. Besides, how could she explain her great love for Lear in words, without sounding as false as her sisters? She hoped her father would understand. And so, when the king asked her what she had to say, Cordelia replied ‘Nothing.’

The king was very surprised by her answer. ‘She who says nothing will get nothing,’ he exclaimed. How could his Cordelia say such a thing to him, and in front of all these important people? ‘Have you nothing more to say, child?’

‘Father, I love you as a child should love a father – no more, no less. I can’t say that all my love will always be yours as my sister have. Half my love will be for my future husband.’

Hearing this, Lear’s face turned red with anger. Her cold words, compared with sweetness of her sisters’ speeches, proved only one thing to him. Cordelia did not love him. She would be punished for it.

King Lear had always had a bad temper, and it had got worse with age. ‘You ungrateful girl!’ he shouted, trembling with fury. ‘You’re no longer my daughter. I’ll give you nothing – no land, no money, everything that would have been yours will be shared between my loving daughters!’ He told the court his plan. The Dukes of Albany and Cornwall and their wives would rule the kingdom together. Lear would keep the title and royal position of King, and he would have one hundred noble soldiers to attend him. He would live with each of the two older sisters in turn, staying a month with Goneril and then a month with Regan.

The King’s noblemen and servants did not know what to do. It was clear that the King was not behaving very wisely. In the old days, he would never have made such a poor decision. Only one man dared to risk speaking to the King in Cordelia’s defense. This was the Earl of Kent, an honest nobleman. He bravely came forward, and warned Lear that he had rewarded the daughter who loved him less, and punished the one who loved him most. Lear refused to believe that he could have made such a mistake.

‘How dare you question a king?’ he roared. ‘Get out of my sight! If you have not left this country within a week, I shall have you killed.’

Kent knew it was useless to argue. Looking at Lear, who seemed terribly unhappy despite his anger, he felt very sorry for him. He calmly accepted his punishment.

Two men, the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France, had asked Lear if they could marry Cordelia. Now he had them brought before him. ‘This young girl, Cordelia, is no longer my daughter; therefore I’m giving her no land and no money. Do you still want her?’ he asked. Burgundy looked rather upset. Without her third of the kingdom, he wasn’t sure marry Cordelia was such a good idea. However, the King of France loved Cordelia for herself. He didn’t need kingdoms to persuade him to marry her. He accepted her for nothing. Cordelia loved him for it.

‘Take her then!’ shouted Lear. ‘I never want to see her face again.’

Before Cordelia left for France, she spoke privately to her sisters. She begged them to take good care of their father in his old age. ‘I’m sure you do not need to tell us about our duty to the King,’ was their proud reply. Cordelia left Britain feeling very sad. She thought she would care for her old father much better than her sisters.

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## II. At Goneril’s Castle

Cordelia was right to be worried. It wasn’t long before her sisters’ true feelings began to show themselves so clearly that even the old King could see how wrong he had been. His plan had been to spend one month staying with one daughter, and the next month with other, taking his hundred knights with him.

First Lear went to stay with Goneril. He soon found out how little she loved him, now that he had nothing more to give her. After a while, Goneril stopped trying to make her father feel welcome in her castle. She ordered her servant to treat him more as a poor relation than as a King. Every time she met him, she seemed to be in bad temper.

‘You complain about every little thing we do that displease you, Father,’ she said when Lear tried to speak to her. ‘But you do nothing for us. Those knights of yours are always quarrelling and fighting. When I told you about this before, I thought that you would do something about it. Now I am beginning to think you enjoy seeing them behave that way. If you don’t like the way things are here, then you must go to my sister, Regan.’

Soon, Lear found that his daughter had told her servants to ignore him. When he tried to give them orders, they pretended that they hadn’t heard him. The King was furious. He had never been treated with such disrespect before. When he tried again to complain to his daughter, she sent him a message to say that she was ill, and refuse to see him.

However, one good thing did happen during Lear’s unhappy stay with Goneril. One day as he was eating dinner, a stranger came up to him and asked if he could become one of the king’s servants. Lear liked the look of the man, and said he should attend him for the rest of dinner. If at the end of the meal the stranger had proved a good servant, he could stay. He soon showed the King how useful he was. One of Goneril’s servants, serving the King his dinner, was very rude to Lear. The stranger at once threw the servant out of the room. Lear was delighted. He gave the stranger some money and decided to keep him with him.

Little did the King know, this man was in fact no stranger to him, He was the Earl of Kent. Kent had been worried about what would happen to the old man now that he had no money or power. He didn’t trust Goneril or Regan to think of their father’s best interests. He had dressed himself to look like a servant, so that he could stay close to the King, and take care of his needs. When the King asked his name, he said it was Caius.

King Lear had one other friend besides Caius: his Fool. All kings kept fools in those days: men whose duty was to amuse the King with jokes and songs. In fact, the fool was allowed to speak more freely before the King than almost anyone else. A clever fool could give advice to a King, or even tell him he was wrong – as long as he did it in a clever puzzle or rhymes that make the King laugh.

King Lear’s Fool loved him greatly. He had tried to warn Lear about Goneril and Regan, by saying that daughters nowadays wanted obedient fathers, instead of the other way round. He told Lear he was wrong to give away his kingdom. Whenever Lear began to get angry, the Fool would quickly make up a joke so that he would think of something else. A

many of these jokes were about daughters who did not love their fathers, Lear's Fool was not popular with Goneril. She could not wait to get rid of him.

Goneril had less and less patience with her father and his complaints. She began to accuse his knights of bad behavior again.

'Father, is there any reason for you to keep once hundred knights and all of their servants? These men are much too rough and unpleasant for us. Their bad manners affect the whole castle. They do nothing but eat and drink, quarrel and get drunk. They have turned this castle into a soldier's drinking-house. Just the shame of it should be enough to make you do something. So please, father, reduce the number of the knights a little before I do something about them myself. And make sure those you keep are good, quiet old men: the sort of men everyone would expect to see serving someone old as yourself.'

Lear could not believe his ears.

'What this? You thankless one! What lies you tell! My knights are the best in the world. They are the finest men of their kind, and they know exactly how to serve me.' Tears of anger and disappointment ran down the old man's face. He could not believe what was happening to him. He cursed Goneril as loudly as his trembling voice would let him. 'May you never have children, you unnatural creature! No, no – I hope you do have children, and that they make you as unhappy as you have made your father. I'm leaving this horrible place; I shall go and stay with Regan. Regan knows the way to treat her father the King!'

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### **III. Regan Punishes Caius**

Goneril's husband, the Duke of Albany, did not agree with Goneril's behavior, but Lear was her father and he did not want to interfere. He came into the room as the King and Goneril were quarrelling. When he heard what had happened, he tried to calm Lear, but Lear would not listen to him. The King called his servant, to tell them to make preparations to leave. Then he found out that, by Goneril's order, fifty of his one hundred knights had already been sent away. Furious, he left the Duke of Albany's castle with his servants and the faithful Caius.

The King decided to send Caius with a letter to tell Regan that he was coming. But when Caius reached the Duke of Cornwall's castle, he discovered that Goneril had also written to Regan. She told her sister that she had quarreled with their father, and warned Regan that their father was an impossible guest.

After reading Goneril's letter, Regan and her husband decided to go and visit the Duke of Gloucester, rather than staying to welcome the King. Caius, still waiting for a reply to the King's letter, followed them there. The first person he met when he arrived at Gloucester's castle was the servant who had been rude to the King at dinner.

Caius did not like this servant at all. He thought he was an enemy to the King, and a coward as well. He did everything he could to make the man fight with him. The servant did not want to fight with the fierce Caius and tried to keep away from him. But it was no use. Soon Caius caught the servant and started beating him.

At the moment, Regan, Cornwall and Gloucester arrived. 'What's this? What's going on?' the Duke of Gloucester cried. Regan recognized Goneril's servant struggling underneath Caius.

'Punish that creature – he is beating my dear sister's servant,' she said. Some of her servants tied up Caius as punishment.

'But my lady, that man is the King's own messenger. The King will not like to see his own man treated in such a way,' exclaimed Gloucester, surprised.

'I'll explain everything to the King,' said Cornwall.

'My sister will like it even less, when she hears that this man has beaten her messenger,' said Regan. Her husband was not afraid of the King. He said that Caius would have to stay tied up until the middle of the following day.

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#### IV. Lear Meets Regan

The first thing Lear saw when he arrived at Gloucester's castle was his favorite servant, Caius, tied up. And when he entered the castle, things went from bad to worse. Furious at Caius's treatment, he angrily asked see Regan and Cornwall. 'They are tired, after travelling all night. They cannot see you', he was told. He made such a noise after hearing this that his daughter and her husband finally appeared.

Lear immediately told Regan how badly Goneril had treated him. He had hardly finished speaking when Regan said sweetly, 'I am sure you're wrong, Father. I cannot believe that Goneril would not do her duty towards you. If she complained about your knights, she must have had a good reason for it.' Seeing that Lear was about to protest, she quickly added, 'Oh, father, you are an old man. You are in the very last years of your life. You should listen to people who understand what is god for you, more than you do yourself. Please, go back to Goneril. Tell her that you know, now, that you have been unfair to her.'

'Tell her I am sorry? Is this what you think I should do?' Lear replied. And before she could stop him, Lear knelt down on the floor. 'Please, dear daughter,' he said, pretending that Regan was Goneril, 'I know that I am very old. I know that I made a lot of trouble for you. On my knees I beg you to let me have some food and clothes, and somewhere to live.'

Regan was shocked. She asked her father to stop playing games, and to go back to Goneril.

'Never, Regan!' said Lear, standing up. 'She has taken away half of my knights. She has looked at me with hateful eyes, and spoken to me with her sharp tongue. I hope all of God's anger will fall on her head for being so ungrateful. I hope Heaven will strike her young bones, so that she never walks again!'

'Shame, sir, shame!' said Cornwall. He thought Lear's anger was too great. 'Oh, I hope Heaven's lightning will strike her wicked eyes with blinding flames. I hope the sun will burn her skin, and the air makes her sick.'

Regan could not believe what she was hearing. 'Will you say the same things about me, when you are angry with me?' she asked.

However, Regan had spoken so sweetly that Lear could not believe she meant to be unkind. He said he would never speak badly about her. He was just about to ask her about



Caius when some visitors arrived. One of them was Goneril. Then, when Lear saw the two sisters smiled at each other, he knew there was no hope for him. His daughter had become his enemies.

‘Dear sister, welcome!’ cried Regan. ‘Now, my Lord, you can ask Goneril to forgive you, and go back to her castle until the end of the month.’

Lear refused yet again. He said he would never go to Goneril. He never wanted to see her again. He would go and stay with Regan, bringing his one hundred knights with him.

Regan began to look angry. She said that she could not allow the old King to bring more than twenty-five knights into her castle.

‘Why does he need twenty-five?’ said Goneril. ‘Or even ten, or five?’ He does not need them at all when there are twice that number of servants in the house to look after him.’ Regan agreed.

‘I can see that neither of you will look after me unless I come to you without my knights!’ cried the unhappy King. ‘How wrong I was to believe you love me the most, and not to trust Cordelia.’ Lear felt as if he would burst with anger and disappointment. He shouted and cursed and swore that he would have his revenge – but the sisters knew what he could not harm them. He was just a helpless old man.

Outside, the sky grew dark and stormy. Each crash of thunder, each flash of lightning increased Lear’s anger. He felt as if the Gods themselves were on his side, He could not bear to shelter in the same castle as his daughters, and be treated like a fool and a beggar. In a terrible voice, he ordered his horses.

‘I would rather spend the night on the moors, even in the storm, than with such women!’ he cried as he left the room. Goneril and Regan looked angrily at each other.

‘Well, if he will not listen, he must learn from the result of his own actions,’ they decided, and they ordered the castle doors to be shut. They left their father out in the storm, without any shelter and with only his Fool to look after him. Gloucester was very unhappy about this treatment of the King, but he did not dare to protest.

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## V. Out In The Storm

Lear and his Fool wandered lost on the dark moors. Lear's anger was by now as wild as the storm. He cried and shouted at the sky, overcome by the cruelty of his daughters. He saw that his Fool was cold and wet, and he was sorry about it, but he saw very little apart from that. He hardly knew who he was any more – he was half-mad. He was found like this by Caius, who had escaped from the castle. Caius took the King to an old hut nearby. The Fool went in first, but ran out again almost immediately crying, 'A ghost! A ghost!' Inside the hut was a madman called Poor Tom. He was very pale and dirty, with big, staring eyes. He was sitting talking nonsense to himself. Lear sat down beside Poor Tom.

'I can see you have daughters, sir,' he said to Poor Tom. 'Yes, you've given them all you had, and that's why you are now so poor, and so mad. What wicked creature they are!' Lear and the madman talked quite happily to each other. It was clear by now that Lear was as mad as Poor Tom.

Suddenly, they saw a light coming towards them. It was Gloucester, who had secretly left his castle to look for the King, and take him somewhere warm and dry. Lear made him take Poor Tom too.

Soon after he returned to his own castle, Gloucester found out that the sisters were plotting to have Lear killed. He rushed back to the King to warn him.

'Take the King to Dover,' he told Caius. 'I know a safe place there where you can stay, just across the sea from France. I will send some of my own men with you to look after the King.'

When they reached Dover, Caius, who was really the Duke of Kent, set off for France immediately, leaving the King in the safe hands of Gloucester's men. As soon as he arrived, he went to tell Cordelia, now Queen of France, what had happened. Cordelia was horrified. She persuaded her husband, the King of France, to send an army to Britain to help King Lear. She wanted to make her father King of Britain again, and punish her sisters. Cordelia herself came with her army to fight for her country.

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## VI. Lear Meets Cordelia Again

Old King Lear was completely mad and had no idea of the great danger he was in. He escaped from the men Gloucester sent to look after him, and wandered around the countryside, singing and dancing. He didn't care who found him. Luckily it was Cordelia's own men who discovered the mad King. Lear was quickly brought to where his youngest daughter was staying.

'My poor, dear father. If only my kisses could cure the harm my sisters have done you!' she cried when she saw him. 'I can't believe my sisters could be so cruel as to send anyone so old and weak out in to a stormy night. I would not have been so unkind to my enemy's dog – even if it had bitten me, I would still have let it stay in front of my fire on a night like that.'

Lear slept for a time, and woke up much calmer than before, although still very confused. At first he didn't even recognize Cordelia.

'Where am I? who are you, and why didn't you let me die? Life is too hard for me now. I am old and foolish. Why, I almost think you are my daughter, Cordelia.'

'Father, you are right - it is me!'

'Really? But you won't love me anymore. Your sisters don't love me, although they have no reason to hate me. But you, you have a reason to hate me, Cordelia,' said Lear, sadly.

'Father, I love you as much as I ever did,' Cordelia replied softly. Lear then begged her forgiveness for not trusting her at the beginning. The father and daughter were very happy to be together again. Cordelia sent her doctor to examine Lear, and he said that, with plenty of rest, the King would become much better. It seemed that everything be all right at last.

Cornwall and Albany had heard that the King of France was attacking Britain with his armies. They and their soldiers marched to the South to meet the French. The Frenchmen fought bravely, but the British were too strong for them. France was beaten, and Lear and Cordelia were taken prisoner by Edmond, the son of the Duke of Gloucester. Edmond was a very dangerous man. He was full of hate and anger. He wanted to be King, and so secretly arranged for Lear and Cordelia to be murdered in prison

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## VII. Sad Times

As Lear and Cordelia lay in prison, strange things began to happen in the British court. Goneril and Regan became more and more cruel. When they discovered that Gloucester had helped Lear that stormy night, they put out his eyes and left him to wander blind and helpless in the moor. Then suddenly, the two sisters began to behave as if they hated each other, and no one knew the reason why. Regan's husband, the Duke of Cornwall, died.

Then the truth was discovered. Both Goneril and Regan had been as unfaithful to their husbands as to their father. They were now both in love with the same man – the evil Edmond. He had pretended to each sister that he loved only her. The sisters needed little encouragement, and soon they were both wildly in love. But when Cornwall died, Regan told Goneril that she was going to marry Edmond. Goneril realized that he had used them both in order to get power for himself. Edmond was a liar, but she still loved him and was determined not to let her sister have him. Mad with love, Goneril killed Regan.

Albany discovered what had happened. He hated the cruel creature his wife had become. Goneril herself was so said that she killed herself soon afterward.

A stranger came and challenged the evil Edmond to a fight. Edmond did not know who the stranger was, but he thought that he looked like a good knight, and so the two fought. After a hard struggle, the stranger showed that he was the better fighter of the two. Edmond was defeated. He wanted to know who the stranger was. It was his brother, Edgar. Edgar told everyone all the bad things that Edmond had done, and Edmond at last felt very sorry for his wickedness. Then he suddenly remembered that he had ordered one of his soldiers to kill Cordelia and Lear.

Everyone rushed to the prison to try to stop the soldier from following Edmond's orders. But they were too late. Lear came slowly out, carrying the dead body of Cordelia in his arms. She had been murdered before his own eyes. Mad with anger, the King had used all his strength to kill the soldier. Now he was trying to breathe life into the dead of Cordelia, but it was no use. His heart was broken. He lay down beside her and died, too.

Edgar looked sadly at the body of the dead King. 'These are sad times,' he said. 'Such sadness makes us say what we feel, not what we think best. The truth is that the oldest person here has suffered the most. We who are young will never see so much, or live so long as King Lear'.

### The End



### VIII. Question (Total: \_\_\_/40 Marks)

After you have finished reading the whole story, there are 5 exercises for you to answer. Please be honest to yourself by doing it without turning up to the story. Try to find out how much you can remember.

#### I. True/False Statements: (10 Marks)

1. \_\_\_ King Lear ruled Britain until he was over ninety years old.
2. \_\_\_ Then he decided to divided up the kingdom for his three daughters to rule.
3. \_\_\_ But first he didn't want to find out which daughter loved him the most.
4. \_\_\_ Goneril and Regan both told King Lear that they didn't love him.
5. \_\_\_ Cordelia said that she loved Lear as a child should love a father.
6. \_\_\_ Her warm words proved only one thing to Lear – that she loved him.
7. \_\_\_ He decided to share everything between Goneril and Regan.
8. \_\_\_ Lear would keep the title of King, and live with Cordelia and Regan.
9. \_\_\_ No one dared to speak to the King only the Duke of Kent.
10. \_\_\_ The King of France and the Duke of Burgundy asked to marry Cordelia.

#### II. Passage Completion (15 Marks)

Use these words to fill in the gaps: **cruelty, hut, found, escaped, staring, clear, pale, nonsense, beside, happily, mad, dark, cried, madman, wild.**

Lear and his Fool wandered lost on the (1) \_\_\_ moors. Lear's anger was by now as (2) \_\_\_ as the storm. He (3) \_\_\_ and shouted at the sky, overcome by the (4) \_\_\_ of his daughters. He hardly knew who he was any more – he was half-mad. He was (5) \_\_\_ like this by Caius, who had (6) \_\_\_ from the castle. Caius took the King to an old (7) \_\_\_ nearby. Inside the hut was a (8) \_\_\_ called Poor Tom. He was very (9) \_\_\_ and dirty, with big, (10) \_\_\_ eyes. He was sitting talking (11) \_\_\_ to himself. Lear sat down (12) \_\_\_ Poor Tom. They talked quite (13) \_\_\_ to each other. It was (14) \_\_\_ by now that Lear was as (15) \_\_\_ as Poor Tom.

**III. Matching (6 Marks)**

Character	Description	Answer
1. Albany	A. Gloucester's evil son	1 →
2. Cornwall	B. Regan's husband	2 →
3. Edgar	C. Goneril's husband	3 →
4. Goneril	D. Lear's oldest daughter	4 →
5. Regan	E. Lear's second oldest daughter	5 →
6. Edmond	F. Another son of Gloucester	6 →

**IV. Key Terms (9 Marks)**

1. **D**\_\_\_\_\_ : very happy, very pleased. (Chapter I)
2. **K**\_\_\_\_\_ : a soldier who protects the noble. (Chapter II)
3. **Q**\_\_\_\_\_ : to argue. (Chapter III)
4. **P**\_\_\_\_\_ : to hurt somebody for doing something wrong. (Chapter III)
5. **L**\_\_\_\_\_ : flash of bright light in the sky. (Chapter IV)
6. **M**\_\_ : insane, mentally ill, crazy. (Chapter V)
7. **B**\_\_\_\_\_ : valiantly. (Chapter VI)
8. **S**\_\_\_\_\_ : a fight (Chapter VII)
9. **M**\_\_\_\_\_ : to kill someone unlawfully (Chapter VII)

**Note:** This is the end of the exercises. You can submit to me via my e-mail address: [suon.sopheaktra@gmail.com](mailto:suon.sopheaktra@gmail.com). You will get your result in one day time. I hope you enjoy reading and doing the exercises. Sending me the answer is such a great encouragement for me to continue doing this work. Thank for your participation.

Sincerely Yours,

Suon Sopheaktra aka Emilio

**P.S:** visit me at <http://sopheaktra4share.wordpress.com/>