

LEAVING CERT ENGLISH STUDY GUIDE

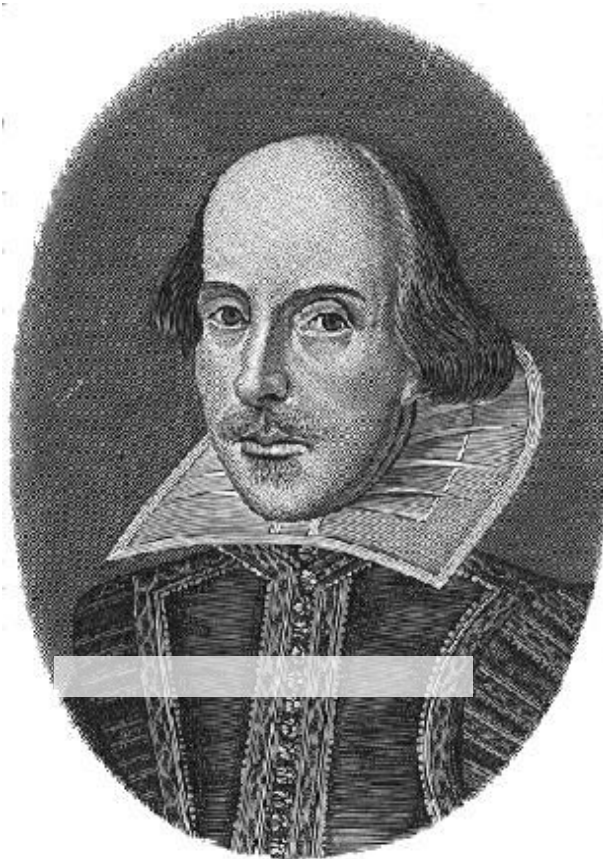


King Lear by William Shakespeare

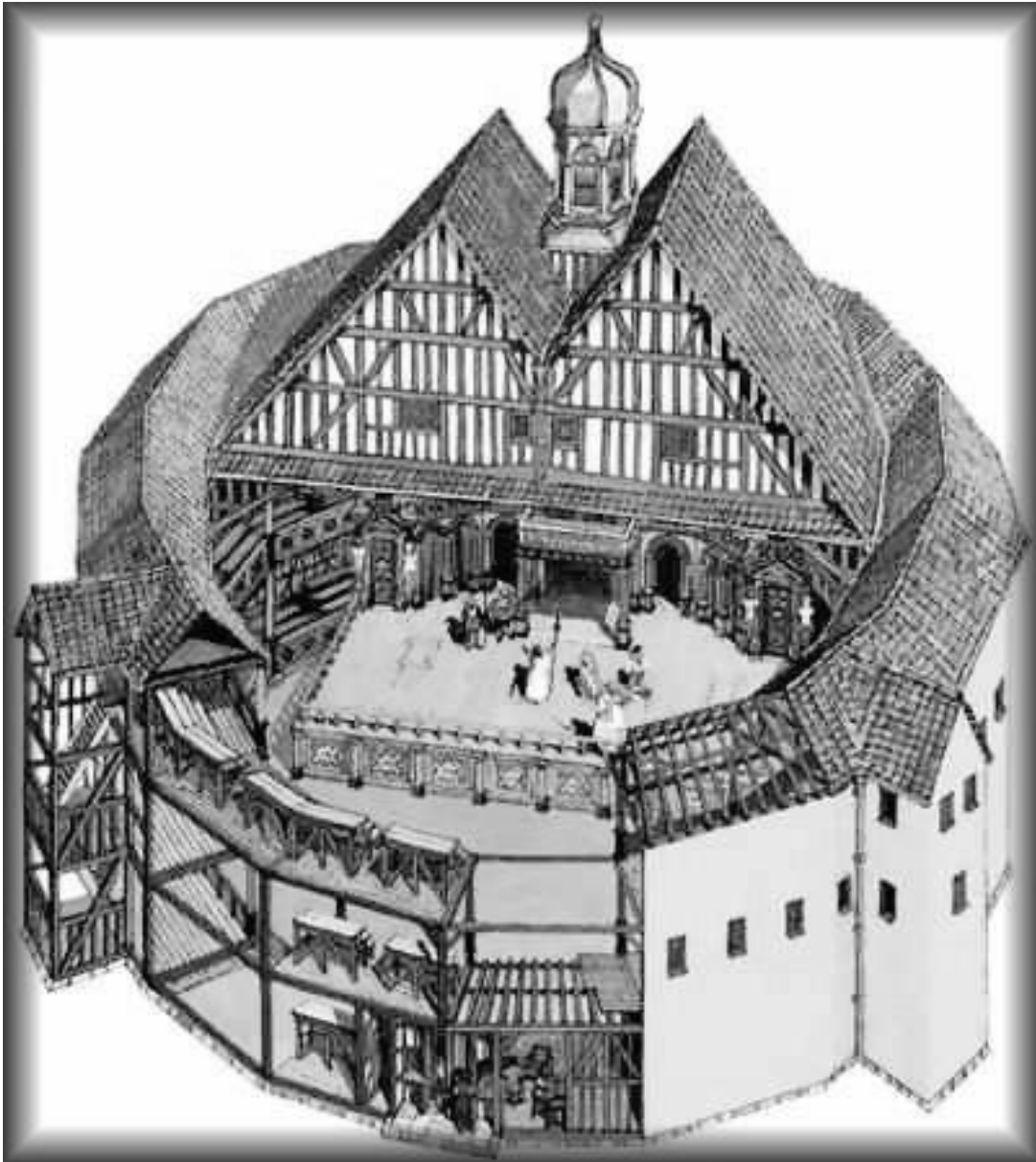
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Shakespearean Theatre Explained



Elizabethan Playhouses (Theatres)

- Playhouses offered something for everyone in Shakespeare's England. The plays covered a variety of themes that were not dissimilar to today's soap operas.
- When permanent playhouses first appeared, civic leaders and church authorities did not want them because of the threat of plague, riots and even rebellion.
- The playhouses provided just one of many colourful spectacles for the audience of the time, they also enjoyed public executions, bear baiting, fencing and public processions through the streets.

- It was lucky for playwrights in Shakespeare's time that the royals enjoyed the theatre - this fact made their plays far more popular than they might otherwise have been.

History of The Globe

- The Globe was built in about 1598 in London's Bankside district by Shakespeare's theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men.
- It could hold up to 3,000 spectators.
- In 1613, during a performance of Henry VIII, a misfired canon ball set the Globe on fire. In under two hours it burned to the ground but fortunately many of the props and costumes were saved. The theatre was rebuilt, this time with a tiled roof instead of a thatched one.
- In 1644, Puritans demolished the theatre and built housing on the site.

Trivia – Did you know?

- In 1572 the Poor Law classed actors in the same section as vagabonds, rogues and wandering beggars.
- Actors had to be good as audiences booed and hissed and even threw rotten vegetables at the stage if they didn't like what they saw.
- Women did not act, their parts were taken by young boys whose voices had not yet broken.
- Many of these boy actors died of poisoning because of the lead in their make-up.
- There was no copyright, a play was produced as soon as it was written and would be attended by scribes who would copy the play to be sold on to other theatre companies and shown elsewhere.
- There was very little rehearsal time and no breaks between scenes.
- The majority of plays in the Globe were shown in the summer because the stage was so open to the elements.
- Elizabethans said, 'I'm going to hear a play,' as opposed to, 'I'm going to see a play'.
- The audience had to use their imaginations because the backdrops, sets and costumes were practically non-existent.
- You might enjoy the 1998 film, 'Shakespeare in Love' starring Joseph Fiennes, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Affleck and Judi Dench amongst others.
- 'Bedlam beggars' – The name came from Bethlem Hospital in London, a facility for the mentally ill. It was established in the 1300s and is still in

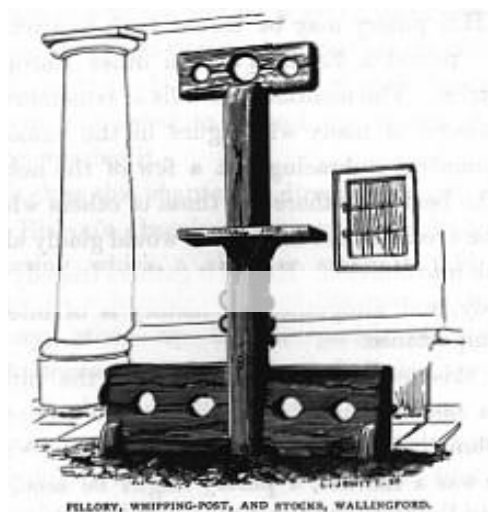
existence today, although conditions have obviously improved drastically over the last 750 years.

In Shakespeare's time, it was widely believed that patients who were discharged from the hospital were given licenses to beg, although the directors of the hospital denied this. Those beggars were known as 'Bedlam Beggars', 'Tom o' Bedlam' and a host of other names.

The word 'bedlam', meaning uproar and confusion, comes from the Bethlam hospital, reflecting the conditions there in its early days.



- Stocks - a common form of punishment. Kent's legs would have been locked between two boards and he would have been unable to move.



Introduction to 'King Lear'

Background

First performed in 1606 for the court of King James 1, 'King Lear' is one of Shakespeare's 'big four' tragedies in which the principal character dies at the end. The others are Othello, Macbeth and Hamlet.

The story itself had existed in various forms for many years before Shakespeare wrote the play. In other versions, Cordelia and Lear survived and overthrew the evil sisters. Shakespeare took what he wanted from the original version but added his own twist, producing one of the most enduring tragedies ever written.

The plot of 'King Lear' had a particular significance for Shakespeare's audience who would have feared the civil war and unrest that would come from a weak monarchy. England had recently experienced years of civil war and political turmoil and the people worried about the future of their country when Queen Elizabeth 1 failed to produce an heir. The crisis was resolved in 1603 when she appointed James 1V of Scotland as her heir. Their recent history had made it clear to the populace that strong, single leadership was essential to maintain peace and to stop various lords fighting amongst themselves, which would have weakened the country to the point where it would make an easy target for foreign invaders. It was Elizabeth's strong leadership which had saved them from an attempted Spanish invasion in 1588 and the memory of that was fresh in the minds of the people. They would have been horrified at Lear's plan to divide his kingdom and appalled at his poor judgement in selecting Goneril and Regan over Cordelia.



Note: In the above 'Long View' by Wenceslas Holler, the names of The Globe and the Bear Baiting (Beare bayting) theatre were mixed up somehow. The Globe is actually the building to the left

The Major Characters

King Lear-The main character. King Lear is an old man who has ruled for many years and enjoyed absolute power. We assume that he has never been contradicted or had his authority challenged. He appears quite shallow when we meet him first, seeking flattery from his daughters and not seeming to value true love and devotion and believing that he can give up the responsibility of kingship while maintaining the trappings and the power that go with being a king. We know, however, that Cordelia, Kent and Gloucester like and respect him so we feel there must be more to him than meets the eye.

Cordelia - Cordelia is, according to Lear, his youngest and his favourite daughter. She is difficult to fully understand as she is not very forthcoming with her emotions. Her refusal to declare her love for Lear is puzzling - she appears almost cold. However, we soon learn that others, Kent and the King of France, value her virtue and goodness and we begin to see that she is a truly good person; she even shows tolerance and gentleness towards Goneril and Regan, despite knowing what kind of people they are.

Goneril - Married to Albany, Lear's oldest daughter is ruthless, cruel and without morals. She holds her mild husband in contempt, takes control of the army and has an affair with the evil Edmund.

Regan - Married to the evil Cornwall, Lear's middle daughter is every bit as cruel as her sister and mirrors her in many ways, even having an affair with Edmund.

Gloucester - Gloucester mirrors Lear in the subplot. He misjudges his sons, believing Edmund when he tells him that Edgar is plotting against him. Although, like Lear, he appears weak when we first meet him, he does prove later that he is capable of bravery.

Edgar - Edgar (g = good) is Gloucester's legitimate son and the one who will inherit his estate. He changes many times throughout the play – from the credulous brother to the mad beggar to the brave hero. Like Cordelia, he is difficult to characterize.

Edmund - Edmund (m=mean/manipulative) Gloucester's younger, illegitimate son. Edmund resents his status as a bastard and plots to take his inheritance from Edgar. He is a clever, ruthless, manipulative character, who almost succeeds completely in his evil schemes.

Kent - A nobleman and a loyal follower of Lear. Having been banished, he disguises himself as 'Caius' a peasant who wants to serve Lear. Like the Fool, he is outspoken and frequently gets himself into trouble for this trait.

Albany - Goneril's husband, Albany is essentially a decent man, and he eventually stands up to Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall. However, he is a little weak and doesn't seem to be fully aware of all that is going on until it is almost too late.

Cornwall - Regan's husband. Unlike Albany, Cornwall is a brutal man who aids his wife and Goneril in their plots against Lear and Gloucester, seeming to relish the opportunity to persecute the old men.

Fool - Lear's jester. He uses his position to speak sense to Lear, even when it gets him into trouble. Although he doesn't agree with much that Lear has done, he remains loyal to him throughout the play and tries his best to protect him.

Oswald - The steward, or principal servant, in Goneril and Albany's house. Oswald obeys all Goneril's commands and helps her in her evil plots.

King Lear

Goneril
Albany

Regan
m. Cornwall

Cordelia
m. King of France

Gloucester

Edgar
(Good)

Edmund
(Bad)



The Settings

- Act 1, Scene 1: King Lear's palace
Act 1, Scene 2: A hall in the Earl of Gloucester's castle
Act 1, Scene 3: Goneril and the Duke of Albany's palace
Act 1, Scene 4: A hall in the same
Act 1, Scene 5: Outside Goneril and Albany's palace
Act 2, Scene 1: Gloucester's castle
Act 2, Scene 2: In front of Gloucester's castle
Act 2, Scene 3: Out on the heath/moor
Act 2, Scene 4: In front of Gloucester's castle, Kent in the stocks
Act 3, Scene 1: A heath in the middle of a storm
Act 3, Scene 2: Another part of the stormy heath
Act 3, Scene 3: Gloucester's castle
Act 3, Scene 4: On the heath, in front of a hovel/hut
Act 3, Scene 5: Gloucester's castle
Act 3, Scene 6: A chamber in a farmhouse near the castle
Act 3, Scene 7: Gloucester's castle
Act 4, Scene 1: The heath
Act 4, Scene 2: In front of Albany's palace
Act 4, Scene 3: The French camp near Dover
Act 4, Scene 4: A tent in the French camp near Dover
Act 4, Scene 5: Gloucester's castle
Act 4, Scene 6: Fields near Dover
Act 4, Scene 7: A tent in the French camp. Lear asleep on a bed
Act 5, Scene 1: The British camp, near Dover
Act 5, Scene 2: A field between the two camps
Act 5, Scene 3: The British camp near Dover



Plot Overview

The play opens with a conversation between the Earl of Gloucester and the Earl of Kent. Gloucester tells Kent that he has two sons: Edgar, who is legitimate and the younger Edmund, who is illegitimate. He jokes in a coarse way about Edmund's mother, not seeming to care that the young man is present and can hear every word. (Gloucester and his two sons will provide the subplot.) King Lear enters and announces that he intends to retire and to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Before he does this, however, he demands that the women declare their love for him publicly. Goneril and Regan flatter the king, telling him they love him more than they can say. Cordelia, Lear's acknowledged favourite, grows increasingly miserable as her turn approaches and when called upon, confesses that she cannot compete with what her sisters have said. She says she loves Lear as any good daughter would love a father, but no more. Lear, angry and publicly humiliated, banishes Cordelia and divides his entire kingdom between Goneril and Regan. He calls Cordelia's two suitors, Burgundy and France, and asks which of them will take Cordelia without a dowry. France is happy to do so and agrees to marry her. The Earl of Kent stands up for Cordelia, urging Lear to reconsider and the king banishes him also. Goneril and Regan confer privately, saying that if Lear becomes more troublesome with old age, they will have to deal with him.

Meanwhile, Edmund begins to plot against his father and contrives to make the credulous Gloucester believe that Edgar has written a letter urging his brother to help him to kill his father so that the sons can share his wealth between them. Gloucester needs little persuading and is quickly convinced that Edmund can be trusted and Edgar cannot.

Lear has planned to spend his retirement staying with first one daughter and then another and with this in mind, goes to Goneril's palace, bringing with him his one hundred knights. Kent, disguised as Caius, meets Lear and is taken into his service. Lear is not treated with respect in his daughter's home; Goneril has instructed her steward, Oswald to be rude to Lear and to encourage the rest of her servants to treat him the same way. Lear is shocked when Oswald is impolite to him and the loyal Kent/Caius trips Oswald, knocking him to the ground. Goneril appears and complains that Lear's knights are rowdy and tells her father that he should only keep a small, better behaved troop with him. She suggests fifty knights as a more appropriate number. Lear becomes outraged and storms out of her house, calling down terrible curses upon her. He says he will go to Regan and that she will treat him with more respect. Already, Lear is beginning to regret his rash decision to banish Cordelia. Goneril writes to Regan to tell her what has happened with their father and Regan, on receiving the letter, leaves for Gloucester's castle so she will not be at home when her father comes to stay.

In the subplot, Edmund persuades Edgar that his father is very angry with him for some undisclosed reason and advises Edgar to stay armed at all times. As Gloucester approaches, Edgar cuts himself with his sword and tells his father that Edgar injured him in a fight. Gloucester is shocked and vows to leave everything to Edmund instead of Edgar. Edgar, fleeing into the woods, disguises himself as a mad beggar and calls himself 'Poor Tom'. Meanwhile, Kent arrives at Gloucester's castle, seeking Regan and Cornwall in order to tell them that Lear is on his way. He sees Oswald, the servant who was rude to Lear in Goneril's palace and picks a fight with him. Oswald calls for help and a furious and unrepentant Kent is placed in the stocks by Cornwall and Regan.

Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle and is shocked to see his messenger, Caius (Kent) in the stocks. Goneril arrives at the castle also and a dismayed Lear soon realises that both daughters have joined forces against him. Enraged and highly agitated, he leaves the castle and with only the Fool for company, prepares to spend the night outdoors in the storm. Lear and the Fool meet Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom and the unlikely group prepare to spend the night together.

Back at the castle, Gloucester tells Edmund of a plot to save Lear, little knowing that his son cannot be trusted. Sure enough, Edmund goes straight to Cornwall with the tale of Gloucester's treason and is rewarded with his father's title and lands. Regan and Cornwall order that Gloucester be captured and when he is brought before them, they treat him with horrific cruelty. Cornwall, egged on by his wife, gouges out Gloucester's eyes. A servant who is nearby can stand this no longer and attacks Cornwall. Regan stabs the servant to death but Cornwall is badly wounded in the fight. Gloucester is thrown out of his own castle by the evil pair but the injured Cornwall succumbs to the injury inflicted on him by the servant and soon dies.

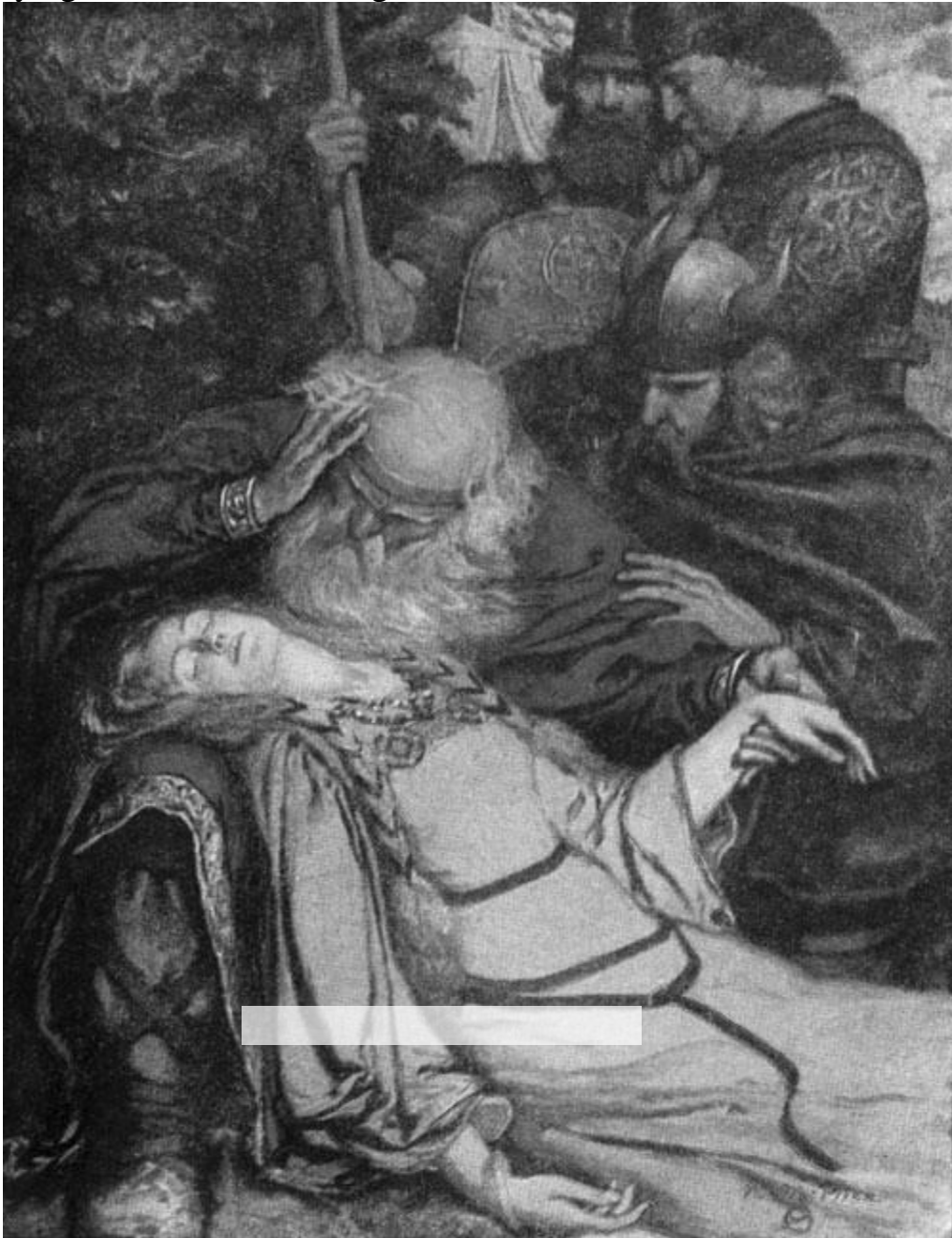
Edgar, still disguised as Poor Tim, is horrified to see his blinded father being led by a peasant and offers to be the one to lead Gloucester to Dover, where the unfortunate man intends to jump off a high cliff. Edgar pretends to Gloucester that they have reached the edge of the cliff and Gloucester jumps, losing consciousness as he does so. In fact, he is on solid ground and when he awakes, Edgar persuades him that he has survived an enormous fall. Oswald appears and tries to kill Gloucester but is himself killed by Edgar. Before he dies, Oswald gives Edgar a letter for Edmund in which Goneril asks Edmund to murder Albany and marry her.

Arriving home, Goneril discovers that Albany has taken Lear's side and is pleased that France is planning to invade. Soon, Cordelia and her French army arrive in Dover and she is reunited with her father. However, they are captured in the battle with the English and Edmund orders that they be executed. Goneril, Regan and Albany join Edmund and a fight breaks out between the disguised Edgar and his treacherous brother in which Edmund is mortally wounded. As he lies dying, he

confesses his guilt to Edgar and Edgar reveals his true identity to his brother, telling him also that their father, Gloucester is dead. Meanwhile, Regan, poisoned by Goneril, dies also and soon afterwards Goneril kills herself.

Edmund, just before he finally dies, admits that he and Goneril had ordered Lear and Cordelia executed. However, his admission comes too late to save Cordelia, whose body is carried in by a grief-stricken Lear. He cannot cope with this tragedy and dies as he holds her in his arms.

Albany tells Kent and Edgar that they must rule the kingdom between them but Kent refuses, saying he is too old and Edgar is left to rule alone.



Scene-by-Scene Summary

Summary: Act I, Scene 1 **King Lear's Palace**

The play opens with two noblemen, the Earl of Kent and the Earl of Gloucester discussing King Lear's plans to divide his kingdom. Also present is Edmund, Gloucester's son. Kent asks to be introduced and Gloucester tells him that Edmund is his younger, illegitimate son, saying that although he has been embarrassed to acknowledge him in the past, he is used to it now. He says he loves Edmund and his older brother equally but makes some crude jokes about Edmund's mother being fun in bed, not seeming to worry that his son can hear every word. Gloucester says that Edmund has lived away from home for the last nine years and will soon be gone again.

Lear enters with his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia; the Earl of Albany, Goneril's husband; the Earl of Cornwall, Regan's husband and assorted courtiers. He asks Gloucester to fetch the Lords of France and Burgundy. Gloucester and Edmund leave to do Lear's bidding.

Lear calls for a map and announces that he plans to divide his kingdom between his three daughters and spend his old age free from the responsibilities of rule. He says that this plan to divide his kingdom now will prevent fighting in the future. Lear also informs the court that the princes of France and Burgundy have both asked to marry his youngest daughter, Cordelia and he is now ready to give them his answer.

Explaining that he will give the largest portion of the country to the daughter who can prove she loves him the most, Lear calls on Goneril to speak first and to declare her love. Goneril does so in overblown terms of flattery and Cordelia, on hearing this, wonders what she can possibly say now. Regan follows her sister with similar words of adoration and Lear is pleased. Having given both sisters their share, he now turns to Cordelia and makes it clear that she is his favourite and that he is confident of being able to give her the largest share as he believes she will outdo her sisters' praise of their father. Cordelia says she cannot say anything and Lear gives her a second chance, advising her to think carefully lest she lose her portion of the kingdom. Cordelia tells Lear that she loves him exactly as much as a daughter ought to love her father but no more and that if her sisters love him as much as they claim, they must have no love left for their husbands. She says she will save half her love for her future husband. An incredulous Lear asks her if she means what she says and she replies that she does. Lear flies into a rage and instantly disowns her.

Kent tries to intervene but Lear warns him not to become involved, saying that he is furious that the daughter he loved the most and planned to live with in his old age could be so unloving. He divides Cordelia's share of the kingdom between her two sisters and announces that he will live with Goneril and Regan in turn, bringing with him one hundred knights. Kent tries again to speak up for Cordelia, saying that

although he has always honoured and loved Lear, he thinks he is behaving irrationally by banishing Cordelia, who loves her father more than her sisters do. Lear is enraged, threatening to draw his sword, but he is restrained by Albany and Cornwall. Kent, unabashed, says again that Lear is doing the wrong thing and advises him to think carefully before rewarding Goneril and Regan. Lear responds by banishing Kent also, giving him six days to leave the kingdom and vowing that if he is still in the country within ten days he will be killed. Kent says goodbye to Cordelia and tells her she has done nothing wrong. He turns to Goneril and Regan, wondering aloud if all their words of love mean anything and hoping that they treat Lear kindly.

Gloucester re-enters with the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy, Cordelia's suitors. Lear asks Burgundy if he will marry Cordelia now that she has no dowry and Burgundy refuses. Lear then advises France to withdraw his offer of marriage also, saying that he likes him too much to see him wed to such a wretch. France is puzzled, wondering what awful crime Cordelia must have committed to be so out of favour now, particularly when she was always her father's favourite. Cordelia tells him that she is in disgrace for refusing to flatter her father with false declarations of love and France, impressed by her honesty, asks Burgundy if he will marry her now, that her goodness is her dowry. Burgundy says that he will if Lear will give her a share of the kingdom but Lear refuses. Burgundy regretfully informs Lear that in disowning Cordelia, he has also lost Burgundy as a son-in-law. Cordelia tells Burgundy that she does not want to marry him either as he is a mere fortune hunter. France speaks up now and asks Cordelia to be his wife, saying that she is a prize in herself and he will gladly take her as his queen. Lear dismisses them both without his blessing and sweeps out, taking Burgundy, Cornwall, Albany, Gloucester and the various courtiers with him. Cordelia tells Goneril and Regan that she knows them for what they are and asks them to be kind to Lear. Regan and Goneril scornfully advise her to mind her own business and Cordelia leaves with France, saying before she does that time will no doubt reveal her sisters' hypocrisy.

Goneril and Regan now scheme together in secrecy to reduce their father's remaining authority. They claim he is becoming senile and point to his banishment of Cordelia and Kent as evidence of this.

Summary: Act I, Scene 2 A hall in the Duke of Gloucester's castle

Edmund enters, holding a letter and delivers a soliloquy expressing his bitterness at being an illegitimate son and therefore unable to inherit his father's estate. He speaks resentfully of Edgar, his legitimate half-brother, who is Gloucester's sole heir. It seems unfair to Edmund that just because he is the result of a union between his father and a pretty young woman, he is deemed a bastard; while Edmund, who is the product of a boring marriage, is given every advantage. He says that the letter he holds will help him to get rid of Edgar and thereby allow him, Edmund, to inherit everything that society has denied him.

Gloucester enters, bemoaning the state of affairs in Lear's court and sees Edgar pretending to hide the letter. Gloucester demands to see the letter and Edmund, feigning reluctance, hands it over, saying that it is from Edgar but is not suitable reading for Gloucester and may not even be true. On reading the forged letter, Gloucester is appalled to learn that Edgar is trying to get Edmund to join him in a plot to kill their father and share his lands and wealth between them. He asks Edmund where he got it and Edmund says it was thrown in his bedroom window. He pretends to hope it may not be written by Edgar at all, even though the handwriting is his. Gloucester asks if Edgar has ever mentioned anything like this before and Edmund says he has heard him say that young sons should rule, not old fathers. Gloucester is completely fooled and says Edgar is a villain and must be brought to justice. Edmund advises against moving too quickly, suggesting instead that he talks to Edgar and finds out the truth of the matter. Gloucester says that the recent eclipses have foretold something bad would happen and already Lear has acted against nature and now a son is turning against his father. He marvels also at a world gone mad in which a noble man like Kent can be banished for being honest. He leaves.

Alone again, Edmund gloats that his plan has been successful and mocks his father's belief in astrology, saying it is ridiculous that he is so stupid as to think that the stars and planets can influence anyone's behaviour. He claims that he would have been the same person no matter what his star sign was. He mentions Edgar and at that moment, Edgar appears, on cue. Edmund sneers privately at this opportune arrival and then pretends to be thinking of something else entirely as his brother draws closer. Edgar asks what he is thinking about and Edmund repeats his father's speech about planetary influence, pretending the words are his. Edgar is surprised at this but has no time to comment further as Edmund asks him in a worried tone if he has seen Gloucester recently and if they had an argument. Puzzled, Edgar says he saw him last night but there was no disagreement. Edmund advised him to think what he might have done to anger his father and counsels him to carry a weapon at all times. Now thoroughly alarmed, Edgar asks Edmund to keep him informed and leaves. Edmund again speaks contemptuously of his father's gullibility and his brother's nobility which prevents him from suspecting others of wrongdoing.

Summary: Act I, Scene 3 Goneril and Albany's palace

Lear is spending the first month of his retirement at Goneril's castle and she is unhappy with the situation, telling her steward, Oswald that Lear's knights are rowdy and out of control and Lear himself erratic and bad-tempered. Oswald, who has been struck by Lear for chastising the Fool, is only too ready to agree when Goneril tells him to be rude and discourteous to Lear and to advise the rest of the servants to behave the same way. She hears Lear coming and leaves, saying that she will write immediately to Regan so that she will support her in this plan to treat Lear with coldness.

Summary: Act I, Scene 4 A hall in Goneril and Albany's palace

Kent enters, disguised as a serving man and says that he plans to see if he can stay in the country and try to serve Lear in whatever way he can.

Lear enters with his knights and servants. The old king spots Kent and asks him what he wants. Kent says he is an honest man who wants to serve Lear. He pretends not to know who Lear is but says he sees nobility and authority in him. Lear asks what he can do if he is taken on as a serving man and Kent says he can ride, give sound advice and deliver a message bluntly if required. Lear is quite taken with him and tells him to come in to dinner with him and his knights and if he still likes him as much afterwards, perhaps he will employ him. He calls imperiously for his Fool and for his dinner.

Oswald enters and when Lear asks him where Goneril is, the steward rudely leaves without answering. Lear is astonished and asks a knight to call him back. The knight returns saying that Oswald refuses to come back and that this is not the first time Goneril's servants have been disrespectful to Lear's men. Lear is puzzled and annoyed and asks again where the Fool is. The knight tells him that he is mourning Cordelia's banishment but Lear is uncomfortable with that topic being raised and asks again for both Goneril and the Fool to be brought to him.

Oswald returns and speaks most disrespectfully to Lear, refusing to call him king and only referring to him as Goneril's father. Enraged, Lear strikes Oswald and Kent trips him, sending the steward sprawling. Lear is pleased with this loyalty from the rough looking serving man and thanks him. Kent pushes Oswald out of the room. Lear tips Kent for his support and praises him.

The Fool enters and in a series of jokes, puns and double entendres, says Lear he is the fool for handing over his kingdom to his daughters.

Goneril enters, frowning, and Lear asks her why she is upset, that she has been cross too often recently. The Fool says that it is a shame that Lear has put himself in such a weak position that he has to care about his eldest daughter's moods. Goneril explains coldly that she is tired of the Fool speaking his mind and tired of all Lear's retinue behaving badly. She says that she had thought initially it would be enough to draw the matter to Lear's attention but now she fears that he has actually been encouraging the knights and will not reprimand them as he should. The Fool sings that Lear is like a little sparrow that raised a cuckoo in its nest and had its head bitten off when the cuckoo grew into an adult bird. Goneril asks Lear to be more sensible and more like the man he used to be. Lear, astonished and annoyed, asks everyone who he is if he is not Lear. The Fool says he is a shadow of his former self. Lear pretends not to know who Goneril is either and asks her to tell him her name. Goneril is impatient with Lear's questions, which she considers typical of his recent behaviour and tells him that as his knights are turning her home into a cross between an inn and a

brothel, she wants him to get rid of most of them and just keep those who are older and wiser and know how to conduct themselves.

Lear is appalled and says he will leave immediately and go to Regan's house. Albany enters, asking what is going on. Lear begins to regret banishing Cordelia, realising too late that her fault was a small one compared to Goneril's betrayal. Albany tries to calm the situation, claiming that he had no part in whatever happened between his wife and Lear. Lear curses Goneril in the roundest terms, calling on nature to make her childless and praying that if she ever does have a child, that it be a constant torment to her. He leaves.

Albany turns to Goneril and asks again what is going on. Lear re-enters and asks Goneril if she really expects him to get rid of fifty of his knights. He cannot help tears from coming into his eyes, so distressed is he. He says that he will go to Regan who will be kind to him and probably attack Goneril for her cruel treatment of her father. He threatens to take back his kingship in order to wreak his revenge on Goneril and finally leaves for good with all his men.

When Lear has gone, Albany tries to tell Goneril how annoyed he is with the harsh way she has treated Lear but she impatiently ignores him, calling Oswald and sending him to Regan to tell her what has happened. She is sure Regan will back her up in her decision to reduce Lear's power. Oswald leaves. Turning to Albany, Goneril scornfully accuses her husband of being that both foolish and weak to take Lear's side in this.

Summary: Act I, Scene 5 Outside Goneril and Albany's palace

Lear sends Kent to deliver a message to Regan whose palace is in the city of Gloucester. The Fool tries to distract Lear and makes pointed jokes about his bad decisions, saying that Regan will treat Lear no better than Goneril did. He says that although Lear is old, he is far from wise. Lear calls on heaven to keep him from going mad. The horses are brought up and Lear and his men leave for Regan's palace.

Summary: Act II, Scene 1 Gloucester's castle

Edmund meets Gloucester's servant, Curan, who says that he has just told Edmund's father that Regan and Cornwall are on their way and will be with him shortly. Edmund asks why they are coming and Curan says he doesn't know. He then asks Edmund if he has heard any rumours of trouble brewing between Cornwall and Albany. Edmund says he has not and Curan says he may hear them before long. He leaves and Edmund, alone for a moment, expresses his delight at the news that Cornwall is on his way. He says that he already has Gloucester fearing Edgar will attack him and now the arrival of the duke will provide another opportunity to further his plotting against Edgar.

Edmund calls Edgar to come out from where he is hiding and tells him he must flee immediately, that news of his hiding place has leaked out. He says that as it is night, Edgar will be able to escape easily. Before he allows him to go, however, he asks if he has taken sides in the disagreement between Cornwall and Albany and hints that the duke and his wife are on their way because they are so angry with Edgar. Edgar has no idea what is going on, he is completely bewildered.

Suddenly, Edmund says that he hears Gloucester coming and tells Edgar to take out his sword and pretend to fight him. Edmund calls loudly for help, while telling Edgar in an undertone to run away. Edgar flees.

Edmund says to himself that a wound would make his story more convincing. He cuts his arm with his own sword, steeling his nerves to do it by reminding himself that he has seen drunkards hurt themselves more seriously and take no notice of it.

Gloucester enters with servants and torches. He asks where Edgar is and Edmund, after drawing attention to his own injury, says his brother has just fled. Gloucester sends some servants to hunt him down and then asks what Edgar wanted Edmund to do. Edmund says that Edgar tried to persuade him to help him kill Gloucester but that he refused, telling Edgar that such a thing would be unnatural and wrong. Edgar, he claims, was so angry at this that he attacked Edmund but ran away soon after, possibly because he was frightened by Edmund's bravery or by his cries for help.

Gloucester says he will have Edgar hunted down and that anyone who hides him will be killed also. Edmund cunningly tells Gloucester that Edgar threatened him that if he tried to expose the treacherous plot, nobody would believe him as he is a bastard; they would all believe Edgar's version of events.

Gloucester praises Edmund for being such a good and natural son and promises he will see to it that Edmund inherits everything.

Cornwall and Regan arrive. They are shocked to hear of Edgar's alleged treachery. Regan immediately links him to Lear, saying that Edgar was her father's godson and asking if he was a companion of Lear's rowdy knights. Edmund replies that he was and Regan says it should be no surprise then that he is so evil, speculating that those knights probably encouraged him in his plot to kill Gloucester in order to get his wealth. She says Goneril has written to her about these knights and she has left her home so that she would not be there when they arrive with Lear.

Cornwall praises Edmund for protecting his father and vows that Edgar will be caught and killed. Furthermore, he takes Edmund into his service, saying he needs men like him, full of virtue and obedience. Regan then tells Gloucester that she has had letters from both Lear and Goneril, both complaining about the other and she would like Gloucester's advice on how to deal with the situation. Gloucester says he will be happy to help and they all leave the stage.

Summary: Act II, Scene 2 In front of Gloucester's castle

Kent, disguised as Caius, meets Oswald as they both arrive at Gloucester's castle. Oswald, not remembering Kent from their meeting in Goneril's palace, asks Kent where he can stable his horses. Kent replies rudely that he can stable them in the mud for all he cares and then verbally abuses Oswald, calling him a coward, a beggar, a vain fool and a number of other insults. Oswald says he doesn't know who Kent is and Kent tells him that he ought to, as it is only two days since he tripped him for being discourteous to Lear. He draws his sword and tells Oswald to get ready to fight. Oswald refuses, calling for help as Kent beats him with the flat of his sword.

Edmund, having heard Oswald's cry for help, rushes in with his own sword drawn and Kent says he will fight him too. At this moment, Cornwall, Regan and Gloucester arrive and ask what is going on. Regan recognises that the pair are messengers from her sister and from Lear. Cornwall asks what is going on. Oswald replies that he was attacked by Kent but spared him as he is an old man. Kent is enraged and insults Oswald at length again, calling him a coward and a liar. Cornwall asks why Kent dislikes Oswald so much and Kent replies that he doesn't like his face. Cornwall, seeming to think this is not much of an excuse, says that maybe Kent doesn't like any of their faces either and Kent agrees that he has seen faces he's liked more in the past. Cornwall tells the others that he knows what kind of fellow Kent is, one who has been praised in the past for being plain-spoken and who now behave very badly as a result. Kent speaks very politely for a few lines, just to show Cornwall he knows how to do it. He tells the confused Cornwall that Oswald uses his politeness to fool others into believing he is a decent man but he, Kent, cannot do the same, even if his bluntness should get him into trouble. Oswald is asked what he did to annoy Kent and he replies that he did nothing and tells Cornwall of the tripping incident in Goneril's palace and how Lear approved of this treatment of his daughter's steward.

Cornwall orders that Kent be placed in the stocks. Kent points out that he is too old to be taught a lesson and that furthermore, he is the king's messenger. Cornwall doesn't care and says he will sit in the stocks till noon. Regan intervenes and says he should stay in them all day and all night. Kent says they wouldn't treat Lear's dog this way. Regan says he is Lear's knave and she will treat him however she likes. Cornwall says Kent is obviously one of Lear's riotous followers; Goneril has spoke of them.

Gloucester tries to speak up for Kent, saying Lear will take it badly if his messenger is treated so disrespectfully. Cornwall and Regan don't care, they say Goneril would be offended if the man who insulted her steward went unpunished. They leave and Gloucester apologises to Kent, saying it is all Cornwall's doing and that it is very hard to change the mind of a man like that. He leaves and Kent takes out a letter from Cordelia, in which she says she knows of his disguise and she will do her best to sort out the situation in Britain, even though she is in France.

Summary: Act II, Scene 3 Out on the heath/moor

Edgar enters. He announces that he has heard himself declared an outlaw but has escaped the manhunt by hiding in a hollow tree. He realises that he has been lucky so far to evade capture but knows if he wishes to remain free, he must take more drastic measures. He decides to take off his fine clothing, cover himself with mud and filth and tangle his hair. This way, he thinks he will be able to pretend to be a 'bedlam beggar' (see page 4). This may be a horrible way to live, but it is better than being caught and executed.

Summary: Act II, Scene 4 In front of Gloucester's castle, Kent in the stocks

Lear, the Fool and one of Lear's attendants (Gentleman) enter. Lear says he is puzzled that Regan was not at home when he called and wonders why they did not send Kent, his messenger, back to him. His attendant says that Regan and Cornwall had shown no signs of planning to leave, it must have been a sudden decision.

Kent greets Lear politely and Lear is appalled to see him locked in the stocks, seeing it as an incredible insult to his authority. He asks who put him there and cannot believe it when Kent says that it was Regan and Cornwall. Lear denies it five times, saying it's not possible but Kent assures him it is the truth. He tells Lear that when he arrived at Regan's home with the message that Lear was on his way, a letter arrived from Goneril at the same time. Regan and Cornwall read it and immediately left home, commanding Kent to follow them to Gloucester's castle and telling him coldly that they would give him an answer for Lear later on. He goes on to describe his fight with Oswald and explains that that is why he is in the stocks now.

Lear is extremely distressed and finds it difficult to stay calm. He asks where Regan is and on learning that she is inside with Cornwall, goes to speak to her alone.

Kent asks the Gentleman why so few of Lear's attendants are with him still. The fool explains in riddles that most of them have deserted Lear, seeing that he is out of favour with the new queens and their husbands. He says they are like fair weather friends but that he, the Fool, will stay with his master.

Lear re-enters, with Gloucester. Gloucester has told Lear that Regan and Cornwall refuse to speak to him, saying they are sick and weary from travelling. Lear is furious, especially when Gloucester says that he has 'informed' Regan and Cornwall of Lear's desire to speak to them. Lear says they should be *commanded* to speak to him and is enraged that Gloucester seems to fear Cornwall's temper. Suddenly, however, Lear has a change of heart, trying to convince himself that Cornwall may really be sick and that he may be behaving oddly as a result. Looking at Kent in the stocks again, however, Lear has an equally sudden change of heart in the other direction and demands once more that his daughter and the Duke come to him, saying he will beat a drum at their bedroom door if necessary, until they agree to speak to him.

Gloucester is concerned that Lear may fall out with Regan and Cornwall and says he wishes they would get on well. On Lear's orders, he goes to fetch Regan and Cornwall. Lear again struggles with his rising emotions, trying to control his rage and his heartbreak.

Gloucester returns with Cornwall, Regan and some servants. They greet one another and Kent is set free from the stocks. Regan says that she is glad to see her father and he says he would assume she is, or she would be no daughter of his. He sees Kent freed, but says he will talk of that later. Turning to Regan, he tells her how unkindly Goneril has treated him and how upset he is. Regan appears to doubt his story, saying it is more likely that he is wrong than that Goneril behaved badly. An incredulous Lear asks her what she means and she says that Goneril was probably within her rights to complain about Lear's riotous knights. Lear curses Goneril but Regan tells him that he is old and near death and should be led by those who know better than him. She advises him to go back to Goneril and beg her forgiveness.

Lear admitting that he is old, says that to go back to Goneril would be most unfitting for the head of the house and gets down on his knees, begging for food, clothes and shelter.

Regan tells him this behaviour is unseemly and advises him again to go back to her sister. Rising, Lear refuses, saying that Goneril wanted him to give up half his knights and he begins to curse her ingratitude. Cornwall chides him but Lear continues to curse and Regan says that soon he will curse her this way too, when he loses his temper with her. Lear says that he will never curse Regan as she is gentler and kinder than Goneril and would never ask him to give up half his men or treat him so coldly that she would leave home when she knew he was coming. Regan, says Lear, knows how to show her gratitude for being given half the kingdom.

A trumpet sounds, announcing an arrival at the castle. Regan tells Cornwall that it is Goneril, who had said in her letter that she would come.

Oswald enters and Lear, recognising him as Goneril's rude steward, tells him to get out. Reminded again of Kent, he asks who locked him in the stocks. He says to Regan that he hopes she knew nothing about it. Suddenly, to his dismay, he sees Goneril enter. He asks her how she can dare to face him and then is appalled to see Regan take her hand and greet her warmly. Goneril says she has done nothing wrong, that his version of events is that of a senile old man. Lear, now very distressed, asks again why Kent was put in the stocks. Cornwall says he had him placed there and that his behaviour warranted even worse punishment. Lear can hardly believe his ears.

Regan advises Lear to admit that he is weak and to go back to Goneril until the end of the month, dismissing half his knights at the same time. She says he can come to her after that, as had been originally arranged.

Lear says that he has no intention of going to Goneril's palace and would rather sleep

in the open air or beg the King of France to take him in or even become Oswald's slave than go to her. Goneril says that the choice is his.

Lear tells her not to talk to him, that she is no daughter of his and says that she will get her just desserts in the fullness of time and come to him asking forgiveness. He says he and his hundred knights will stay with Regan.

Regan says that she is not ready for him and tells him to listen to Goneril and to realise that he is not fit to decide what is best for him. She asks him why he needs so many followers, that it is expensive to keep them and difficult to keep them from fighting with her own knights. Goneril suggests that Lear allow her servants, or Regan's to attend to him when he is staying with them. Regan agrees with this and says if Lear comes to her, that he may only bring twenty five followers.

Lear reminds her that he gave them everything. Goneril says it was just in time, implying that he was not capable of ruling.

Lear asks again if he must really limit himself to twenty five followers and, on hearing that he must, turns to Goneril and says that he'll go to her so, as she will allow him fifty. She says she has reconsidered and now wonders why he needs many, or even five? Regan agrees, saying he needs none.

Lear says that it is not a question of need, that if people only had what they needed, they would be no better than animals. He is humiliated and dreadfully upset. He tries very hard not to cry and curses his daughters, threatening them with terrible vengeance. However, powerless as he is now, he cannot think what form this revenge may take. He leaves with Gloucester, Kent and the Fool.

Goneril and Regan agree together that they did the right thing.

Gloucester returns and says that in a furious rage, Lear called for his horse and is going somewhere, Gloucester doesn't know where. Cornwall says it's his best to let him go and Goneril warns Gloucester not to beg him to stay. Gloucester unhappily points out that it is a stormy night but Regan says he must be locked out so he will learn a lesson. She says he is attended by unruly men and that they might incite him to violence if he stayed.

Cornwall agrees with her and tells Gloucester to lock his doors against both Lear and the storm.

Summary: Act III, scene 1 A heath in the middle of a storm

Kent, out looking for Lear, meets a Gentleman, one of Lear's knights. Kent asks where Lear is and is told that he is wandering through the storm, raving and raging, with only the Fool for company. The Fool is, apparently, trying to cheer Lear up with jokes.

Kent gives the knight some secret information, that the Dukes of Cornwall and

Albany are not getting on at all well and that there are French spies in their courts who have seen this and reported back on their quarrels and their harsh treatment of Lear. The French, believing civil war to be near at hand, have secretly landed at English ports and are only waiting for the opportunity to show themselves.

Kent asks the knight to go to Cordelia in Dover and ask for help for Lear. He assures the knight that despite his lowly appearance, (disguised as Gaius) he is a nobleman. The knight agrees to go to Cordelia but wants to ask Kent some more questions. Kent tells him he can't talk now but asks the knight to trust him, giving him a ring to show Cordelia as proof of the source of the information. The pair part, each agreeing that if they come upon the king first, they will call the other.

Summary: Act III, Scene 2 Another part of the stormy heath

Lear and the Fool enter. In one of his most famous speeches, Lear calls to the storm to destroy him and the world, challenging it to do its worst. The Fool begs him to see shelter and to return to his daughters, humbling himself before them if necessary.

Lear ignores him and keeps raving at the storm, cursing his daughters at the same time and asking the storm to destroy them.

Kent finds them and tells them that it is too wild a night to remain outdoors. He says he has never experienced such a bad storm. Lear continues ranting and Kent draws his attention to a hut nearby. He tells Lear to go in and wait there, while he, Kent returns to Gloucester's castle and forces Cornwall and Regan to open the doors.

Lear suddenly turns to the Fool and, seeming to realise that he has been behaving irrationally, kindly asks the Fool if he is cold. He agrees to go into the hut as he feels sorry for the Fool.

Lear asks Kent to guide him and the pair go into the hut, which is off-stage. The Fool, alone for a moment, makes a strange prophecy, saying that the world is in turmoil and things will get worse.

Summary: Act III, Scene 3 Gloucester's castle

Gloucester tells Edmund that he is very unhappy with the recent turn of events. When he asked Cornwall and Regan to allow him to show some kindness and pity to Lear, they responded by taking over his house and telling him he was not allowed to go to Lear's aid.

Edmund condemns this behaviour as savage and unnatural.

Gloucester tells Edmund that there is trouble between Cornwall and Albany. He tells Edmund about the French invasion and says there is a letter about it hidden in his room. He asks Edmund to distract Cornwall while he, Gloucester, goes to find Lear.

He knows that if he is caught helping Lear he will be killed but thinks it is worth the risk and tells Edmund to say he is sick in bed if his absence is noticed. He leaves.

Edmund is delighted with this chance to betray his father and plans to go straight to Cornwall with the letter and the information, knowing he will probably be given his father's land, title and wealth as a reward when Gloucester is executed for treason.

Summary: Act III, Scene 4 On the heath, in front of a hovel/hut

Kent enters with Lear and the Fool. He tries to persuade Lear to go into the hut but Lear tells him to leave him alone. He says that the storm is nothing compared to the torment of his mind and that he is so distraught by his daughters' ingratitude that he doesn't care about taking shelter. He tells the Fool to go into the hut, which he does. Lear reflects that, as a king, he never took the plight of the homeless and the poor into account and he regrets it now.

A voice (Edgar's) from inside the hut, shouts out some nonsense and the Fool rushes out, crying that there is a spirit inside. Kent comforts him and asks what the problem is. The fool tells him that a creature calling itself Poor Tom is inside and Kent calls for him to come out.

Edgar, disguised as a madman, comes out. Lear asks him if he has gone mad because he gave everything to his two daughters and is now reduced to this state. Edgar talks more nonsense, claiming that he is being chased by a demon and that he is possessed. Lear, who is becoming less and less in touch with reality, asks him sympathetically if his daughters are responsible and if he gave them all his possessions. The Fool jokes that they left him a blanket to cover his nudity, at least.

Kent tries to talk sense to Lear, saying that Poor Tom has no daughters but Lear scoffs at this, saying only daughters could have brought him so low. Lear asks Tom what he was before he became a mad beggar and Edgar says he was a rich courtier who spent his time on wine and women.

Lear notices Edgar's nakedness and asks if that is all man is, at the end of the day, a lowly creature such as this. He tears off his own clothes, despite the Fool's protestations.

Gloucester enters, carrying a torch. Edgar talks more nonsense, saying Gloucester is a fiend. Kent asks Gloucester to identify himself and Gloucester responds by asking who they all are. Edgar stays in character and raves crazily.

Gloucester, unimpressed, asks Lear if he has no better company. He sympathises with Lear's predicament, saying that they both have vile children who hate them. He tells Lear that he has found a place where he can shelter and have some food. Lear wants to stay and talk to Edgar and Kent and Gloucester comment on how unhinged his mind has become. Gloucester says it is hard to blame him, when his daughters want him dead. He confides in Kent that he knows how Lear feels, as he has a son,

recently outlawed, who sought to kill him. He says the grief nearly drove him mad too.

The storm rages on and Lear finally agrees to go inside, but only if he can bring Poor Tom with him. He has taken a fancy to him and calls him a noble philosopher. Soothingly, Gloucester leads them away with him.

Summary: Act III, Scene 5 Gloucester's castle

Cornwall and Edmund enter. Cornwall says he will have revenge on Gloucester for his treason. Edmund pretends to be upset at having to turn his father in and says it may be unnatural behaviour in a son. Cornwall tells Edmund that Edgar's wishing to kill his father now seems slightly more acceptable, since he deserves it.

Edmund shows Cornwall Gloucester's letter about the French invasion and again pretends to wish that Gloucester was not a traitor or that he, Edmund, was not the one who found out and had to tell Cornwall. Cornwall asks Edmund to go with him to Regan, to tell her the story. Edmund says that if the contents of the letter are true, Cornwall has a difficult task ahead of him, repelling an invasion. Cornwall replies that whether the letter is true or not, it has made Edmund Earl of Gloucester. He tells Edmund to find his father so that he can be arrested.

Edmund says in an aside (a private thought spoken aloud that only the audience is supposed to be able to hear, not the other characters on stage) that if he finds his father helping Lear, it will give his story more credence. He tells Cornwall that he will do as he asks, even though it will cause a conflict between his loyalty to Cornwall and his loyalty to his father.

Cornwall tells Edmund that he trusts him and will be as a father to him from now on.

Summary: Act III, Scene 5 A chamber in a farmhouse near the castle

Gloucester, Lear, Kent, The Fool and Edgar enter. Gloucester says that this is better than being out in the storm and he will make them as comfortable as he can. Kent thanks him, saying that Lear has, in his passion, lost his mind. Gloucester leaves to get food and warm clothing.

Edgar and the Fool exchange mad speeches and Lear decides to hold a mock trial of his evil daughters. He makes Poor Tom/Edgar the judge and calling the Fool a wise man, asks him to sit and listen. Kent tries to persuade Lear to rest but Lear insists on having the trial, making Kent become involved too. The 'trial' is simply three madmen ranting crazily and Kent is heartbroken to see Lear so reduced. He tries again to calm Lear down.

Gloucester returns with provisions. Kent tells him that Lear is completely insane now and Gloucester asks him to carry Lear out to a litter that is waiting as there is a

plot afoot to kill the king. He asks Kent to drive Lear to Dover where friends await him. Kent gets the fool to help him and the three men carry Lear away.

Edgar, left behind, grieves for Lear and says that it is sad to see him in this state. He feels that his own troubles are not as important as he had once thought them, now that he sees Lear's suffering.

Summary: Act III, scene 7 Gloucester's castle

Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, Edmund and servants enter. Cornwall tells Goneril to bring Gloucester's treasonous letter to her husband, Albany as quickly as she can and to tell him that the French have landed. He orders his servants to find Gloucester so he can be punished as a traitor. The servants leave.

Regan says that Gloucester should be hanged and Goneril says he should have his eyes plucked out. Cornwall tells them to leave it to him and advises Edmund to go with Goneril to her palace as he should not see what they are going to do to Gloucester when they catch him.

Oswald enters and announces that Lear has been taken to Dover, accompanied by around three dozen knights. They were boasting that they had well-armed allies in Dover. Gloucester was responsible for helping Lear to escape.

Oswald is sent to get horses for Goneril and she and Edmund leave. Cornwall instructs his servants to find Gloucester and tie him up like a thief. The servants leave.

Cornwall says that although he may not have the authority to execute Gloucester without a trial, he can certainly punish him, no matter what people think.

The servants re-enter with Gloucester. Cornwall tells them to tie his old arms up tightly. Gloucester asks them to reconsider, pointing out they are his guests in his home. The servants begin to tie him up, encouraged to do so even more tightly by Regan who calls him a 'filthy traitor'. She pulls hair from his beard and insults him. Gloucester is shocked at this treatment and again asks them why they are treating him this way. Cornwall and Regan tell him they know about the letter from France and ask him to whom he has sent the mad king. Gloucester tries to claim that the letter was from a neutral party but they do not believe him. He admits that he sent Lear to Dover and under more questioning, his anger flashes up and he says he sent him there to protect him from his two evil daughters who turned him out in the storm and would probably have plucked out his eyes if they got the chance. Gloucester swears he will see justice for Lear.

Cornwall says he will never see and gouges out Gloucester's eye, throwing it to the floor and stamping on it. Regan encourages him to pluck out the other eye too.

A servant of Cornwall's, who has served him since he was a child, cannot stand by and watch this any more. He draws his sword and attacks Cornwall, who fights back.

The servant wounds Cornwall but Regan, taking another sword, stabs the servant in the back, killing him.

Enraged, Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's other eye and the blinded man calls for Edmund in his pain and terror. Regan gleefully tells him that it was Edmund who betrayed him and Gloucester realises that he has wrongly banished Edgar, whom he prays now the gods will help.

Regan tells a servant to throw Gloucester out, saying he can smell his way to Dover. She turns to Cornwall to see how badly injured he is. He says he is bleeding profusely and Regan leads him out.

The servants, left alone, decide to follow Gloucester with some ointment and bandages and to get Poor Tom to lead him to safety as he is clearly deeply distressed.

Summary: Act IV, scene 1 The heath

Edgar is on the heath, saying that although his situation is bad, he has reached rock bottom and things can only get better. Suddenly, he sees the blinded Gloucester being led towards him by an old man. Edgar is horrified to see his father so dreadfully injured.

They draw nearer, the old man telling Gloucester that he has been a tenant of both Gloucester and Gloucester's father for eighty years. Gloucester tells him to leave him, that he cannot be comforted and to help him might place the man in danger. He laments his lost son, Edgar, saying if only he could touch him once more, he would be happy.

The old man sees the disguised Edgar, who says in an aside that he had been wrong earlier to say that things could not get any worse. The old man tells Gloucester that it is a poor mad beggar and Gloucester wonders if he is the same fellow from the night before. He said in an odd way, he was reminded of Edgar when he saw that man last night, but reflects that the gods play cruel tricks on people.

Edgar, deciding to remain disguised, introduces himself. Gloucester sends the old man away to get some clothes for Poor Tom/Edgar and says he will ask him to lead him to Dover. The old man agrees to get some clothing and to meet them later. He leaves.

Edgar, tormented to be so close to his injured father and not feeling that he can reveal himself, talks gibberish but consents to lead Gloucester to Dover, or more specifically, to a high cliff in Dover. Gloucester gives Edgar a purse full of money, saying that he is happy to give it to one who needs it more than he does. Gloucester says when he reaches the cliff he will reward Poor Tom/Edgar and won't need to be led any further.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 2 In front of Albany's palace

Goneril and Edmund arrive at her palace and Goneril says she is surprised that Albany did not come and meet them on the way. Oswald approaches and when asked, says that Albany is a changed man - happy that the French army have landed and sad that Goneril is home again. When Oswald told him of Gloucester's treachery and of Edmund's loyalty to Cornwall, he was angry and called Oswald a fool who was on the wrong side.

Goneril tells Edmund not to come in with her, criticising Albany's cowardice. She tells Edmund to go back to Cornwall's palace and get his army ready to fight while she will take over charge of Albany's army. She kisses him and gives him a 'favour' (something to remember her by, possibly a handkerchief or a small piece of jewellery). She hints that she would like to give him more and we gather that she would like to be his lover. Edmund leaves.

Goneril comments on her difficulties, left to deal with a foolish husband. Oswald announces that Albany is approaching and then leaves the stage.

Albany enters and Goneril sarcastically remarks that she is glad she was worth meeting. Albany tells her she is worth nothing and that she has a very bad nature. Goneril is impatient with his criticism but he continues, telling her that he is irate at the treatment she and Regan and Cornwall have meted out to Lear. He is horrified that Lear has been driven mad and scandalised that Cornwall, who has Lear to thank for all his power, could participate in such a scheme.

Goneril insults Albany, calling him a weak, cowardly man who ought to be busying himself getting ready to fight the French instead of moaning and wailing over the punishment of men who deserved it. Albany calls her a devil, saying such behaviour is even more unnatural in a woman. He says he would like to kill her and is barely restraining himself from doing so. Goneril scorns him and doesn't care about his anger.

A servant enters with news that Cornwall has died from the wound inflicted on him by the man who tried to stop him gouging out Gloucester's eyes. Albany is appalled to hear that Gloucester was blinded and thinks that Cornwall's death is punishment from the gods for his evil ways. The servant gives Goneril a letter from Regan.

In an aside, Goneril says that she has mixed feelings about the news she has just heard. She is glad Regan is not so powerful now that her husband is dead but at the same time she worries that **this now leaves her sister** free to marry Edmund. She tells the messenger she will read the letter and write a reply. She leaves.

Albany asks the messenger where Edmund was when Gloucester was blinded and is told that he accompanied Goneril to Albany's palace. Albany asks where he is now and the messenger says he is on his way back to Regan. On being questioned further, the messenger tells Albany that Edmund did know what was going to happen his father and left on purpose so his presence wouldn't prevent Cornwall inflicting

horrible punishments on Gloucester. Albany says that he is grateful to Gloucester for the friendship he has shown Lear and promises to seek revenge on those responsible for his blinding. He leaves with the messenger, asking him as they go to tell him all he knows.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 3 The French camp near Dover

Kent and a Gentleman enter, talking about the King of France, who has had to leave England suddenly to deal with an urgent problem in his own country. He has left the Marshal of France, Monsieur la Far, to lead the army in his absence, under Cordelia.

Kent asks him if Cordelia received his letters and the Gentleman says that she did and cried when she read them, though she composed herself with queenly dignity. Kent asks if she had any questions and the Gentleman says that she cried, 'Father' in heartbroken tones once or twice as she read, and also called out in horror at the news of her sisters' treatment of Lear.

Kent tells the Gentleman that Lear is in town but refuses to see Cordelia as he is so ashamed of the way he treated her. He asks if there is any news of Albany and Cornwall's troops and learns that they are on the march. Kent says he must go and that it is necessary for him to remain disguised for a while. He thanks the man for his friendship and they leave to find Lear so that the Gentleman and Cordelia's attendants can take care of him.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 4 A tent in the French camp near Dover

Cordelia enters with a doctor and soldiers. She says sadly that Lear is hiding from her, running through the fields, covering himself with weeds and singing madly. She sends a hundred soldiers to search for him and bring him to her. She asks the doctor if there is any chance of Lear regaining his sanity. The doctor says that if he can rest enough, he may recover. He says he has sleeping potions which should help.

A messenger enters with the news that the British forces are marching towards them. Cordelia says she had expected this and that her army is ready to fight them. She says she is doing this for Lear and not for any reasons of personal gain or ambition. Love is her motivation.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 5 Gloucester's castle

Regan and Oswald are talking; he tells her that Albany has at last been persuaded to set his army on the march, having made a big fuss about it. In Oswald's opinion, Goneril is clearly a better soldier than Albany.

Regan is more interested in Edmund, asking if he spoke to Albany and what the letter from Goneril to Edmund is about. Oswald says he doesn't know what's in the letter.

Regan muses that it was a mistake to let Gloucester live once they had put out his eyes and says that he is likely to stir up sentiment against her by provoking sympathy in those he meets. She mentions that Edmund is gone to seek him out and kill him and to spy on the French army. Oswald says he must go after Edmund to give him the letter from Goneril. Regan asks him to stay as the roads are dangerous. Oswald refuses, saying he has to do his duty by Goneril. Regan is most curious about the letter, wondering what was so secret that she could not tell it to Oswald to tell to Edmund. She begs Oswald to show her the letter but he refuses. Regan says she knows that Goneril does not love Albany and asks Oswald if he noticed her sister flirting with Edmund. Oswald will not be drawn so Regan has to content herself with asking him to bring Edmund the information that Cornwall is dead and she is free to marry him. She advises Oswald to tell Goneril to stop pursuing Edmund as she, Regan, has won his love. Finally, she asks Oswald to kill Gloucester if he meets him, promising a large reward if he succeeds.

Oswald says he will show Gloucester whose side he is on if he does meet him and they part.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 6 Fields near Dover

The disguised Edgar enters, now wearing the clothes that the old man gave him. Gloucester asks when they will reach the top of the cliff and Edgar tells him they are getting near it. He asks if Gloucester can hear the sea. Gloucester says he can't and Edgar tells him his hearing must be affected by his blindness. Gloucester says he thinks Edgar sounds different, better spoken than before. Edgar assures him he is not and pretends they have reached dizzying heights at the top of the cliff. He describes the beach below and says he feels ill, looking down at it, it is so far away. Gloucester, not knowing that they are really on level ground, asks to be led to the edge and pays Edgar off with a jewel.

Edgar says to himself that he is doing this seemingly cruel thing to cure Gloucester. Meanwhile, Gloucester, praying that the gods may forgive him and keep Edgar safe, wherever he is, throws himself forward, falling to the ground, losing consciousness as he does so.

Edgar wakes Gloucester and now pretends to be another character, an ordinary gentleman who saw Gloucester falling from the cliff. He describes the fall in great detail and says that he **thought he saw a demon at the top of the cliff** with Gloucester before he fell. He tells Gloucester that the gods obviously want him to live and Gloucester accepts this and says he will bear his sufferings patiently if that is what the gods want. He says that now that he thinks of it, the poor beggar who led him to the cliff kept talking about a fiend.

Edgar tells him to think of nicer things. At that moment, Lear appears, draped all over in flowers and Edgar realises he is completely mad.

Lear talks nonsense, pointing at a little field mouse one moment and seeming to think he is at an archery contest the next. He asks Edgar for the password and is pleased with the one Edgar makes up.

Gloucester recognises Lear's voice but Lear doesn't know who Gloucester is, accusing him of being Goneril with a white beard. He is still obsessed with his daughters and rants again about their lies and false flattery.

Gloucester asks Lear if he is not the king and Lear replies that he is. He pardons Gloucester for adultery (although he does not know who he is) saying that adultery shouldn't be a sin considering his friend Gloucester's bastard son treated his father better than his legitimate daughters treated him. He moves on to general abuse of women and sexuality, almost spitting in his rage.

Gloucester tries to kiss Lear's hand and Lear babbles on regardless. His speeches make no sense and Edgar is dreadfully sad to see the old king brought so low, yet he points out that there is some reason in his madness, some of the things he says are true.

Suddenly, Lear, in a moment of clarity, recognises Gloucester but the moment of sanity doesn't last.

A Gentleman from Cordelia's camp approaches with some attendants. They try to bring Lear with them, promising him anything he wants. They show Lear great respect and gentleness but he runs away and the men follow him. The Gentleman stays a moment to answer Edgar's questions about the impending battle. He tells Edgar that the French army has marched out of their camp to meet the British but that Cordelia has stayed behind to care for Lear. The Gentleman leaves and Edgar and Gloucester prepare to leave for a place of safety.

Just then, Oswald appears and spotting Gloucester, gloats that he will kill him and get a large reward. Edgar steps forward and adopts yet another disguise, that of a peasant from the west of England. He tries to persuade Oswald to let them pass but Oswald will not and Edgar is forced to fight him. He deals Oswald a mortal blow with his cudgel (big stick) and the dying Oswald asks him to bury him and bring the letters he is carrying to Edmund in the English camp. He dies, and Edgar observes that he knows who he was, a villainous servant of Goneril's, only too happy to do her evil bidding. He searches Oswald's pockets and finds the letters. Reading them, he discovers that Goneril has written to Edmund asking him to kill Albany if he survives the battle so that she will be free to marry him (Edmund). Edgar is appalled, and says he will bury Oswald in the sand with no ceremony as befits such a bad man. He is pleased that he will be able to warn Albany of the plot against him.

Gloucester says he envies Lear his madness and wishes he were mad too so he wouldn't have to face such sorrows. Edgar says he hears the battle drum and takes Gloucester's hand so he can bring him somewhere safe. He and Gloucester leave.

Summary: Act IV, Scene 7 A tent in the French camp, Lear asleep in the bed

Cordelia, Kent, a doctor and a gentleman enter. Cordelia tells Kent she will never be able to repay his kindness. He says that to be thanked verbally is more than enough. She asks him if he will not get out of his disguise now and dress in clothes more fitting his rank. He says he wants to remain in his disguise for a while longer and she gracefully agrees that he may of course.

Cordelia turns to the doctor and asks how Lear is doing. He says the king is still asleep and Cordelia prays that he may recover. The doctor says it is time to wake Lear now and asks her permission to do so. She tells him to be guided by his own judgement and asks if Lear is dressed in clean clothes. She is told that he is, the servants did it while Lear slept.

Lear is carried in, still asleep. Cordelia kisses him and wishes that she could kiss away all the hurts her sisters caused him. Kent is much moved by this. Cordelia says to the sleeping king that even if he wasn't their father, Lear deserved to be treated with respect because of his age. She wouldn't have locked her enemy's dog outside in a storm as bad as that, even if the dog had bitten her. She is surprised that Lear survived at all.

Lear wakes and Cordelia tells the doctor to speak to him. He gently advises her to do so instead, saying it would be best. She addresses Lear with the utmost respect and love and he is bewildered, thinking she is a spirit. He tries to kneel before her but she will not allow him to do so. He says he knows he is a senile old man and wonders if she could be his daughter, Cordelia. Tears in her eyes, she tells him she is. He is deeply ashamed and wishes he could drink poison, so badly does he feel for banishing her. He assumes she does not love him any more and says she has good reason not to, unlike her sisters. Cordelia assures him she has no reason not to love him. He asks if he is in France and she says no, he is still in England. Lear becomes a little fretful at this and the doctor points out that although Lear is no longer possessed of his mad rage, he should not be overexcited or reminded of what has happened recently. He advises her to take him away now and she leaves with her father, the doctor and the servants.

Kent, left with a gentleman, asks if it's true that Cornwall was killed. He is told that it is true and that Edmund is leading his army now. The gentleman tells Kent that rumour has it Edgar is in Germany with the Earl of Kent. Kent says wryly that rumours cannot be trusted. He says great changes are coming and the gentleman g. They say there will be much bloodshed before things change, however.

Summary: Act V, Scene 1 The British camp near Dover

Edmund, Regan and various soldiers enter. Edmund is talking to an officer, asking if he knows whether Albany has changed his position in the battle, he has been so changeable lately. The officer leaves to find out.

Regan says Oswald has obviously been injured in some way as he has not turned up yet. Edmund doubts it. Regan asks him if he loves Goneril and Edmund replies diplomatically that he honours her. Regan pursues the matter, asking if he has slept with Goneril. Edmund asks her if she would mind. Regan admits she is jealous and Edmund reassures her that he has not slept with her sister. Regan begs him never to do so and he tells her not to worry.

Albany, Goneril and soldiers enter. In an aside, Goneril says she would rather lose the battle than lose Edmund to Regan. Albany greets Regan and tells her that he has heard Lear and Cordelia are reunited. He says that he supports their cause and only fights on the side of Regan and Goneril because his honour cannot allow him to stand by and see the French invade. He is convinced that it is the sisters' ill treatment of Lear and Gloucester that has led to this war. Regan is annoyed and Goneril tells him to put aside domestic quarrels and to concentrate on their common enemy. Albany agrees to hold a council of war. Edmund says he will attend the meeting and Regan and Goneril squabble over who will go with him.

Edgar enters, still disguised as a peasant, and asks for a word with Albany. Sending the others away, Albany agrees to listen. Edgar gives him Goneril's letter to Edmund and asks Albany to read it before the battle. He says that if, after the battle, he wants a champion to fight on his behalf, he need only sound the trumpets and he, Edgar, will produce a worthy champion. That is assuming Albany's side wins, of course. If they lose, says Edgar, the plots mentioned in the letter will not be carried out. He leaves, though Albany asks him to stay till he's read the letter.

Edmund re-enters and says it is time to fight, the French army has arrived. He gives Albany an estimate of the French numbers and urges him to hurry. Albany says he will be ready. He leaves.

Alone, Edmund wonders which sister he should take. Whichever one he decides upon, the other will have to die. If he takes Regan, Goneril will be furious and he cannot take Goneril while her husband is alive. He says that he needs Albany for the battle against the French but after that, Goneril can kill him herself. He adds that Albany intends to show mercy to Lear and Cordelia but that he, Edmund, will see to it that he gets hold of them first and they will be shown no mercy.

Summary: Act V, Scene 2 The British camp near Dover

The battle begins. Lear and Cordelia pass by with their army. Edgar and Gloucester enter. Edgar places Gloucester in the shelter of a tree and goes off to fight. He says that if he returns, he will bring Gloucester some comfort. Gloucester gives him his blessing and Edgar leaves.

There are noises off-stage and then the sounding of a retreat. Edgar returns to Gloucester and tells him that Lear has lost and he and Cordelia have been captured. He tries to lead Gloucester away to safety. Gloucester says he will stay and die.

Edgar chides him for this attitude and says men cannot decide on the time of their own deaths, that there is a right time for it and it must not be sought. Gloucester agrees and leaves with Edgar.

Summary: Act 5, Scene 3 The British camp near Dover

Cordelia and Lear are led in by Edmund, who has been victorious in the recent battle. Cordelia recognises that they are in danger but is brave and asks if they are to see Goneril and Regan. Lear, who is happy to be with Cordelia, doesn't want to see his other daughters; he thinks that he and Cordelia will have a wonderful time together, speaking about all sorts of philosophical matters and even gossiping about people in the court. They will be like birds in a cage, singing together, he fondly imagines and he has no interest in seeing anyone but his darling Cordelia.

Edmund tells the guard to take them away and gives the man a note, saying that its contents are to be obeyed immediately. We don't know what the note says, but we can guess that it is ordering their execution. The guard says he will do his duty straight away.

Albany, Goneril and Regan enter. Albany praises Edmund for his brave fighting and then asks that Lear and Cordelia be turned over to him but Edmund refuses, saying that he has ordered their imprisonment so that they may not stir up support among the common soldiers, who love them still and might mutiny if they saw them in person. Albany says Edmund presumes too much and says that he, not Edmund, is in control. Regan takes Edmund's side and claims she will marry him and make him her lord. Goneril reacts jealously to this and the two women quarrel over Edmund, Goneril claiming that he will never marry Regan. Regan says she feels ill, otherwise she would argue more strongly with her sister. Albany, who has heard all of this steps in and arrests Edmund on charges of treason. He also points out to Goneril that she is already married and has no right to claim Edmund.

Albany challenges Edmund to defend himself in a trial by combat and says if no champion comes forward to fight Edmund, he, Albany will do so. The trumpets are sounded to call any man who wishes to fight Edmund. Regan, who now feels extremely ill, is led away to Albany's tent to rest.

Edgar appears, still disguised but fully armed and ready to fight. Albany asks him who he is but Edgar refuses to say, merely explaining that he has a good cause to fight Edmund. Albany, **impressed by his manner and his speech**, agrees to let him be the champion.

The pair fight and Edgar wounds Edmund but Albany calls out that Edmund is to be kept alive for questioning. Goneril tries to help Edmund, saying he is the victim of a conspiracy. Albany then produces the letter she wrote to Edmund (asking him to kill Albany) and Goneril flees in desperation. Albany sends a man after her, realising that she is highly agitated.

The dying Edmund now freely admits that the charges against him are true. Edgar reveals his true identity and accuses Edmund of being responsible for Gloucester losing his eyes. Edmund agrees that this is the case and says that he is now being punished for his actions.

Albany tells Edgar that he played no part in the torture of Gloucester and is on his side and Edgar says he knows this to be true. He tells everyone how he disguised himself as a mad beggar and protected Gloucester to the best of his ability. A mere half hour before the fight with Edmund, Edgar, fully armed, revealed his true identity to his father and sought his blessing in the upcoming duel. Gloucester, torn between sorrow and joy, died. Kent then rushed up to Edgar, knowing now who he was, and on hearing the news that Gloucester was dead and Lear captured, collapsed in his grief.

The man who had been sent to check on Goneril rushes in, clutching a bloody knife. He says that Goneril has killed herself, but not before admitting to poisoning Regan, who is also dead. Edmund comments wryly that he was promised to both sisters but now they will all be married in death.

Kent enters and says he is looking for Lear and Albany realises with a start of horror that in the midst of all the recent turmoil, he has forgotten about Lear and Cordelia. He asks the dying Edmund where they are just as the bodies of Goneril and Regan are carried in. Astonished, Kent asks what happened to the sisters. Edmund, reflecting sadly that the sisters at least loved him, repents his evil deeds and determines to do good before he dies. He tells Albany that he ordered Lear and Cordelia's deaths and that someone should go quickly if they are to be saved. Edgar rushes off and Edmund further explains that Goneril had instructed that Cordelia be hanged and her death made to look like a suicide. His confession completed, Edmund dies.

Lear enters, carrying Cordelia's body in his arms: Edgar arrived too late to save her. Kent tries to speak to Lear but the maddened king curses everyone, calling them all murders and traitors and mourning that he was too late to save Cordelia. Slipping in and out of sanity, Lear grieves over Cordelia's body, praising her virtues when she was alive; and saying that he killed the man who hanged her. Kent again tries to speak to Lear, but Lear barely recognizes him and shows no interest when told of the deaths of Goneril and Regan. Albany advises Kent to leave Lear alone, there is no point in trying to reason with him when he is so clearly maddened with grief. A messenger enters and reveals that Edmund has also died. Albany says that he cares little for the news at the moment and announces that he, Albany, is resigning so that Lear may be king again. Lear ignores all this, concentrating his attention on Cordelia. He asks for her button to be loosened, believing in his delirium that she is breathing. Then, collapsing over her body, he dies. The heartbroken Kent wishes he could die too, he is so grief-stricken. Edgar tries to revive Lear but Kent tells him to let the old king go; this world is but a torture to him now.

Albany, having given Kent and Edgar their power and titles back, asks them to rule the kingdom. Kent, saying he is old and will soon be dead, refuses, so Edgar is left to rule alone. Albany marvels at all that Lear has endured in his long lifetime and the small group leave the stage to the sound of a funeral march.

