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King Lear

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WITH DETAILED NOTES
FROM THE WORLD'S
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SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT
AND PAUL WERSTINE

ACT 1

Scene 1

Enter Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund.

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

GLOUCESTER It did always seem so to us, but now in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most, for (equalities) are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety. 5

KENT Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to 't. 10

KENT I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER Sir, this young fellow's mother could, whereupon she grew round-wombed and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault? 15

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

GLOUCESTER But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. Though this knave came something saucily to the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, 20

21. **this knave:** i.e., Edmund, the illegitimate son (The word **knave** meant "boy" or "fellow," but was also a term for a servant, a sense playfully continued by Gloucester in "came something saucily . . . before he was sent for," as if he were an impudent servant who intrudes before he is summoned.); **something:** somewhat

22. **saucily:** (1) impudently; (2) bawdily

23. **fair:** beautiful

24. **whoreson:** bastard (here used affectionately)

24-25. **Do . . . Edmund:** It is possible that Edmund does not hear the conversation until this point.

29. **services:** respects (a courtly term)

30. **sue:** beg, entreat

31. **study deserving:** strive to deserve (your acquaintance)

32. **He:** i.e., Edmund; **out:** i.e., away

33 SD. **Sennet:** trumpets announcing an approach

34. **Attend:** escort (to the king)

37. **we:** i.e., I (the royal "we," which continues in the lines that follow)

40. **fast:** firm

43. **son:** i.e., son-in-law

46. **constant will:** firm intention; **publish:** make public

47. **several:** separate, particular; **dowers:** i.e., inheritances, legacies (Only Cordelia's portion would have been an actual dowry.)

and the whoreson must be acknowledged.—Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

25

EDMUND No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER My lord of Kent. Remember him hereafter as my honorable friend.

EDMUND My services to your Lordship.

KENT I must love you and sue to know you better.

30

EDMUND Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. (*Sennet.*) The King is coming.

Enter King Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and Attendants.

LEAR

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,
Gloucester.

35

GLOUCESTER I shall, my lord.

He exits.

LEAR

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.—
Give me the map there. [*He is handed a map.*]

Know that we have divided

In three our kingdom, and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, [while we
Unburdened crawl toward death. Our son of
Cornwall

40

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

45

The (two great) princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn
And here are to be answered. Tell me, my
daughters—

50

[Since now we will divest us both of rule,

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WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS

Cover design by Jeanne M. Lee

www.simonsays.com

\$5.99 U.S./\$8.25 Can.

ISBN 13: 978-0-7434-8276-9

ISBN 10: 0-7434-8276-X



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PRINTED IN U.S.A.