

KING LEAR  
(in 10 Minutes)

Abridged by  
Roxy Carmichelle G. Cortez  
Edited by  
Dr. Joachim Emilio B. Antonio

SETTING: Britain

CHARACTERS: (10-16 actors)

LEAR, *King of Britain*

CORDELIA, *Lear's daughter* (can double as SERVANT)

GONERIL, *Lear's daughter*

REGAN, *Lear's daughter*

The Earl of GLOUCESTER

EDGAR, *Gloucester's legitimate son*

EDMUND, *Gloucester's illegitimate son*

The Duke of ALBANY, *Goneril's husband* (can double as SECOND MESSENGER and GENTLEMAN)

The Duke of CORNWALL, *Regan's husband* (can double as FIRST and THIRD MESSENGER)

OSWALD, *Goneril's steward* (can double as FRANCE and KNIGHT)

The King of FRANCE

SERVANT

GENTLEMAN

FIRST MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

THIRD MESSENGER

KNIGHT

THE PLAY:

*Sennet. Enter one bearing a coronet, then King LEAR, then the Dukes of CORNWALL and ALBANY, next GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and attendants.*

LEAR: Which of you shall we say doth love us most that we our largest bounty may extend where nature doth with merit challenge?

GONERIL: Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter.

REGAN: Find I am alone felicitate in your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA: Nothing, my Lord. I love your majesty according to my bond, no more nor less.

LEAR: Here I disclaim all the paternal care and as a stranger to my heart and me hold thee from this forever. (*Gives CORNWALL and ALBANY the coronet*)

*Flourish. Enter GLOUCESTER with the king of FRANCE and attendants.*

FRANCE: Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance, is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.

LEAR: Thou hast her, France.

*Flourish. Exeunt all but FRANCE, GONERIL, REGAN, and CORDELIA.*

CORDELIA: Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides.

*Exeunt. Enter EDMUND the bastard, with a letter.*

EDMUND: Why brand they us with "base", "baseness," "bastardy," – who in the lusty stealth of nature take more composition and fierce quality than doth within a dull bed. Well then, legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.

*Enter GLOUCESTER. EDMUND looks over his letter.*

GLOUCESTER: Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter? Give me the letter, sir.

EDMUND: I hope my brother wrote this as an essay or taste of my virtue.

GLOUCESTER: *(reads)* “The custom of respecting elderly keeps us without our inheritance until we are so old we can’t enjoy our happiness. Come to me, that of this may I speak more, Edgar” O villain, villain! Where is he?

*Exit GLOUCESTER.*

EDMUND: Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit.

*Exit. Enter GONERIL and OSWALD. Hunting horns within.*

GONERIL: I’ll not endure it. His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us on every trifle. Idle old man that still would manage those that he hath given away.

*Exit OSWALD. Horns within. Enter LEAR.*

LEAR: How now, daughter? Methinks you are too much of late i’ th’ frown.

GONERIL: Here do you keep a hundred knights so disordered that this our court shows like a riotous inn. Be then desired by her to disquantity your train.

LEAR: Bastard, thou liest. My train are men of rarest parts. I have another daughter who, when she hears this, with her nails she’ll flay thy wolfish visage. Away, away!

*Exeunt. Enter EDMUND and EDGAR.*

EDMUND: O sir, fly this place. In cunning I must draw my sword upon you. Seem to defend yourself. Now quit you well. – *(loudly)* Yield! Come before my father. Light, ho!

*Exit EDGAR. Enter GLOUCESTER.*

EDMUND: Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER: O strange and fastened villain! Would he deny his letter? Let him fly far. – And of my land, loyal boy, I'll work the means to make thee capable.

*Enter the Duke of CORNWALL, REGAN, and attendants.*

REGAN: Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister. Lay comforts to your bosom.

*They exit. Enter EDGAR.*

EDGAR: Whiles I may'st 'scape, I will preserve myself, and am besought to take the basest shape that ever penury in contempt of man brought near to beast.

*He exits. Enter LEAR. Enter CORNWALL, REGAN.*

LEAR: Beloved Regan, thy sister's naught, she hath tied unkindness here.

*Tucket within. Enter OSWALD and GONERIL.*

LEAR: *(to GONERIL)* Art not ashamed? – O Regan, wilt thou take her by hand?

REGAN: You will return and sojourn with my sister.

LEAR: Persuade me rather to be slave to this detested groom. *(indicates OSWALD)*

GONERIL: At your choice, sir.

*Storm and tempest. Exit LEAR.*

CORNWALL: 'Tis a wild night. Come out o'th' storm.

*Exeunt. Storm still. Enter LEAR.*

LEAR: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!

*Exit. Enter GLOUCESTER and EDMUND.*

GLOUCESTER: I have received a letter this night. These injuries the King now bears will be revenged; there's part of a power already footed. We must incline to the king. Though I die for it, the King my old master must be relieved.

*Exit GLOUCESTER.*

EDMUND: This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke instantly know, and of that letter too. This must draw me that which my father loses – no less than all.

*Enter CORNWALL.*

EDMUND: Malicious is my fortune that I repent to be just! (*giving CORNWALL a letter*)

CORNWALL: Seek out where thy father is.

EDMUND: (*To CORNWALL*) I will preserve in my course of loyalty.

CORNWALL: I will lay trust upon thee.

*Exit EDMUND. Enter REGAN then GLOUCESTER, brought in by servants.*

REGAN: Ingrateful fox, 'tis he.

CORNWALL: Bind him.

*Servants bind GLOUCESTER, CORNWALL plucks out one of GLOUCESTER's eyes and stamps on it.*

SERVANT: Hold your hand, my lord!

*SERVANT and CORNWALL draw and fight, CORNWALL is wounded.*

REGAN:                    *(to another servant)* Give me your sword.

*She takes a sword and stabs the SERVANT from behind, killing him.*

SERVANT:                I am slain!—My lord, you have one eye left to see some mischief on him. *(Dies)*

CORNWALL:             Lest it see more, prevent it. – Out, vile jelly! *(Plucks GLOUCESTER's other eye)*

GLOUCESTER:          Where's my son Edmund?

REGAN:                 Out treacherous villain! Thou call'st on him that hates thee.

*Exit CORNWALL and REGAN. Exeunt severally. Enter EDGAR in disguise, then GLOUCESTER.*

EDGAR:                 Yet better thus, and known to be contemned, than still contemned and flattered.  
Who comes here? My father, poorly led? Poor Tom shall lead thee.

*Exeunt. Enter GONERIL and EDMUND.*

GONERIL:              This kiss would stretch thy spirits up into the air. *(Kisses EDMUND)*

EDMUND:              Yours in the ranks of death.

*Exit EDMUND. Enter ALBANY.*

GONERIL:              I have been worth the whistle.

ALBANY:              O Goneril, I fear your disposition.

*Enter FIRST MESSENGER.*

FIRST MESSENGER: O my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead, slain by his servant, going to put out the other eye of Gloucester.

ALBANY: Oh, poor Gloucester, I live to thank thee for the love thou showed'st the king, and to revenge thine eyes.

*Exeunt. Enter REGAN and the steward OSWALD.*

REGAN: It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out, to let him live. Edmund is gone to dispatch his nighted life.

OSWALD: I must needs after him with my letter. My lady charged my duty in this business.

REGAN: Why should she write to Edmund? She gave most speaking looks to noble Edmund. Take this note. My lord is dead, and more convenient is he for my hand than for your lady's. So fare you well.

*Exeunt severally. Enter with drum and color, CORDELIA, and SECOND MESSENGER.*

SECOND MESSENGER: News, madam. The British powers are marching hitherward.

*Exeunt. Enter GLOUCESTER, and EDGAR disguised in peasant clothing and LEAR.*

LEAR: Pass.

GLOUCESTER: I know that voice. Is't not the king?

*Enter GENTLEMAN.*

GENTLEMAN: Oh, here he is. Lay hand upon him.

LEAR: I am a king, know you that? Come, you shall get it by running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.

*Exit LEAR running, pursued. Enter OSWALD the steward.*

OSWALD: A proclaimed prize! Thou traitor, the sword is out that must destroy thee.

GLOUCESTER: Now let thy friendly hand put strength enough to 't.

*EDGAR interferes, EDGAR and OSWALD fight.*

EDGAR: Come, no matter vor your foins.

OSWALD: *(falling)* Slave, thou hast slain me, give the letters which thou find'st about me to Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. *(he dies)*

GLOUCESTER: What, is he dead?

EDGAR: Sit you down, father. Rest you. *(takes letter, reads)* "Let our reciprocal vows be remembered. You have many opportunities to cut him off. Your – wife, so I would say, Goneril." O indistinguished space of woman's will!

*Drum afar off. Exeunt. Enter CORDELIA, GENTLEMAN, LEAR.*

LEAR: You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA: *(kneels)* O, look upon me, sir, and hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

LEAR: Do not laugh at me, for I think this lady to be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA: And so I am, I am.

*Exeunt. Enters with drum and colors EDMUND and REGAN.*

REGAN: Sweet lord, you know the goodness I intend upon you. Tell me but truly – Do you not love my sister? I shall never endure her. Be not familiar with her.

*Enter with drum and colors ALBANY and GONERIL, with troops.*



GONERIL: [Aside] I had rather lose the battle than that sister should loosen him and me.

ALBANY: The King is come to his daughter with others whom rigor of our state forced to cry out. For this, France invades our land.

GONERIL: Combine together 'gainst the enemy.

*Enter EDGAR disguised. Exeunt all but ALBANY and EDGAR.*

ALBANY: Speak.

EDGAR: *(giving ALBANY a letter)* Before you fight the battle, ope this letter.

*Exit EDGAR. Enter EDMUND.*

EDMUND: Draw up your powers.

*Exit ALBANY, EDMUND, Alarum within. Enter EDGAR disguised and GLOUCESTER.*

EDGAR: Away! King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en. Ripeness is all. Come on.

*Exeunt. Enter in conquest with drum and colors EDMUND, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN.*

EDMUND: Sir, I thought it fit to send the old and miserable king to some retention.

REGAN: [To EDMUND.] General, I create thee here my lord and master.

ALBANY: Edmund, I arrest thee on capital treason—for your claim, fair sister, I bar in the interest of my wife. 'Tis she is subcontracted to this lord, and I, her husband, contradict your banns. My lady is bespoke.

EDMUND: What in the world that names me traitor, villain-like he lies.

REGAN: My sickness grows upon me.

*REGAN is helped to exit. A trumpet sounds, Enter EDGAR at a third sound, armed, a trumpet before him.*

EDGAR: What's he that speaks for Edmund, Earl of Gloucester?

EDMUND: Himself.

*Alarums, EDMUND and EDGAR fight, EDMUND falls.*

GONERIL: This is practice, Gloucester. Thou art not vanquished, but cozened and beguiled.

ALBANY: Shut your mouth, dame, or with this paper shall I (stopple) it.

*Exit GONERIL.*

EDMUND: But what art thou.

EDGAR: My name is Edgar, and thy father's son. Our lives' sweetness taught me to shift into a madman's rags. Met I my father with his bleeding rings, saved him from despair. Never revealed myself unto him until some half hour past. I asked his blessing. But his flawed heart 'twixt extremes of joy and grief burst smilingly.

*Enter KNIGHT with a bloody knife.*

KNIGHT: Your lady, sir, and her sister by her is poisoned. She confesses it.

EDMUND: I was contracted to them both. All three now marry in an instant.

*Exit KNIGHT, GONERIL's and REGAN's corpses are brought out.*

EDMUND: Some good I mean to do despite of mine own nature. Quickly send - to th' castle, for my writ is on the life of Lear and Cordelia. Nay, send in time!

*Exit soldiers with EDMUND, Enter LEAR with CORDELIA in his arms.*

LEAR: A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all! I might have saved her.

*Enter THIRD MESSENGER.*

THIRD MESSENGER: Edmund is dead, my lord.

LEAR: No, no life? – Oh, thou'lt come no more, never, never — Pray you, do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips. Look there, look there. O, o, *(dies)*

EDGAR: He faints! – My Lord! *(to LEAR)* Look up, my lord. Oh, he is gone indeed.

ALBANY: *(to EDGAR)* Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain.

EDGAR: The weight of this sad time we must obey. Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

*Exeunt with a dead march.*

If you'd like to stage this play, publish it, discuss it in class, or use it in any other way apart from individual reading, please secure written permission from Compact Shakespeare before doing so. Please email us at [info@compactshakespeare.com](mailto:info@compactshakespeare.com).