



## KING LEAR - A Tragedy in Five Acts

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### ACT I

Now, King Lear lived about a thousand years ago, and he was complete idiot, I'm sorry but it's true. Maybe he had been all right when he was a younger man, I don't know, but now that he was old and grey he just wanted to laze around eating pineapples all day.

'Mmm,' said King Lear, biting into a pineapple. But unfortunately it wasn't a pineapple, it was a wasps' nest.

'OWW,' he shrieked. 'I hate living about a thousand years ago! There's never anything on TV and life is just one misery after another!'

'Look at that old fool,' said his eldest daughter, Goneril. 'He's not fit to run the kingdom anymore.'

'Let's trick it off him!' said his middle daughter, Regan. 'Then we can do whatever we like!'

'You two are the worst!' said King Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia, who was the only nice one of the bunch. 'We shouldn't be trying to trick the kingdom from our father! We should be taking care of him in his old age! And furthermore - '

But just then King Lear waddled over, in his ceremonial robes and his ceremonial crown and his ceremonial nose which he wore on special occasions when he was feeling extra ceremonial and also when he couldn't find his normal nose.

'DAUGHTERS!' he bellowed. 'I am old and tired and I really can't be bothered running the kingdom anymore, it's a complete hassle. So instead, I've decided to give it to you lot.'



‘OMG,’ whispered Regan, ‘he’s actually just going to give it to us. What an idiot.’

But you can only have it if you truly love me,’ said King Lear craftily. ‘You first, Goneril. Tell me how much you love me. And you’d better make it good.’

‘Why, my dearest daddy,’ said Goneril, ‘I was just this minute telling everyone how much I love you and how I don’t even want your kingdom, I just want to take care of you in your old age. But if you want to give me your kingdom I’ll still take it,’ she added hastily, ‘if it will make you happy.’

‘Brilliant,’ said King Lear. ‘I am so wise and clever and intelligent that I can see you definitely love me very much indeed. Goneril, I grant you a third of my kingdom! Now – how about you, Regan? I hope you love me too.’

‘Are you kidding?’ said Regan. ‘I ADORE you! Sometimes I say to myself, “Oh, how lucky I am because I’ve got the best dad in the world! He’s better than a thousand cakes and I’m definitely not just saying that so that I can get his kingdom.”’

‘Well spoken,’ said King Lear. ‘I grant you a third of my kingdom too.’

Finally King Lear turned to his youngest daughter.

‘Ah, Cordelia,’ he said. ‘I bet YOU love me most of all, don’t you?’

But Cordelia had had enough. She could not bear to play her father’s foolish games nor to hear her sisters’ wicked lies.

‘Well?’ demanded King Lear. ‘What have you got to say for yourself?’

‘Nothing,’ said Cordelia.

“‘Nothing’?” roared King Lear. ‘Then you shall GET nothing! I was going to give you loads of kingdom but now I’m not giving you anything! Goneril and Regan shall have it all! Now get out of my sight, Cordelia. I never want to see you again!’

And he looked on with a cold heart as Cordelia gathered up her things and fled her family in tears.



'Right, we'd better be off, we've got a kingdom to run,' said Goneril and Regan. 'See you later, idiotic-old-father-gator.'

'Well, that went brilliantly,' said King Lear, once he was alone. 'I've given away all my kingdom and all my responsibilities. I don't see how anything can go wrong. What a clever old burper I am!'

## ACT II

Sometime later Goneril was dancing round her brand new castle when there came a knock at the door.

*Drat, she thought. It's that stupid father of mine. I thought I'd seen the last of that old scruff.*

'Hi, Goneril,' said King Lear, through a beard full of raindrops and leaves. 'It's really wet out here. Can I come in and stay for a bit?'

'I'm afraid it's not really very convenient at the mo –,' began Goneril, but King Lear was already pushing his way into the hallway like an unstoppable tangerine.

'Ah, that's better,' he said, flumping himself down on Goneril's best sofa and accidentally squashing her pet dog Colin. 'Oh, by the way, I brought a few pals along. Well, a hundred actually. They're knights, so I'm sure they'll be really well behaved.'

'WAAAAAHEEEEEEEEEYY!' shouted the knights, bursting through the castle doors. 'Look at all this cool stuff! Let's smash it up!'

'Is this what you call "really well behaved"?' said Goneril as the knights ran around the castle, smashing up the treasure and scribbling all over the tapestries.

'That's it!' shouted Goneril. 'Out of my castle, the lot of you!'

### ACT III

'I can't believe it,' said King Lear once they were back out in the rain. 'What an ungrateful little peanut Goneril turned out to be! Well, let's try Regan, she lives just up the road.'

So off they all traipsed to Regan's castle but guess what? She didn't want anything to do with them either.

'Hmm,' said King Lear. 'I'm starting to think I might have given my kingdom away to the wrong daughters. Oh well, things could be worse. At least I've got my friends. Who needs daughters when you've got friends, that's what I always –'

But the knights had had enough. They'd all tiptoed off to get a kebab while King Lear wasn't looking.

'I hate Act III, it's completely rubbish,' said King Lear. 'Maybe Act IV will turn out to be more fun.'

### ACT IV

But no. Act IV was even worse. It was just a lot of King Lear standing around on a freezing cold rainy heath and a blackbird doing a poo on his shoulder.

'Oh ye gods, ye great gods of the heavens!' wailed King Lear, turning his face to the sky. 'Oh ye great, lovely, kind, compassionate gods, won't you help me now in my hour of need?'

For a moment the gods considered lending King Lear a hand. But then they decided it would be funnier just to make the storm about fifty times worse instead. That's the problem with the gods - they're all right when they're in a good mood but they're complete stinkers when they want to be.

'Aaaargh!' shouted King Lear. 'Thanks a lot, gods!'



How long King Lear ran through that terrible storm he knew not. The wind whipped at his heels and the cold rain lashed at his anguished face and the ground was rocky and harsh beneath his feet. But just when he feared he would be stranded forever, he stumbled upon a hut in the middle of the heath. It was a mean place, little more than a shack made out of peasant's hair. But at least it was dry, if a bit itchy.

King Lear sat himself down on the rough floor and put his head in his hands. Then he put his feet in his hands. Then he put his hands in his hands, don't ask me how but he did.

'Only this morning I had a whole kingdom to call my own,' he moaned. 'And now see what I am come to – a hairy old hut in the middle of nowhere and not another living soul for miles around.'

'A-hoo and a-hee!' someone giggled in the darkness.

'What?' cried King Lear. 'Who is here with me in this godforsaken place?'

'A-hoo and a-hee!' giggled the voice. 'Tis one who knows you better than yourself, yet one who is better than no one you know.'

'Eh?' said King Lear. 'I asked you a simple question! Who are you?'

'A-hoo and a-hee!' said the voice. 'I am one who is like unto a cabbage that is thrown into the air by a naughty schoolboy, only to come down and go SPLAT all over the headmaster's face.'

'What the blazes are you talking about?' shouted King Lear. But then he realized.

'Aha!' he cried. 'You are one of those strange Fools they always have in Shakespeare plays, aren't you? One of those odd fellows who dresses like a clown, and juggles, and who always talks in riddles for no reason anyone can ever understand! Step forward, Fool, and show thyself!'



‘A-hoo and a-hee!’ said the Fool, stepping forward from the shadows in his clown costume. ‘Now, listen thee well! An egg may shelter a baby bird, but a piglet who has eaten a packet of wafers may never grow into a watermelon! A gnat may graze on an elephant’s ear, but a duckling with the face of an ant cannot play the harpsichord underwater! An invisible raven with a beak made of liquorice – ’

‘Look, can you please just lay off the riddles for a moment?’ said King Lear. ‘I’m not really in the mood for Fools.’

‘A-hoo and a-hee,’ said the Fool. ‘If I am a Fool, then what are you? Forsooth, you must be the King of Fools! For who would give away his kingdom other than the foolish-est fool who ever walked this foolish earth, you fool!’

‘Fine,’ said King Lear. ‘Well, if I am indeed the King of Fools I’d better dress the part, don’t you think?’

And so saying, he rushed back outside and began covering himself all over with flowers and twigs and leaves.

‘Look at my lovely robes! Oh, and look at all my lovely treasure!’ he cried, picking up a massive load of worms and stuffing them down his front.

‘Now I am truly the King of Fools!’ And off he skipped like the happiest wobbler alive.

‘Hey, come back!’ yelled the Fool. ‘I was only having a laugh – there’s no need to be like that, you’ll put me out of a job!’

‘What a brilliant king I am!’ laughed King Lear as he stumbled o’er the heath in his robe of dirt and flowers. ‘And what’s more – ’

Suddenly an arrow whizzed past his head.  
Then another arrow whizzed past his head.  
Then someone threw a horse at him.  
KA-BOOOOOOOM!  
KA-BLAAAM!  
OUCH!



Swords clashed, men screamed, the land ran red with blood... It was like hell. Except it was raining too, so it was even worse.

'My once-proud kingdom – dissolved into war!' cried King Lear.

But then, through the explosions and the rain and the mayhem, there came a sight so beautiful and pure and true that the old man fell to his knees in amazement.

It was Cordelia, King Lear's youngest daughter and the only one of them who ever was any good in the first place.

## ACT V

'Dearest father,' said Cordelia, bending down to kiss King Lear on the nose. 'You told me to go away forever but I have returned because – well, I just have.'

'Truly you are the best daughter ever,' wept King Lear. 'I should never have listened to Goneril and Regan, nor given them my kingdom.'

'Probably not,' agreed Cordelia. 'See how they have brought the land to war and confusion. But never mind them, they died in battle not an hour ago.'

'They're dead?' said King Lear. 'As in, not breathing and stuff? I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm not all that fond of them – but dead? Oh, why, why did I have to be in this cursed play? Why couldn't I have been in Romeo & Juliet instead?'

'That wouldn't really have helped,' said Cordelia. 'Pretty much everyone dies in that one too.'

'Well, how about Hamlet?' said King Lear. 'That one seems like a laugh.'

'It is a laugh,' said Cordelia. 'If you like everyone dying, that is.'

'OK,' said King Lear. 'I've got it – Macbeth. That one ends happily, right?'

'It does,' said Cordelia. 'Apart from the bit where everyone dies at the end.'



‘Oh,’ said King Lear. ‘Shakespeare’s a bit depressing, isn’t he? Didn’t he write anything where people don’t just – you know – die?’

‘Well, he did write a few comedies,’ said Cordelia. ‘No one dies in those, they all just get married at the end and sing songs.’

‘Ooh, they sound good,’ said King Lear, sitting up. ‘Maybe King Lear will turn out to be a comedy.’

‘No, it’s definitely a tragedy, I’m afraid,’ said Cordelia, clutching her father to her breast as the battle raged all around.

‘Are you sure?’ said King Lear. ‘How do you know?’

‘Well, the thing is, you died two minutes ago,’ said Cordelia.

‘And so did I.’

‘Oh,’ sighed King Lear. ‘All things considered, it’s been an absolutely terrible day.’

**THE END**