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King Lear by William Shakespeare

King Lear is often considered to be Shakespeare's great tragedy, and perhaps even Shakespeare's greatest works. Based on an ancient Celtic myth, the play's dark plot explores human suffering and the spiritual connections of mankind.

King Lear follows the story of an aging king who plans to divide his kingdom into three parts. He gathers his three daughters to him and promises to leave the largest third of his kingdom to the one who loves him the most. His elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, bathe their father with false acclamations of love and devotion. Cordelia, who is truly devoted to her father, refuses to flatter him unnecessarily and states her simple and honest feelings. The king is offended when she doesn't fawn over him as her sisters did, and proceeds to disinherit and banish her. His faithful servant, Kent, objects to the banishment, and is subsequently banished as well.

Cordelia's candor garners the admiration of the King of France, who asks her to become his wife. She becomes the queen while her father announces his intention to live between the homes of Goneril and Regan and their two husbands, the Duke of Albany and Cornwall. The greedy sisters wish to be rid of their father, considering him a nuisance.

Meanwhile, rivalries form in the house of the Earl of Gloucester, whose sons, Edgar and the illegitimate Edmund both vie for their father's full inheritance. Edmund's sly manner and determination win the admiration of both Goneril and Regan, whose poor treatment of their father disgusts the Duke of Albany.

Lear, disillusioned by the poor treatment of his daughters, finds himself slowly going mad, wandering about England accompanied by a mocking fool. As he wanders, the dastardly Edmund and Lear's elder daughters scheme and create unnecessary friction between the countries of France and Britain in order to secure their own supremacy.

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