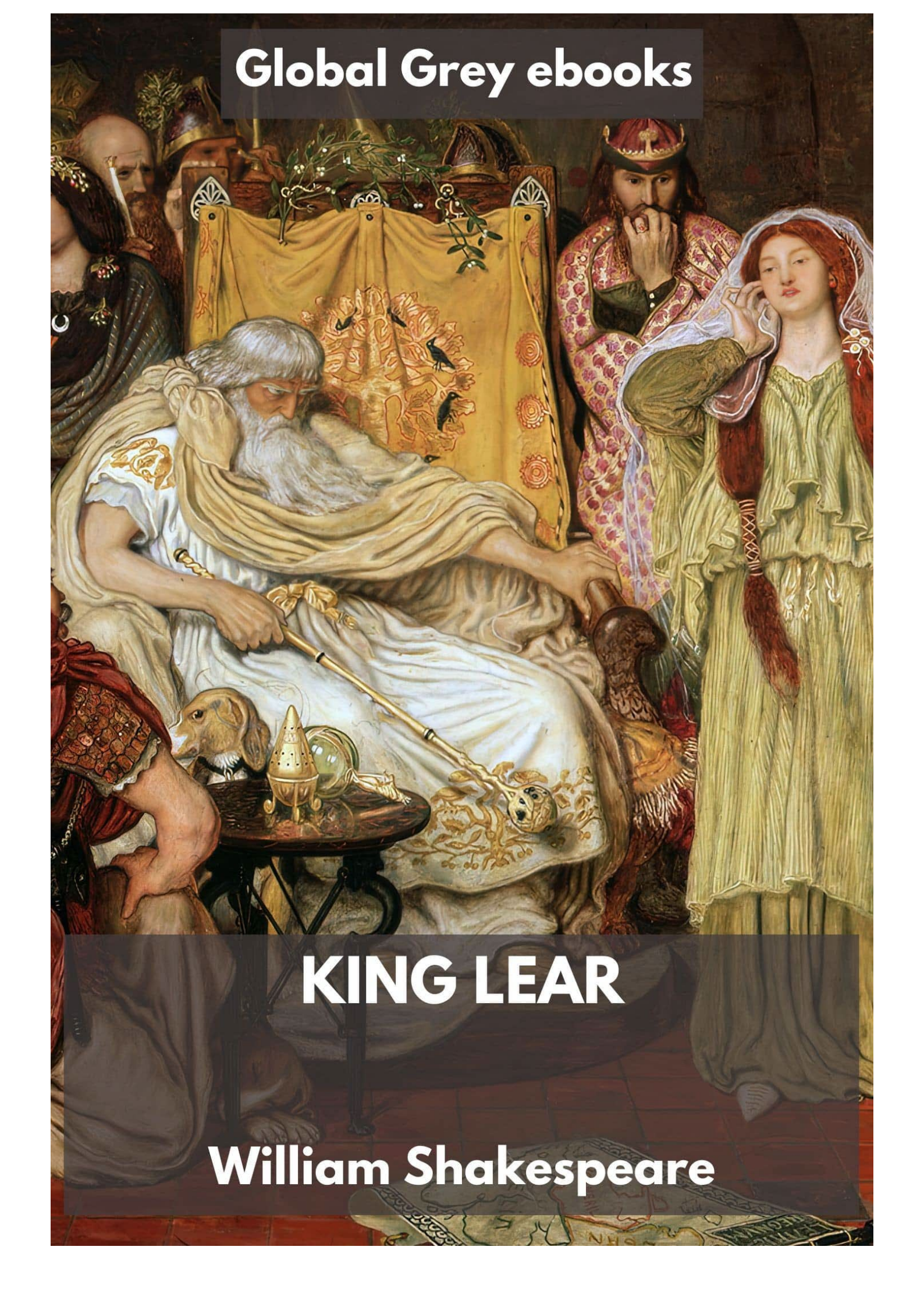


A detailed painting depicting a scene from William Shakespeare's 'King Lear'. King Lear, an elderly man with a long white beard, is seated in a high-backed chair, looking down at a small table in front of him. On the table are a golden censer, a globe, and a small dog. To his right, a woman in a green dress and white veil (Cordelia) stands with her hand to her face. Behind her, a man in a red and gold robe (Edmund) stands with his hand to his mouth. To the left, a man in a red robe (Gloucester) is partially visible. The background is dark and ornate, with a yellow cloth draped over the back of the chair. The overall style is classical, with rich colors and detailed costumes.

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KING LEAR

William Shakespeare

KING LEAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



King Lear by William Shakespeare.

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Dramatis Personae

Lear, King of Britain.

King of France.

Duke of Burgundy.

Duke of Cornwall.

Duke of Albany.

Earl of Kent.

Earl of Gloucester.

Edgar, Son to Gloucester.

Edmund, Bastard Son to Gloucester.

Curan, a Courtier.

Old Man, Tenant to Gloucester.

Physician.

Fool.

Oswald, steward to Goneril.

An Officer employed by Edmund.

Gentleman, attendant on Cordelia.

A Herald.

Servants to Cornwall.

Goneril, daughter to Lear.

Regan, daughter to Lear.

Cordelia, daughter to Lear.

Knights attending on the King, Officers, Messengers, Soldiers, and Attendants.

Scene: Britain.

Act I

Scene I. A Room Of State In King Lear's Palace

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 qualities are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

KENT.

Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER.

His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him that now I am braz'd to't.

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?

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

EDMUND.

No, my lord.

GLOUCESTER.

My Lord of Kent: remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

EDMUND.

My services to your lordship.

KENT.

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

EDMUND.

Sir, I shall study deserving.

GLOUCESTER.

He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again. The King is coming.

[Sennet within.]

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

LEAR.

Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,
Gloucester.

GLOUCESTER.

I shall, my lord.

[*Exeunt Gloucester and Edmund.*]

LEAR.

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. 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
Unburden'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
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. The 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 answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,—
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,—
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge.—Goneril,
Our eldest born, speak first.

GONERIL.

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valu'd, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA.

[*Aside.*] What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

LEAR.

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual.—What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN.

Sir, I am made of the self mettle as my sister,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;

Only she comes too short, that I profess
 Myself an enemy to all other joys
 Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
 And find I am alone felicitate
 In your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA.

[*Aside.*] Then poor Cordelia,
 And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's
 More ponderous than my tongue.

LEAR.

To thee and thine hereditary ever
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
 No less in space, validity, and pleasure
 Than that conferr'd on Goneril.—Now, our joy,
 Although the last and least; to whose young love
 The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
 Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA.

Nothing, my lord.

LEAR.

Nothing?

CORDELIA.

Nothing.

LEAR.

Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA.

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
 According to my bond; no more nor less.

LEAR.

How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little,
 Lest you may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA.

Good my lord,
 You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
 Return those duties back as are right fit,
 Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
 Why have my sisters husbands if they say
 They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
 Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
 Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
 To love my father all.

LEAR.

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA.

Ay, my good lord.

LEAR.

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA.

So young, my lord, and true.

LEAR.

Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dower:
 For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
 The mysteries of Hecate and the night;
 By all the operation of the orbs,
 From whom we do exist and cease to be;
 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
 As thou my sometime daughter.

KENT.

Good my liege,—

LEAR.

Peace, Kent!

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.
 I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest
 On her kind nursery. [*To Cordelia.*] Hence and avoid my sight!
 So be my grave my peace, as here I give
 Her father's heart from her! Call France. Who stirs?
 Call Burgundy! Cornwall and Albany,
 With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:
 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
 I do invest you jointly with my power,
 Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
 That troop with majesty. Ourself, by monthly course,
 With reservation of an hundred knights,
 By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
 Make with you by due turn. Only we shall retain
 The name, and all the addition to a king; the sway,
 Revenue, execution of the rest,
 Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm,
 This coronet part between you.

[*Giving the crown.*]

KENT.

Royal Lear,

Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,

Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers.—

LEAR.

The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft.

KENT.

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound
When majesty falls to folly. Reverse thy state;
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgement,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds
Reverb no hollowness.

LEAR.

Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT.

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies; ne'er fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

LEAR.

Out of my sight!

KENT.

See better, Lear; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.

LEAR.

Now, by Apollo,—

KENT.

Now by Apollo, King,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

LEAR.

O vassal! Miscreant!

[*Laying his hand on his sword.*]

ALBANY and CORNWALL.

Dear sir, forbear!

KENT.

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift,
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

LEAR.

Hear me, recreant! on thine allegiance, hear me!

Since thou hast sought to make us break our vows,
 Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
 To come betwixt our sentences and our power,
 Which nor our nature, nor our place can bear,
 Our potency made good, take thy reward.
 Five days we do allot thee for provision,
 To shield thee from disasters of the world;
 And on the sixth to turn thy hated back
 Upon our kingdom: if, on the next day following,
 Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
 The moment is thy death. Away! By Jupiter,
 This shall not be revok'd.

KENT.

Fare thee well, King: sith thus thou wilt appear,
 Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.
 [*To Cordelia.*] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
 That justly think'st and hast most rightly said!
 [*To Goneril and Regan.*] And your large speeches may your deeds approve,
 That good effects may spring from words of love.
 Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
 He'll shape his old course in a country new.

[*Exit.*]

Flourish. Re-enter Gloucester, with France, Burgundy and Attendants.

CORDELIA.

Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

LEAR.

My Lord of Burgundy,
 We first address toward you, who with this king
 Hath rivall'd for our daughter: what in the least
 Will you require in present dower with her,
 Or cease your quest of love?

BURGUNDY.

Most royal majesty,
 I crave no more than hath your highness offer'd,
 Nor will you tender less.

LEAR.

Right noble Burgundy,
 When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
 But now her price is fall'n. Sir, there she stands:
 If aught within that little-seeming substance,
 Or all of it, with our displeasure piec'd,
 And nothing more, may fitly like your grace,
 She's there, and she is yours.

BURGUNDY.

I know no answer.

LEAR.

Will you, with those infirmities she owes,
Unfriended, new adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her or leave her?

BURGUNDY.

Pardon me, royal sir;
Election makes not up in such conditions.

LEAR.

Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,
I tell you all her wealth. [*To France*] For you, great king,
I would not from your love make such a stray
To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
T'avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is asham'd
Almost t'acknowledge hers.

FRANCE.

This is most strange,
That she, who even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favour. Sure her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
Fall into taint; which to believe of her
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Should never plant in me.

CORDELIA.

I yet beseech your majesty,
If for I want that glib and oily art
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak,—that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action or dishonour'd step,
That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favour;
But even for want of that for which I am richer,
A still soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

LEAR.

Better thou hadst
Not been born than not to have pleas'd me better.

FRANCE.

Is it but this?—a tardiness in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do? My lord of Burgundy,

What say you to the lady? Love's not love
 When it is mingled with regards that stands
 Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
 She is herself a dowry.

BURGUNDY.

Royal King,
 Give but that portion which yourself propos'd,
 And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
 Duchess of Burgundy.

LEAR.

Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm.

BURGUNDY.

I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father
 That you must lose a husband.

CORDELIA.

Peace be with Burgundy!
 Since that respects of fortunes are his love,
 I shall not be his wife.

FRANCE.

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
 Most choice forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd!
 Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:
 Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away.
 Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
 My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.
 Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
 Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:
 Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
 Can buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me.
 Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind:
 Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

LEAR.

Thou hast her, France: let her be thine; for we
 Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
 That face of hers again. Therefore be gone
 Without our grace, our love, our benison.
 Come, noble Burgundy.

[*Flourish. Exeunt Lear, Burgundy, Cornwall, Albany, Gloucester and Attendants.*]

FRANCE.

Bid farewell to your sisters.

CORDELIA.

The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
 Cordelia leaves you: I know you what you are;
 And like a sister am most loath to call
 Your faults as they are nam'd. Love well our father:
 To your professed bosoms I commit him:

But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So farewell to you both.

REGAN.
Prescribe not us our duties.

GONERIL.
Let your study
Be to content your lord, who hath receiv'd you
At fortune's alms. You have obedience scantied,
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.

CORDELIA.
Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides:
Who covers faults, at last shame derides.
Well may you prosper.

FRANCE.
Come, my fair Cordelia.

[*Exeunt France and Cordelia.*]

GONERIL.
Sister, it is not little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father
will hence tonight.

REGAN.
That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

GONERIL.
You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been
little: he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off
appears too grossly.

REGAN.
'Tis the infirmity of his age: yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

GONERIL.
The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age to
receive not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly
waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

REGAN.
Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

GONERIL.
There is further compliment of leave-taking between France and him. Pray you let us hit
together: if our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of
his will but offend us.

REGAN.
We shall further think of it.

GONERIL.
We must do something, and i' th' heat.

[*Exeunt.*]