

KING LEAR | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



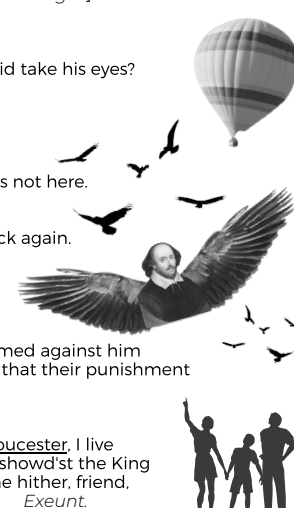
SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

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This is ridiculous.

No! It's important!

UGH!
SHAKES-
NERDS.



Long story short: King Lear has retired and divided his kingdom between two of his three daughters, **Goneril** and **Regan**. (He actually planned to divide it in three parts, but then the third daughter ticked him off, so he cut her out of the deal.) Lear's retirement plans were to hunt all day, every day and party all night, every night with a hundred of his buddies. That was cool until he threw a messy party at the house Goneril shares with her husband, the Duke of **Albany**. After that, Goneril and Regan team up against their father: They kick him out of their houses in the middle of a storm. Albany is horrified when he learns of this.

Just before this scene, the Duke of **Gloucester** tried to help Lear out, so Regan has her husband gouge out Gloucester's eyes (on stage—it's gross). Goneril and Albany don't know about it... yet.

Ere rhymes with "air."

The "i" in whilst rhymes with the "y" in "why."

Howe'er is a contraction of "however" and rhymes with "how-AIR."

The "o" in doth is a contraction of "however" and rhymes with "how-AIR."

Gloucester is two syllables and rhymes with "GLOSS-ter."

You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge. But, O, poor Gloucester,
Lost he his other eye?

MESSENGER

Both, both, my lord.

[to Goneril] This letter, madam, craves a speedy answer;
'Tis from your sister.

GONERIL [aside]

One way I like this well;

But being widow, and my Gloucester with her,
May all the building in my fancy pluck
Upon my hateful life. Another way
The news is not so tart. [to the Messenger] I'll read and answer.
Q> Exit. <Q

ALBANY

Where was his son when they did take his eyes?

MESSENGER

Come with my lady hither.

ALBANY

He is not here.

MESSENGER

No, my good lord; I met him back again.

ALBANY

Knows he the wickedness?

MESSENGER

Ay, my good lord, 'twas he informed against him
And quit the house on purpose that their punishment
Might have the freer course.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I live

To thank thee for the love thou show'd'st the King
And to revenge thine eyes. Come hither, friend,
Tell me what more thou knows. *Exeunt.*

The Shakespeare

Enter ALBANY.

GONERIL

I have been worth the whistling.

ALBANY

O Goneril,

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. Q> I fear your disposition;
That nature which contemns its origin
Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap perforce must wither,
And come to deadly use.

GONERIL

No more, the text is foolish.

ALBANY

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;
Filths savor but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?
A father, and a gracious aged man
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefitted?
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come:
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep. <Q

GONERIL

Milk-livered man,

That bear'st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs,
Who hast not in thy brows an eye discerning
Thine honor from thy suffering; Q> that not knowst
Fools do those villainies pity who are punished
Ere they have done their mischief. Where's thy drum?
France spreads his banners in our noiseless land;
With plum'd helm thy state begins to threaten,
Whilst thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries,

'Alack, why does he so?' <Q

ALBANY

See thyself, devil:

Proper deformity shows not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL

O vain fool!

Q> **ALBANY**

Thou chang'd and self-covered thing, for shame
Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,
A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood, mew! — <Q

Enter a Messenger.

Q> **ALBANY**

What news? <Q

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

Gloucester's eyes?

MESSENGER

A servant that he bred, thrilled with remorse,
Opposed against the act, bending his sword
To his great master, who, thereat enraged,
Flew on him and amongst them felled him dead.
But not without that harmful stroke which since
Hath plucked him after.

ALBANY

This shows you are above.

What are these little marks?

Don't worry about them now. You'll find out on the next page!

The Translation

ALBANY enters.

GONERIL

So you finally find me worthy of your attentions.

ALBANY

Goneril, you aren't worth the dust the wind blows in your face. I don't trust you. You can't trust anyone who abuses her own father, her flesh and blood. A woman who breaks off relations with her bloodline is like a branch that tries to break away from the tree. She will wither and come to a bad end.

GONERIL

Oh, shut up. Your words are idiotic.

ALBANY

Bad people can't appreciate wisdom or goodness. They only like things as bad as themselves. What have you two sisters done? You're tigers, not daughters. Barbaric degenerates, you've driven insane a kindly old father, whom even an angry bear would treat gently. Could my good brother-in-law—a man to whom the king gave half his kingdom—have allowed you to do it? If the heavens don't punish these crimes immediately, the end will come. Human beings will become cannibals, like ravenous sea fishes.

GONERIL

Coward! You take everything lying down, you just turn the other cheek—you can't even see the difference between being honored and being taken advantage of! If we punish criminals before they have a chance to commit their crimes, you're a fool to pity them. Why aren't you preparing for war? The French have invaded our peaceful country. Your territory is at risk, and all you can do is sit around like a preachy fool and whine.

"Ah, why is he doing that?"

ALBANY

Look at yourself, devilish shrew! A woman deformed by hatred and rage is more horrifying than the devil—at least the devil is supposed to look that way.

GONERIL

You useless fool!

ALBANY

Shame on you, warped hag! Your true demonic features are distorting your body. If I let myself do what I yearn to, I'd rip the flesh off your bones. But I won't attack a woman, even if she is a demon.

GONERIL

I sneeze on your manhood. Ha!

MESSENGER enters.

ALBANY

What news do you bring?

MESSENGER

Oh my lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead. He was killed by his servant as he about to gouge out Gloucester's other eye.

ALBANY

Gloucester's eyes?

MESSENGER

A servant Gloucester had raised in his house, full of compunction, opposed the blinding and turned his sword on the Duke of Cornwall. Enraged, Cornwall attacked and killed the servant, but not without receiving his own wound, of which he later died.

ALBANY

There's justice in heaven after all!

That these crimes are punished so quickly is proof. But oh, poor Gloucester! Did he lose his other eye?

MESSENGER

He lost both, my lord.—Ma'am, this letter is from your sister, and needs an immediate answer.

GONERIL

[to herself] In a way I'm glad to hear that Cornwall is dead. But on the other hand, Edmund is traveling with Regan, who is now a widow. If something happens between them on the road, it would shatter my hopes of having Edmund for myself and escaping this hateful life. Still, there are benefits to having Cornwall out of the way.—I'll read this letter and answer it. *She exits.*

ALBANY

Where was Gloucester's son Edmund when they gouged his eyes out?

MESSENGER

He was on his way here with your wife.

ALBANY

But he isn't here now.

MESSENGER

No, my lord. I met him going back again.

ALBANY

Does he know about this wicked crime?

MESSENGER

Yes, my lord. He was the one who denounced his father. He then left the house specifically so that the punishment might be carried out without concern for their father-son bond.

ALBANY

Gloucester, I'll thank you forever for the love you've shown the king. I'll get revenge for what they did to your eyes.—Come here, my friend. What else you do know? *They exit.*

You don't see THAT every day.



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

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Write

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!



Aw, SNAP!
Ohhhhhhh!
MILK-LIVERED MAN
burned!
Oh, no she DIDN'T!

This scene contains some of Shakespeare's best insults.

Find one that you really like and figure out how to say it so it really stings.

- Try:
- Spitting it out
 - Throwing it away
 - Saying it to yourself
 - Using it like a sword
 - Using it like a hammer
 - Using it to stop someone from talking

This insult might have stung back in the year 1600-and-whatever, but we don't usually insult people by referring to their livers anymore (but maybe we should start a new trend!).

What would you say instead of "milk-livered man"?

— “ — “ —
Humanity must perform prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.
— ” — ” —

What an image. Phew!
This one needs no prompt.
Do what you want with it. It's a good one.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GONERIL WAS ABOUT TO SAY WHEN THE MESSENGER CAME IN AND CUT HER OFF?



WHY DID SHE STOP?

Shakespeare gives Goneril and Albany a lot of (really great) words in this scene. But what if they had no words to get their meaning across—if they had to communicate using only gestures (big or small)?



Imagine you're Goneril or Albany. What might you do—what tactics would you use—as you go after your objective without language?

Try a bunch of things! Change up the pace (is the gesture swift or slow?) and quality (is the gesture sharp or does it flow?)

In this play, Albany is the only character who stands up for someone else when there's nothing at stake for him. Actually, Goneril's actions will directly benefit Albany, since they're married.

What would make you stand up for someone else, even when there's nothing to be gained for you?

BUILD WITH YOUR IMAGINATION

THIS SCENE TAKES PLACE IN A HOUSE: THE PLACE GONERIL AND ALBANY SHARE.

WHAT DOES THE HOUSE LOOK LIKE IN YOUR MIND?

IS IT BIG OR SMALL?

WHAT'S IT MADE OF?

HOW IS IT DECORATED? WHAT'S ON THE WALLS?

IS IT BRIGHT AND AIRY OR DARK AND COZY... OR SOMETHING ELSE?

WHAT COLOR IS IT?

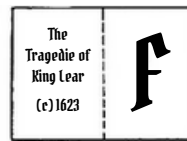
WORD-NERD CORNER

On the previous page, you might notice that there are little marks in the text, like this:

That's because there were two versions of *King Lear*: a QUARTO and a FOLIO.

You may remember those words from a recent pack or two...

Big, fancy book.
Good for showing off
to your friends.



FOLIO



QUARTO

Small, cheap book.
Good for not going
broke from all the
plays you buy.

Unlike in *Hamlet*, where the texts are just different from each other, the *King Lear* texts actually work together. There's a bunch of stuff in Q that's not in F, and a bunch of stuff in F that's not in Q. But the stuff that's in both is always exactly the same!

We've marked the parts that Q only appear in Q. <Q

In this scene, the F version is shorter than the Q version, and there's one major change in who's on stage. (Can you find it??)

So go back and read the F version of the scene. (Just skip everything between the Qs!)

How is it different? What changes about the scene or the characters? Which one do you like better? Why?