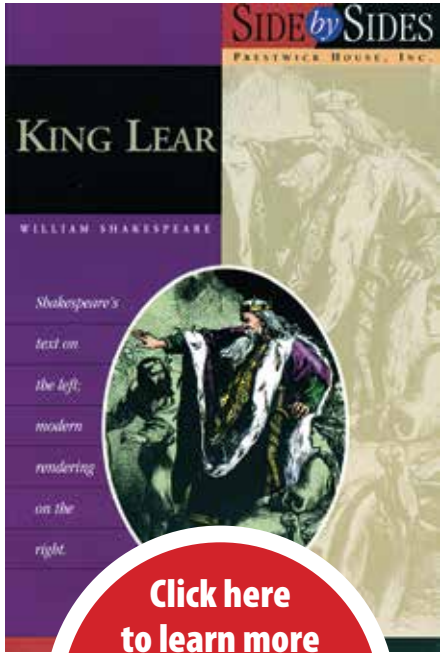




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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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 illegitimate son to GLOUCESTER

CURAN a courtier

OLD MAN tenant to GLOUCESTER

DOCTOR

FOOL

OSWALD steward to GONERIL

A Captain employed by EDMUND

Gentleman attending on CORDELIA

A Herald

Servants to CORNWALL

GONERIL
REGAN
CORDELIA } daughters to LEAR

Knights of LEAR'S train, Captains, Messengers, Soldiers, and Attendants.

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:
 130 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. Ourselves, by monthly course,
 With reservation of an hundred knights,
 135 By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
 Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
 The name, and all the additions to a king;
 The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
 Beloved sons, be yours: which to confirm,
 140 This coronet part betwixt you.

KENT: Royal Lear,
 Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
 Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,
 As my great patron thought on in my prayers,—

145 KING 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 wilt thou do, old man?
 Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
 150 When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's bound,
 When majesty stoops to folly. Reverse thy doom;
 And, in thy best consideration, cheque
 This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,
 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;
 155 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
 Reverbs no hollowness.

KING LEAR: Kent, on thy life, no more.

KENT: My life I never held but as a pawn

Call the prince of France. Quick. Call the prince of Burgundy. Call the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany. Divide the third part of land between the dowries of my two other daughters. Let pride, which she calls frankness, be her husband. I give you equal parts of my power, my supremacy, and all attributes associated with kingship. I myself, along with one hundred knights who will be maintained at your expense, will reside with each of you in turn for one month at a time. I will only retain the name and the honorary title of a king. The authority, profits, and administrative duties will be yours, my beloved sons-in-law. In confirmation, I divide this coronet between the two of you.

KENT: Royal Lear, whom I've always honored as my king, loved as if he was my father, followed as my master, and prayed for as my patron—

KING LEAR: *The bow is bent and drawn; stay out of its range!*

KENT: *Let it strike, then, even though the arrow will pierce my heart. I, Kent, must be disrespectful when Lear is mad. What are you doing, old man? Do you think that the dutiful will be afraid to speak when the powerful fall victim to flattery? Honor depends on honest words when his majesty descends into foolishness. Reconsider your decision and reflect on this dreadful haste. I risk my life for my opinion: Your youngest daughter doesn't love you least, nor are they heartless whose subtle words contain no insincerities.*

KING LEAR: Kent, on your life, no more!

KENT: *I have never viewed my life as anything other than a pledge to*

75 from him better testimony of his intent, you shall run a certain
course; where, if you violently proceed against him, mistaking
his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour,
and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn
80 down my life for him, that he hath wrote this to feel my affec-
tion to your honour, and to no further pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER: Think you so?

EDMUND: If your honour judge it meet, I will place you where you
shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance have
85 your satisfaction; and that without any further delay than this
very evening.

GLOUCESTER: He cannot be such a monster—

EDMUND: Nor is not, sure.

GLOUCESTER: To his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him.
Heaven and earth! Edmund, seek him out: wind me into him,
90 I pray you: frame the business after your own wisdom. I would
unstate myself, to be in a due resolution.

EDMUND: I will seek him, sir, presently: convey the business as I
shall find means and acquaint you withal.

95 GLOUCESTER: These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend
no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus
and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects:
love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, muti-
nies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond
100 cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under
the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias
of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of
our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous
disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this vil-

*intentions, you will pursue a safe course of action. But, if you react
violently against him and misunderstand his intentions, it will
threaten your honor and destroy his loyalty to you. I swear by my
life that he has written this in order to test my dedication to your
honor and without dangerous intentions.*

GLOUCESTER: *Do you think so?*

EDMUND: *If you find it appropriate, I will take you to a place where you
can hear us discuss this, and, by hearing it yourself, you can remove
your doubts. This can happen no later than tonight.*

GLOUCESTER: *He cannot be such a monster.*

EDMUND: *I'm sure he's not.*

GLOUCESTER: *To his father, who loves him so tenderly and entirely.
Heaven and earth! Edmund, find him! Gain his confidence, I beg
you. Set up a situation according to your own discretion. I would give
anything to have my doubts removed.*

EDMUND: *I will find him at once, sir, manage the business as I see fit, and
inform you about everything.*

GLOUCESTER: *These recent eclipses of the sun and the moon foreshadow
nothing good for us. Although science can explain the occurrences
of eclipses, the world is plagued by the consequences that follow
Love cools, friendships break, brothers fight. In cities, there are
riots, in countries, there is conflict, in palaces, there is treason,
and the bonds between father and son fall apart. This villain
comes as predicted: There's son against father. The king acts con-
trary to his natural tendencies: There's father against child. We
have seen great things in our time: Plots, deception, treachery,*

GLOUCESTER: But where is he?

EDMUND: Look, sir, I bleed.

GLOUCESTER: Where is the villain, Edmund?

EDMUND: Fled this way, sir. When by no means he could—

45 GLOUCESTER: Pursue him, ho! Go after. [*Exeunt some Servants*]
By no means what?

EDMUND: Persuade me to the murder of your lordship;
But that I told him, the revenging gods
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders bend;
50 Spoke, with how manifold and strong a bond
The child was bound to the father; sir, in fine,
Seeing how loathly opposite I stood
To his unnatural purpose, in fell motion,
With his prepared sword, he charges home
55 My unprovided body, lanced mine arm:
But when he saw my best alarum'd spirits,
Bold in the quarrel's right, roused to the encounter,
Or whether gasted by the noise I made,
Full suddenly he fled.

60 GLOUCESTER: Let him fly far:
Not in this land shall he remain uncaught;
And found—dispatch. The noble duke my master,
My worthy arch and patron, comes to-night:
By his authority I will proclaim it,
65 That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks,
Bringing the murderous coward to the stake;
He that conceals him, death.

EDMUND: When I dissuaded him from his intent,
And found him pight to do it, with curst speech
70 I threaten'd to discover him: he replied,

GLOUCESTER: *But where is he now?*

EDMUND: *Look sir, I'm bleeding!*

GLOUCESTER: *Where is the villain, Edmund?*

EDMUND: *He fled this way, sir, when he wasn't able to—*

GLOUCESTER: *Chase him! Quick, go after him!* [*Some Servants exit*]
“wasn't able to” do what?

EDMUND: *Persuade me to kill your lordship. And I told him that the angry gods aim their thunderbolts at parricides and then explained how intricate and strong the bond is that connects the child to his father. Sir, in short, when he saw how steadfastly I opposed his despicable plan, he aimed directly at my unprotected body with a fierce thrust and wounded my arm. But when he saw my finest courage roused to action, confident in the justice of the cause, or perhaps frightened of the noise I made, he suddenly fled.*

GLOUCESTER: *Let him run off. If he is in this land, he will be caught! Once he has been found—kill him! My master, the noble Duke, my worthy chief patron, will arrive tonight. By his authority, I will proclaim that he who finds him will receive a reward for bringing the murderous coward to his execution. If anyone hides him, death!*

EDMUND: *When I tried to dissuade him from his plan, and found that he was determined to go through with it, I threatened, with angry words, to reveal his plan. He replied: “You poor bastard! Do you*

35 Ere I was risen from the place that show'd
 My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,
 Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth
 From Goneril his mistress salutations;
 Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,
 Which presently they read: on whose contents,
 40 They summon'd up their meiny, straight took horse;
 Commanded me to follow, and attend
 The leisure of their answer; gave me cold looks:
 And meeting here the other messenger,
 Whose welcome, I perceived, had poison'd mine,—
 45 Being the very fellow that of late
 Display'd so saucily against your highness,—
 Having more man than wit about me, drew:
 He raised the house with loud and coward cries.
 Your son and daughter found this trespass worth
 50 The shame which here it suffers.

FOOL: Winter's not gone yet, if the wild-geese fly that way.
 Fathers that wear rags
 Do make their children blind;
 But fathers that bear bags
 55 Shall see their children kind.
 Fortune, that arrant whore,
 Ne'er turns the key to the poor.
 But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours for thy daughters
 as thou canst tell in a year.

60 KING LEAR: O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
 Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
 Thy element's below! Where is this daughter?

KENT: With the earl, sir, here within.

65 KING LEAR: Follow me not;
 Stay here. [Exit]

GENTLEMAN: Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

from running and nearly breathless, he stammered salutations from his mistress Goneril and delivered a letter, careless of interrupting me. They opened it immediately, and, on reading its contents, called together their household, instantly mounted their horses, and commanded me to follow them and to await an answer at their leisure. They gave me cold looks! When I met the other messenger here, whose welcome, I felt, had ruined mine, and recognized him as the fellow who had recently behaved so insolently against your highness, I felt more courage than common sense and drew my sword. He alarmed the house with loud and cowardly screams. Your son-in-law and your daughter thought this transgression deserved the humiliation that I now suffer.

FOOL: Winter isn't over yet, if the wild geese are still flying around.
 Fathers who wear rags make their children blind, but
 fathers who have money will have grateful children.
 Fortune, that shameless whore, never opens the door
 for the poor!
 But for all this, you'll receive more pain from your daughters than
 you can handle in one year.

KING LEAR: Oh, how this choking sensation strangles my throat! Hysteria,
 you disease that brings rising sorrow, stay in your proper place!
 Where is this daughter?

KENT: With the Earl, sir, inside.

KING LEAR: Don't follow me. Stay here. [Lear exits]

GENTLEMAN: Did you commit no other offense than the one you have
 described?

100 unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, forked
 animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! come unbutton here.
[Tearing off his clothes]

FOOL: Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in.
 Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart;
 a small spark, all the rest on's body cold. Look, here comes a
 105 walking fire.

[Enter Gloucester, with a torch]

EDGAR: This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew,
 and walks till the first cock; he gives the web and the pin,
 squints the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white
 wheat, and hurts the poor creature of earth.
 110 Saint Withold footed thrice the old;
 He met the night-mare, and her nine-fold;
 Bid her alight,
 And her troth plight,
 And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

115 KENT: How fares your grace?

KING LEAR: What's he?

KENT: Who's there? What is't you seek?

GLOUCESTER: What are you there? Your names?

EDGAR: Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tad-
 120 pole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart,
 when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows
 the old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the
 standing pool; who is whipped from tithing to tithing, and
 stock-punished, and imprisoned; who hath had three suits to
 125 his back, six shirts to his body, horse to ride, and weapon to
 wear;

*man is no more than a poor, bare, two-legged animal such
 as you are. Off, off, you borrowed garments! Come unbutton
 here! [Lear is tearing off his clothes]*

FOOL: *Please, uncle, stop this. It's a nasty night for taking a swim. A
 little fire in the uncultivated countryside is like the heart of a lecher.
 A small spark of feeling, while all the rest of his body is cold. Look,
 here comes a walking fire!*

[Gloucester enters with a torch]

EDGAR: *This is the foul fiend, the demon Flibbertigibbet! He comes out at
 nightfall and walks about till midnight. He gives cataracts, causes
 strains to the eye and harelips. He mildews the ripening wheat and
 tortures the poor creatures of the earth.
 Saint Withold walked across the plain three times. He
 met the night-mare and her nine offspring. Bid her to
 let go and do no harm. Be gone witch, be gone!*

KENT: *How is your Grace doing?*

KING LEAR: *Who's he?*

KENT: *[To Gloucester] Who's there? What is it you want?*

GLOUCESTER: *Who are you there? Your names?*

EDGAR: *Poor Tom, who eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole,
 the lizard, and the water-newt. Out of anger, when the foul fiend
 rages, he eats cow-dung instead of salad. He swallows the old rat
 and the dog lying in the ditch. He drinks the green scum from
 standing waters. He is chased from one district to the next, put in
 stocks, and imprisoned. He used to own three suits and six shirts,
 a horse, and a weapon.*

ACT IV

SCENE I

The heath.

[Enter Edgar]

EDGAR: Yet better thus, and known to be contemn'd,
Than still contemn'd and flatter'd. To be worst,
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear:
5 The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace!
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts. But who comes here?

[Enter Gloucester, led by an Old Man]

10 My father, poorly led? World, world, O world!
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,
Life would not yield to age.

OLD MAN: O, my good lord, I have been your tenant, and your
father's tenant, these fourscore years.

15 GLOUCESTER: Away, get thee away; good friend, be gone:
Thy comforts can do me no good at all;
Thee they may hurt.

ACT IV

SCENE I

The heath.

[EDGAR enters]

EDGAR: *It's better to be as I am, openly despised, than to be despised, but treated with false flattery. The lowest thing, rejected by fortune, always lives in hope, and not in fear. The most difficult change is from good to bad. Any change from the worst is for the better. Welcome, then, you tender elements of nature; I embrace you! This wretched man, whom you have blown into torment owes you no thanks. But who comes here?*

[Gloucester enters, led by an Old Man]

My father, guided inadequately? World, world, oh world! If the strange changes of fortune didn't make us hate life, we would not submit to growing old.

OLD MAN: *Oh, my good lord. I have been your tenant, and your father's tenant, for the past eighty years.*

GLOUCESTER: *Go away, go away! Good friend, go away. Your attempts to help me won't do me any good, and they may hurt you.*

GENTLEMAN: Good sir,—

205 KING LEAR: I will die bravely, like a bridegroom. What!
I will be jovial: come, come; I am a king,
My masters, know you that.

GENTLEMAN: You are a royal one, and we obey you.

210 KING LEAR: Then there's life in't. Nay, if you get it, you shall get it
with running. Sa, sa, sa, sa.
[Exit running; Attendants follow]

GENTLEMAN: A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,
Past speaking of in a king! Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

215 EDGAR: Hail, gentle sir.

GENTLEMAN: Sir, speed you: what's your will?

EDGAR: Do you hear aught, sir, of a battle toward?

GENTLEMAN: Most sure and vulgar: every one hears that,
Which can distinguish sound.

220 EDGAR: But, by your favour,
How near's the other army?

GENTLEMAN: Near and on speedy foot; the main descry
Stands on the hourly thought.

EDGAR: I thank you, sir: that's all.

GENTLEMAN: Good sir—

KING LEAR: I will die bravely, like a neat bridegroom. What! I will be
happy! Come on, come on! I am a king, masters, remember that.

GENTLEMAN: You are royalty, and we obey you.

KING LEAR: Then the situation isn't hopeless. And you shall have it. You
shall have it by running for it. Sa, sa, sa, sa.
[He exits running; Attendants follow]

GENTLEMAN: A pitiful sight in a common wretch, not to mention in a king.
You have one daughter, who redeems nature from the universal curse
your two other daughters have brought upon it.

EDGAR: Greetings, noble sir.

GENTLEMAN: Sir, be quick! What do you want?

EDGAR: Have you heard anything, sir, of an upcoming battle?

GENTLEMAN: Most certainly. It's common knowledge. Everyone has heard
about it who can hear at all!

EDGAR: But, please tell me, how close is the other army?

GENTLEMAN: Close, and moving quickly. We expect to see the main part
of the troops any hour.

EDGAR: I thank you, sir, that's all.

55 Whose age has charms in it, whose title more,
 To pluck the common bosom on his side,
 An turn our impress'd lances in our eyes
 Which do command them. With him I sent the queen;
 My reason all the same; and they are ready
 60 To-morrow, or at further space, to appear
 Where you shall hold your session. At this time
 We sweat and bleed: the friend hath lost his friend;
 And the best quarrels, in the heat, are cursed
 By those that feel their sharpness:
 The question of Cordelia and her father
 65 Requires a fitter place.

ALBANY: Sir, by your patience,
 I hold you but a subject of this war,
 Not as a brother.

REGAN: That's as we list to grace him.
 70 Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded,
 Ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers;
 Bore the commission of my place and person;
 The which immediacy may well stand up,
 And call itself your brother.

75 GONERIL: Not so hot:
 In his own grace he doth exalt himself,
 More than in your addition.

REGAN: In my rights,
 By me invested, he compeers the best.

80 GONERIL: That were the most, if he should husband you.

REGAN: Jesters do oft prove prophets.

soldiers against us. I sent the queen with him for the same reason. They will be ready tomorrow, or any day after that, to appear wherever you intend to hold your trial. Right now, we are exhausted and wounded. A friend has lost a friend. Even the best causes in war are cursed, in the heat of passion, by those who feel the bitter consequences of battle. The case of Cordelia and her father requires a more appropriate place.

ALBANY: Sir, if I may say so, I regard you as a subordinate in this war, not as an equal.

REGAN: It's up to us to determine that. I think you should have inquired about our opinion before you had said that much. He led our troops; he followed the authority of my high rank and person. Due to this close connection, he may well stand up and call himself your equal.

GONERIL: Not so fast! He distinguishes himself through his own qualities rather than through the honors you have conferred upon him.

REGAN: Through the rights I have endowed upon him, he becomes an equal to the best.

GONERIL: That would be most fully realized if he became your husband.

REGAN: Prophecies are often made in jest.

EDGAR: By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale;
 And when 'tis told, O, that my heart would burst!
 The bloody proclamation to escape,
 That follow'd me so near,—O, our lives' sweetness!
 215 That we the pain of death would hourly die
 Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
 Into a madman's rags; to assume a semblance
 That very dogs disdain'd: and in this habit
 Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
 220 Their precious stones new lost: became his guide,
 Led him, begg'd for him, saved him from despair;
 Never,—O fault!—reveal'd myself unto him,
 Until some half-hour past, when I was arm'd:
 Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,
 225 I ask'd his blessing, and from first to last
 Told him my pilgrimage: but his flaw'd heart,
 Alack, too weak the conflict to support!
 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
 Burst smilingly.

230 EDMUND: This speech of yours hath moved me,
 And shall perchance do good: but speak you on;
 You look as you had something more to say.

ALBANY: If there be more, more woeful, hold it in;
 For I am almost ready to dissolve,
 235 Hearing of this.

EDGAR: This would have seem'd a period
 To such as love not sorrow; but another,
 To amplify too much, would make much more,
 And top extremity.
 240 Whilst I was big in clamour came there in a man,
 Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
 Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
 Who 'twas that so endured, with his strong arms
 He fastened on my neck, and bellow'd out
 245 As he'd burst heaven; threw him on my father;

EDGAR: *I have nursed his sorrows, my lord. Listen to a brief story. And when I've told it, I fear my heart will burst! The death sentence that followed me—oh, how sweet our lives are! That we would suffer the pain of death hourly rather than die once and for all!—caused me to change into the clothes of a madman and to assume an appearance that even dogs ridiculed. Dressed like this, I met my father with his bleeding eye sockets, who had just lost their sight. I became his guide, led him, and begged for him, and saved him from despair. I never—oh what a mistake!—revealed my identity to him, until about half an hour ago, when I was wearing armor. Not sure, though hopeful, of a fortunate outcome, I asked for his blessing, and told him my story from beginning to end. But his fractured heart—alas!—too weak to endure the stress, torn between two emotional extremes, between joy and grief, broke in happiness.*

EDMUND: *Your speech has touched me and might do some good. Go on. You look as though you have more to say.*

ALBANY: *If there is something to say that's even sadder; keep it to yourself. I am about to cry, just hearing about this.*

EDGAR: *This must seem extremely sad to anyone who cannot deal with sorrow. To say more, and elaborate on it, would make it even worse and exceed the limits of grief. While I was crying loudly, a man came in, who, having seen me in my horrible condition, would have shunned my detestable presence. But when I revealed who I was and what I endured, he clasped me around my neck and cried out, as if to burst heaven. Then he threw his arms around my father and told the most pitiful tale about Lear and himself that anyone ever heard. While retelling it, his grief overpowered him, and his heart began to*

Study Guide

Act I, Scene I

King Lear wants to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. What question does he ask his daughters, and why does he eventually banish Cordelia?

Act I, Scene II

Edmund forges a letter from his brother Edgar and shows it to his father. Why does Edmund deceive them both? Why does he seem to feel so much anger and resentment?

Act I, Scene III

What does Goneril complain about to her steward Oswald? What does she want Oswald to do?

Act I, Scene IV

King Lear is angry because he does not receive the respectful treatment he demands in Goneril's house. When the fool talks to Lear, his language is full of imagery. What does he criticize the king for?

Act I, Scene V

King Lear prepares for his departure to his daughter Regan's house. What does the fool predict about the king's plans?

Act II, Scene I

Edmund has been dissatisfied with his personal situation since the beginning of the play. How does Edmund manage to get rid of his brother Edgar?

Act II, Scene II

After a fight with Oswald, Kent is put in stocks by Cornwall and Regan. Why did he attack Oswald?

Act II, Scene III

What decision does Edgar make after he is forced into banishment by his father and brother?

Act II, Scene IV

At the end of this scene, King Lear leaves the house of Regan and ventures into the cold night. What causes him to become upset and angry with both of his daughters?

Act III, Scene I

What news does Kent convey to the Gentleman, and what favor does he ask of him?

Act III, Scene II

King Lear addresses the natural elements and exclaims, "I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning." Elaborate on his remark.

Act III, Scene III

Describe the exchange between Edmund and his father Gloucester. What are Edmund's intentions; what are Gloucester's?

Act III, Scene IV

King Lear meets Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom. As he begins his descent into madness, Lear compares himself with the poor beggar. Why does he see parallels between himself and Poor Tom? What does he think they have in common?

Act III, Scene V

Comment on Edmund's advancements in this scene.