

Act 4 Scene 3

KENT (in disguise) and the GENTLEMAN enter.

KENT

Do you know why the King of France went back home so suddenly?

GENTLEMAN

He left something unfinished in his kingdom, which he remembered after arriving here. It was important and dangerous enough that he had to return in person to deal with it.

KENT

Who has he left behind as his general?

GENTLEMAN

The Marshal of France, Monsieur la Far.

KENT

Did the letters you delivered cause Queen Cordelia to show any grief?

GENTLEMAN

Yes, sir. She took them and read them in my presence, and now and then a large tear would trickle down her delicate cheek. It seemed that she was able to control her deepest emotions, even though they tried to overcome her.

KENT

Oh, then the news moved her?

GENTLEMAN

Not to any burst of passion. She seemed to struggle between patience and sorrow, deciding which would best express her feelings. You've seen how it can rain while the sun is still shining—her smiles and tears were like that, but even more beautiful. The little smiles on her lips seemed oblivious to her tears, which dropped like pearls from her diamond eyes. In short, sorrow would be a precious thing if everyone were as lovely in their sorrow as Cordelia was.

KENT

Did she ask anything out loud?

GENTLEMAN

Well, once or twice she sighed the name "father," as if the word were pressing on her heart. And once she cried out, "Sister, sisters! You most shameful of all ladies, sisters! Kent, father, sisters! What, in a storm, in the middle of the night? No false shows of pity can be trusted!" And then she shook the holy tears from her heavenly eyes and went off to deal with her grief alone.

KENT

It's the stars, the stars above us who decide our fates. Otherwise one couple couldn't have children so different from each other as Cordelia and her sisters are. Have you spoken to her since then?

GENTLEMAN

No.

KENT

Was this before the King of France returned home?

GENTLEMAN

No, after that.

KENT

Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear is in Dover. When he's in his right mind, he remembers why we're here, and he refuses to see his daughter Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Why, good sir?

KENT

He is pained by a powerful sense of shame. He remembers how unkind he was to her; and how he stripped her of his blessing and turned her out to take her chances in a foreign land, and then gave her share of the kingdom to her two hard-hearted sisters. These things sting his mind so venomously that a burning shame keeps him from going to see Cordelia.

GENTLEMAN

Alas, the poor gentleman!

KENT

Have you heard anything about Albany and Cornwall's troops?

GENTLEMAN

Yes. They're on the march.

KENT

Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear, and leave you to attend to him. I have some important business that will force me to disguise myself again for a while. When my true identity is revealed, you won't regret helping me like this. Please, come along with me.

They exit.