

Act 5 Scene 1

EDMUND, REGAN, gentlemen, and soldiers enter with drums and banners.

EDMUND

[To a gentleman] Find out if the Duke of Albany plans to stick to his most recent plan, or if something has changed his mind. He's very fickle and always second-guessing himself. Bring me a report of his final decision.

A gentleman exits.

REGAN

My sister's messenger Oswald must have had an accident.

EDMUND

That outcome is to be feared, madam.

REGAN

Now, sweet lord, you know that I intend to honor you with my hand in marriage. But tell me truly—be honest now—don't you love my sister Goneril?

EDMUND

With an honourable love.

REGAN

But have you never taken my brother-in-law's place in her bed?

EDMUND

Such a question only insults yourself.

REGAN

I'm suspicious that you have been both her ally and her lover and are now hers.

EDMUND

No, madam. I swear by my honour.

REGAN

I won't be able to stand it if she takes you from me. My dear lord, don't be intimate with her.

EDMUND

Don't worry about me. Now she and the duke her husband are here!

ALBANY, GONERIL, and soldiers enter with drums and banners.

GONERIL

[To herself] I would rather lose this battle than let that sister of mine come between Edmund and me.

ALBANY

Good to see you, Regan, my loving sister-in-law.

[To Edmund] Sir, I hear that the king has joined his daughter Cordelia, along with others who have rebelled against the harshness of our rule. I can't be brave if the cause I'm fighting for isn't honorable. This business concerns me only because the French have invaded our land. I don't care whether the French support King Lear or others who I'm afraid have good reason to oppose us.

EDMUND

Sir, you speak nobly.

REGAN

Why are we discussing this?

GONERIL

We must unite against the enemy. These domestic and personal quarrels are not the issue here.

ALBANY

Then let's meet with our experienced officers and determine how to proceed.

EDMUND

I'll meet you at your tent right away.

REGAN

Sister, will you come with us?

GONERIL

No.

REGAN

It would be best if you did. Please, come with us.

GONERIL

[To herself] Oh, ha! I know what she's doing: trying to keep me away from Edmund.

[To the others] All right, I'll go.

EDGAR (still disguised as a peasant) enters.

EDGAR

[To ALBANY] If your Grace would ever stoop to speak with a man as poor as I am, then hear what I have to say.

ALBANY

[To EDMUND, REGAN, and GONERIL] I'll catch up with you.

Everyone exits except for ALBANY and EDGAR.

[To EDGAR] Tell me.

EDGAR

[Giving ALBANY a letter] Before you fight the battle, open this letter. If you are victorious, then blow your trumpet to signal to me. I seem wretched now, but I can produce a champion who will defend my claims. If you die in battle, then your business in this world will be over, and the plot against your life will be over as well. Good luck to you.

ALBANY

Stay until I've read the letter.

EDGAR

I was ordered not to do that. When the time comes, all you have to do is blow a horn, and I'll appear again.

ALBANY

Well, farewell then. I'll read your letter.

EDGAR exits.

EDMUND enters.

EDMUND

The enemy's in sight. Prepare your troops. *[He gives ALBANY a document]* Here is an estimate of the enemy's true strength and weaponry, drawn up by our diligent scouts. But hurry now, please.

ALBANY

We will be ready for the occasion.

ALBANY exits.

EDMUND

I've pledged my love to both of these sisters now. And they're each suspicious of the other, as if they were both poisonous snakes. Which of them will I pick? Both? One? Or neither? I can't be happy with either one of them as long as the other remains alive. If I married the widowed Regan, it would drive Goneril crazy. But it would be difficult to carry out my plan with Goneril while her husband's still alive. Now then, I'll use Albany's authority and power to win this battle. And when it's over, let Goneril figure out how to get rid of him. Albany intends to be merciful to Lear and Cordelia, but if I win the battle and they

become my prisoners, they won't live long enough to see his pardon. My position requires actions, not words.

He exits.