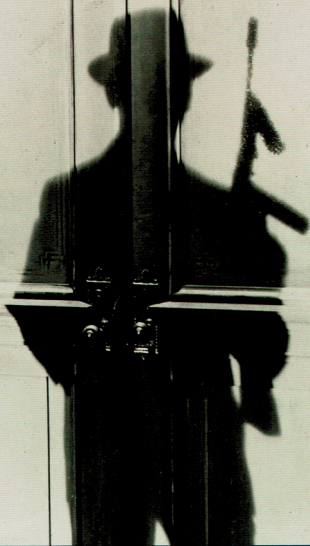


SIMPLY SHAKESPEARE



Based on William Shakespeare's
KING LEAR

Jennifer Bassett



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King Lear

CHAPTER ONE

*How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!*

Act 1, Scene 4

It all began on a clear day in February. A north wind was blowing off Lake Michigan, sharp and cold. It made the eyes water and the fingers turn blue. People hurrying to work through the streets of Chicago kept their heads down and their collars turned up over their ears. Even the traffic lights looked cold.

On the fifteenth floor of an office building in 92nd Street two men stood by a window, looking down into the street. As they watched, a big black Cadillac turned smoothly out of the traffic and disappeared down to the underground entrance of the building.

'There's the Boss now,' said one of the men. 'You know why he's called this meeting, don't you?'

'I don't know the details,' said the other, an older man with short grey hair.

'Well, we'll find out soon enough,' said the first man. He turned to look at a young man standing some way behind them. 'Who's the boy, Gloucester? Your son, is he?'

Gloucester nodded. 'Yeah, my younger boy. But he's not my wife's son. I had a good time many years ago with a pretty little Polish girl, and this boy was the result.' He laughed. 'Still, I'm fond of the boy, even if he is **illegitimate**. His mother's dead now, and he's come to live with me.'

He called across the room. 'Hey, Edmund. Come over here a minute.'

The young man crossed the room towards them. He was tall, with fair hair and very light blue eyes.

'I want you to meet Mr Kent,' said his father. 'He's the Boss's right-hand man and a good friend of mine.'

The young man shook hands. 'Pleased to meet you, Mr Kent,' he said politely.

Kent said something pleasant in return, and then the three men moved towards the door. The meeting would begin in a few minutes in the big office, and it was never a good idea to keep the Boss waiting.

His name was Lear. Sometimes he was called Lear 'the King'; to most people he was just the Boss. He had been the Boss for more years than most people could remember. During this time the 'Family' had become one of the biggest and richest in the United States. The Family was big business; it was Lear's personal kingdom of relations, friends, and several hundred workers. It owned companies, apartment buildings, shops, hotels, nightclubs, sometimes whole streets. It did every kind of business. Some of it was lawful; most of it wasn't. But the police could never put a finger on the top men. The Family's lawyers were too quick, too clever, too sharp. Money – enough money – can buy anything, and anybody. And if money didn't solve the problem, then a bullet did.

It was a long time since Lear had used a gun himself. He paid other men to do the shooting for him. In fact, he had people to do everything for him – make his phone calls, drive his car, clean his shoes, pour his drinks, light his cigars . . .

But now he was tired of it all. He was an old man, and he was tired of making decisions, giving orders, watching over the business day and night. He had worked hard all through his long life and had looked after the Family and his people with a strong, firm hand. Nobody argued with the Boss. Not twice. If you did, you very quickly became food for the fish

at the bottom of Lake Michigan. But if you were a good worker and did exactly as you were told, then Lear was like a father to you. He never forgot a kindness, and he never forgave an insult.

But it was a hard, lonely life at the top, and now Lear wanted a change. He wanted an easy, comfortable old age, to enjoy himself without a care in the world. His wife had long been dead, but he had three grown-up daughters. For weeks he had thought about his problem, and finally he had made a plan.



Kent sat in his usual place at the long table and watched the room filling up with all the 'chiefs' of the Family's different businesses. He knew a little of Lear's plan – and he didn't like it.

Lear's three daughters had arrived and were taking their seats. The older two, Goneril and Regan, were already married: Goneril to Albany, a tall, thin man with a face like a horse. Kent had heard rumours that the marriage was not a success. Regan's husband was Cornwall, a big black-bearded man who was feared and disliked by nearly everyone in the Family. Cornwall had walked away, alive, from more gunfights than most people had had hot dinners. Cordelia, the youngest daughter, was hoping to get married soon. She had her young man with her today, Kent saw. His name was France, and he was a lawyer from New York – clever, good-looking, and already making a name for himself. Kent hoped they would be happy – he was very fond of Cordelia.

When Lear came in, the talking stopped and everyone stood up. All the chiefs there were **powerful** men, with their own small 'kingdoms', but Lear's word was still law in the Family. He was a tall, strongly built man, with snow-white hair and thick black eyebrows over hot black eyes. There were lines of worry and tiredness on his face.

He nodded to a few people, took his place at the head of the table, and dropped his bomb into the meeting.

'As you all know,' he began, 'I've been the Boss for a long time. I'm not a proud man, but I think I can say I've looked after you all well. The Family business runs smoothly, we make a lot of money, and we don't cause any problems for the city officials. In fact, they like us – we help to keep crime off the streets.' There were smiles round the table at this little joke. 'But now,' Lear went on, 'I'm an old man and I want a rest. I have three dearly loved daughters, and I don't want any fights or arguments between you all after my death. So, I'm breaking up the Family business into three parts, and giving one part to each of my daughters. By the end of this meeting, I shall no longer be the Boss. I shall live a quiet, peaceful life, waiting for death.'

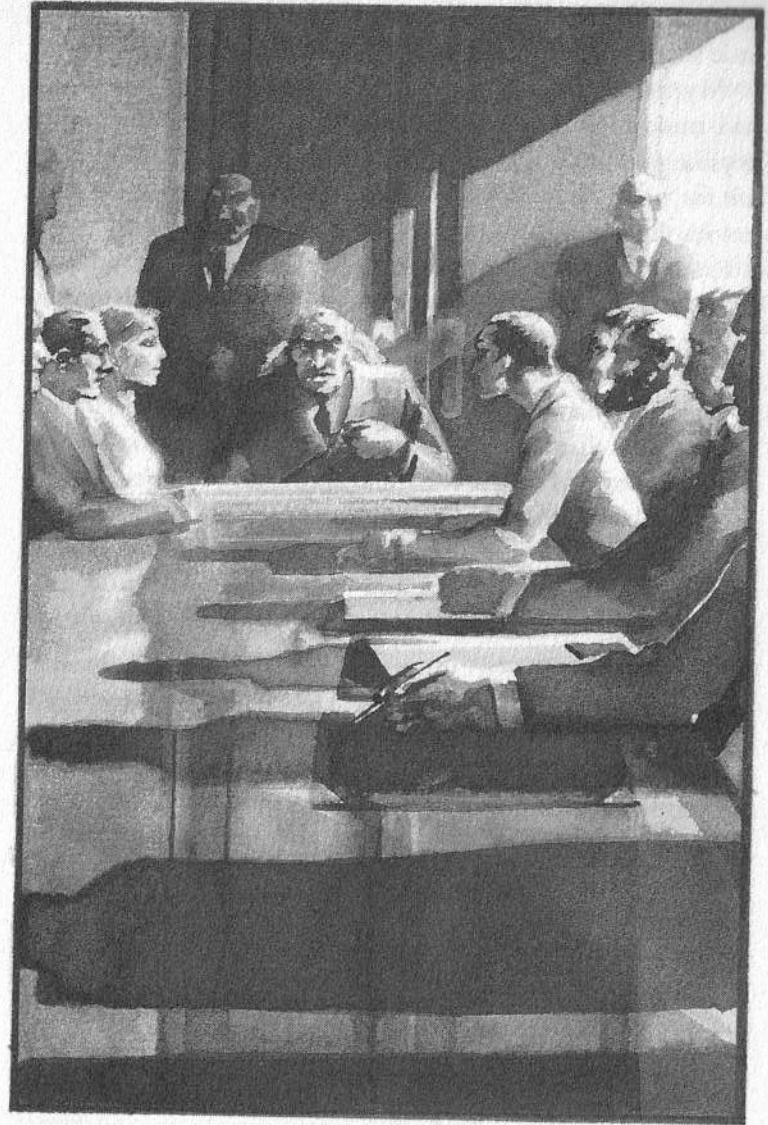
He stopped, and a whisper of surprise ran round the room. But there was more to come.

'But which daughter will get which part, eh? We're talking big money here.' Lear smiled, and his hot black eyes rested on each young woman in turn. 'So I've called you all here today to listen to their answers to my question. Now, which of you girls loves your old father most? You're the oldest, Goneril. You speak first.'

Goneril bent forward across the table. She had long green eyes like a cat and fingernails painted the colour of blood.

'Oh, Father, I love you more than words can say! How can I describe my feelings for you? You're the light of my life, the sunshine in my heart. No daughter ever loved a father more.' Her voice was sugary sweet, but the green eyes were watchful, and greedy.

Lear smiled and nodded slowly. 'Good. I like it.' He pushed a big pile of papers down the table towards her. 'There you are, my dear. Now . . . Regan.' He turned to his second daughter.



'As you all know,' Lear began, 'I've been the Boss for a long time. I'm not a proud man, but I think I can say I've looked after you all well.'

Regan had her father's hot black eyes. She smiled, showing little sharp white teeth.

'My sister's taken the words right out of my mouth,' she said smoothly. 'You're more important to me, Father, than anything or anybody in the whole wide world. I'd give my life for you.' She pressed her hand to her heart to show how serious she was.

From his seat at the other end of the table, Kent watched Cordelia's unhappy face. He knew which of Lear's daughters had a kind, loving heart. But Cordelia was young. She hadn't yet learnt how to lie.

Lear gave another satisfied smile, and more papers were passed to Regan. People began to talk among themselves. Then Lear turned to Cordelia, and the talking stopped.

'OK, honey.' His eyes rested warmly on his favourite child. 'What can you say to win a bigger prize than your sisters, eh?'

'Nothing, Father.'

'Nothing?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing will come of nothing. Try again, girl.'

'I love you, Father, as much as a daughter should. No more and no less.'

Lear's hot black eyes stared at her. 'You'll have to do better than that, my girl.'

Cordelia met her father's eyes bravely. 'Papa, you're my father, and I love you dearly – as a father. Why did my sisters get married, if they say they love you more than anybody in the world? When I marry, I shall love my husband just as much as I love you.'

Lear's face was stony. 'What kind of a way is that to talk to your father? Hey?'

'It's an honest way. And a true way.'

'Then truth and honesty will be your rewards,' said Lear angrily. 'You won't get a single dollar out of me for the rest

of your life. If that's the best you can do, then I'm finished with you!'

Kent jumped to his feet. 'Boss!' he began urgently. 'You can't —'

'You keep out of this, Kent,' said Lear. 'This is my private business. I thought she'd be the comfort of my old age. It just shows how wrong a man can be.' He turned to Goneril and Regan. 'OK, girls. You can take Cordelia's third of the business and share it out between you. You two, with your husbands to help you, of course, are now the new bosses of the Family.'

Kent tried again. 'Boss, we've been together for a long time. You've got to listen to me! Do you really know what you're doing? You can't just walk away from your job like this . . . Once the Boss, always the Boss! And Cordelia —'

'Shut up!' shouted Lear. He stood up and moved round the table towards Kent. Other people stood up nervously. The meeting was getting out of control.

Kent had red hair and an Irish grandfather. He had never yet walked away from an argument.

'You're wrong, Boss,' he said quietly. 'Your youngest daughter doesn't use flowery language, but that doesn't mean she loves you less than her sisters do. Think about it, Boss.'

'Jesus, man!' Lear said through his teeth. 'How dare you tell *me* what to think!' He took hold of Kent's collar and shook him. Albany and Cornwall rushed forward to pull the two men away from each other.

Kent straightened his collar angrily. 'The truth hurts, does it, Boss?'

'Get out!' said Lear. 'You're finished, Kent. You'd better get a plane out of Chicago today, or I'll run you out of town myself.'

'OK,' said Kent. 'If that's how you want it.' He turned and walked down the room to Cordelia. 'Goodbye, Miss Cordelia,'

he said gently. 'Take care of yourself now. And you' – he turned to Goneril and Regan – 'you take care of your father, who you love so much.' A second later the door closed behind him.

People began to move back to their seats, but Cordelia came up to her father and put her hand on his arm.

'Papa, please listen to me. You've got it all wrong. Don't you want me to be honest and speak the truth?'

'It's a pity you were ever born if you can't please me better than this,' said her father angrily. He shook his arm free of her hand.

At this, France, the New York lawyer, stepped forward and put his arm round Cordelia's shoulders. Lear looked at him coldly.

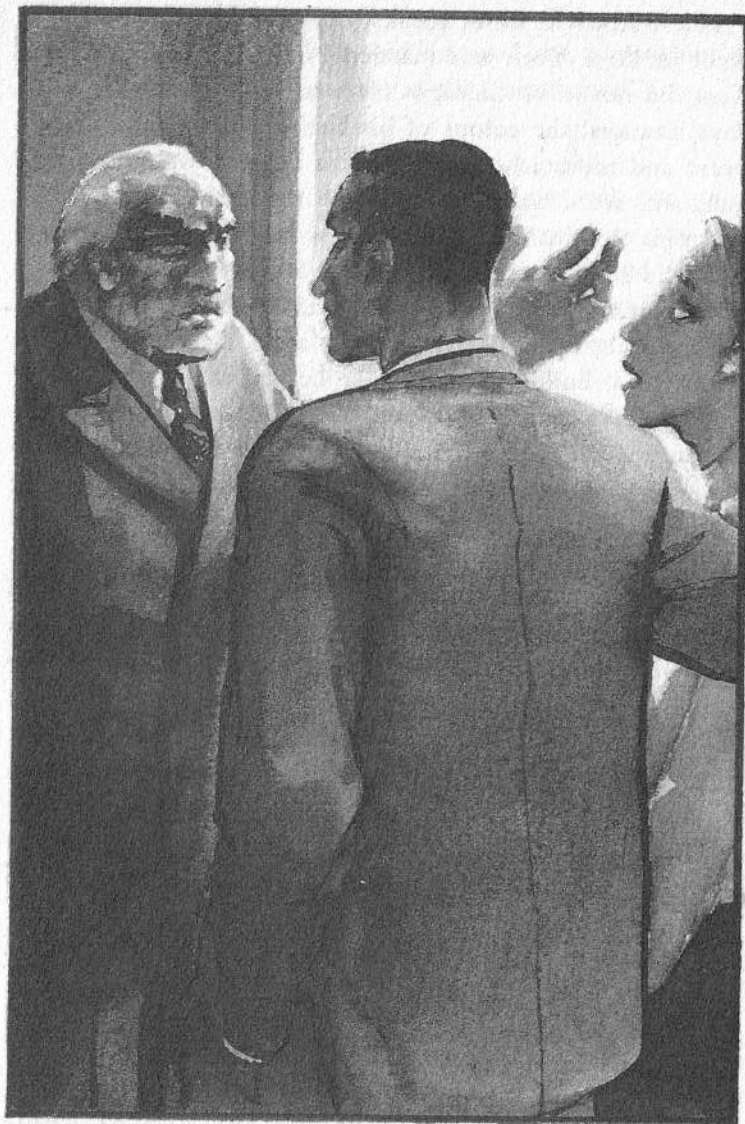
'Still want to marry her, do you?' he said unpleasantly. 'She's getting nothing from me. There she is. What you see is what you get.'

France looked Lear up and down. 'You're throwing away more riches than you've ever had in your life. There are some things that money just can't buy.' He looked down into the white face by his side. 'Come on, honey,' he said gently. 'Let's get out of here.'

'Take her and good luck to you,' Lear said icily. 'She's no daughter of mine. I never want to see her again.'



The meeting that February day changed a lot of things in the Family. The news got round fast and there was a lot of worried whispering in quiet corners. The lines of control from the top were no longer clear. Instead of one boss at the top, there were now two. Actually, there were four, as the husbands, Albany and Cornwall, wanted their share of money and power too. The two men did not like each other, and people began to wonder how long the Family would hold together.



*'Still want to marry her, do you?' Lear said unpleasantly.
'She's getting nothing from me. There she is. What you see is
what you get.'*

Lear refused to see or speak to Cordelia again, and so she went to New York and married France a short time later. Kent did not leave Chicago. He went into hiding for a few days, changed the colour of his hair to brown, and grew a beard and moustache. He bought a new brown suit, a new gun, and wore dark glasses all the time. He worried a lot about his old boss. Lear had been good to him in the past, and Kent did not forget kindness easily. He listened for rumours in the bars and nightclubs downtown.

Gloucester didn't like the changes at all. But he worked for Cornwall as building manager, so he couldn't say much. He had his own family troubles, too. On the day after the famous meeting in 92nd Street, his younger son Edmund had come to him with a long face and a story that Gloucester didn't want to hear.

This Edmund was a strange young man. Behind those light blue eyes was a cold, hungry hate that burned away without stopping. He hated being illegitimate. He hated Edgar, his elder half-brother, who was Gloucester's 'lawful' son. He hated being at the bottom of any pile. The only things he loved were power, money, and himself. But his hate never showed in his face, and people, especially women, found him very attractive.

That day Edmund, with a pretence of unwillingness, had shown his father a letter which had made Gloucester sick with anger. The letter appeared to be from Edgar, his elder son. Behind the careful language, the message was quite simple really. Edgar was suggesting to Edmund that if their father met an early, 'accidental' death, the two brothers could then enjoy all his money immediately, without having to wait for years.

'But I can't believe he's serious,' Edmund had said to his father. 'I'll have a talk with him. Find out what he really thinks.'

'Yeah. You do that, boy,' Gloucester had said, his face white with anger. 'And if it's true ... My God, I'll ...

What's the world coming to these days? There's the Boss, gone soft in the head. Poor old honest Kent, kicked out of town. And children and parents at war everywhere!'



Lear was not yet at war, but his new life-plan was not going well. He had sold his big apartment downtown, and was going to live with his two daughters, Goneril and Regan, spending one month at a time with each of them. He was keeping all his servants, helpers, secretaries, drivers, and they would live with him in his daughters' houses. He wanted, in fact, to live as if he were still the Boss, but without the work or the responsibility.

This didn't please Goneril at all. She and her sister both had enormous houses, built for them by Lear, on a very nice piece of private land called 'The Park'. The Park was just north of Chicago, right on the shore of Lake Michigan. Land was as valuable as gold dust around there, but the Family also owned another big piece of land right next to the Park. At the moment it was just an enormous **building site**, but in about a year's time it would become the biggest and most expensive **marina** for pleasure boats on Lake Michigan. This was Cornwall's special interest, and Gloucester, his building manager, lived in a house right on the building site.

In Goneril's house there had already been angry words. Lear, with his small army of servants, was living with her at the moment, and that Sunday morning there had been a fight between one of his men and Oswald, Goneril's private secretary. Oswald was a very smooth man. He had a smooth face, smooth black hair, and a smooth tongue, but you wouldn't turn your back on him in a dark lonely street. He had been rude to Lear when Lear asked if his lunch was ready, and Caius, Lear's man, had hit Oswald and knocked him down. Lear had been so pleased with Caius that he had given him fifty dollars.

Caius was a new servant. He had come to see Lear that morning to ask for a job. Lear was a man of quick decisions; he took a liking to Caius immediately, and Caius started work there and then. He wore a brown suit, kept his dark glasses on all the time, and if you looked closely at the back of his neck, you could see that his brown hair had once been red.

After lunch the trouble began for real. Goneril came into Lear's sitting-room like a north wind blowing across Lake Michigan.

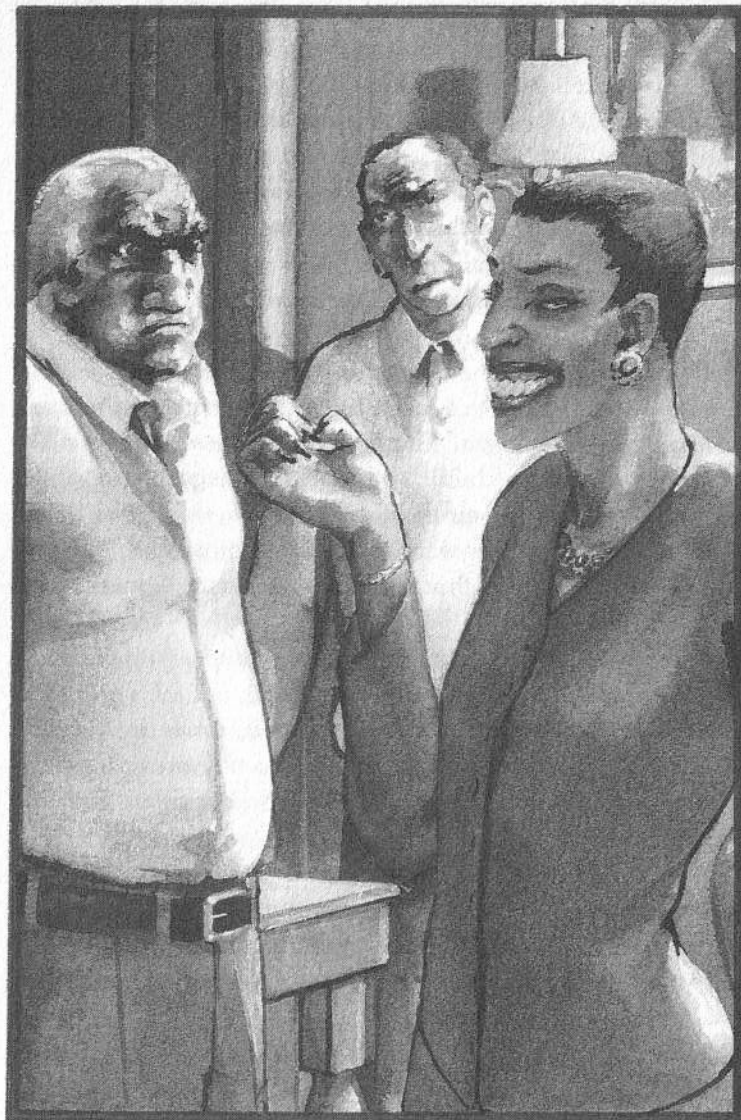
'What the hell's going on, Father?' she said. 'One of your wild men has knocked my secretary down. And every day your servants insult me and my people; they shout and argue and drink at all hours of the day and night. What do you think this house is – some kind of a nightclub? Huh? Why can't they behave in a quiet, sensible way – in fact, as suitable servants for an old man. If you can't control them, you must get rid of some of them.'

Lear stared at her, with narrowed eyes. 'For one terrible moment I thought you were my daughter. I'm sorry, who am I speaking to?'

'Don't be stupid, Father,' Goneril said coldly. 'I really haven't got time for silly jokes. You're making this house very unpleasant, and I must ask you to get rid of half your servants.'

Lear got slowly to his feet. His face was tight with anger. 'You ungrateful little **bitch!**' he said heavily. 'Is it too much to ask that you give house-room to your old father and his people? Oh, poor Cordelia, her crime seems small compared to this! Why did I drive her away from me? Still, I have another daughter. I shall leave for Regan's house immediately; *she'll* know how to behave towards her father.'

Goneril gave him a smile that would have frightened even a Chicago taxi-driver. Then she inspected her brightly painted



'You ungrateful little bitch!' Lear said heavily. 'Is it too much to ask that you give house-room to your old father and his people.'

finger nails with great interest. 'As you please, Father,' she said coolly.

Before Lear could reach the door, it opened and Albany came in. He looked in surprise from his wife's cold smile to Lear's angry face.

'What's the matter, sir?' he said to Lear.

Goneril cut in smoothly. 'It's nothing important. Father's just in one of his difficult moods.'

Albany began to speak, but Lear turned on his daughter in **fury**.

'I hope that you're never able to have children of your own. But by God, if you do, I hope they bring you nothing but pain, day and night. Then you'll know what it feels like to have a thankless child! You wait till Regan hears about this. She's a kind, loving daughter, and she won't like this at all – oh no! She'll never want to speak to you again!'

The door crashed shut behind him, and Goneril gave another **evil** smile.



That afternoon the phone rang several times in Regan's house, but either she was out, or she was not answering calls. Goneril sent Oswald off with a note for her sister, and told him to find her quickly.

When Lear could get no answer to his phone call, he too wrote a note to Regan, and sent it off with Caius. Caius hurried out to his car, feeling very worried about his boss. He did not like the way things were going, but of course, he could not say anything to Lear.

The Fool was the only person who could ever say things to Lear which Lear didn't want to hear. The Fool, or Boy, as he was sometimes called, was a young man of about seventeen or eighteen. No one knew his real name or his age. Lear had found him one day, lying asleep next to the big Cadillac in

92nd Street. He had no money, no job, no home, no family – nothing, except a pair of dirty jeans in a paper bag, a wide dreamy smile, and an enormous number of really bad jokes. He had told Lear one of these jokes when Lear's driver had pulled him out from behind the car. So, instead of kicking him down the street, Lear had laughed, and given him a job and the name 'The Fool'.

No one really knew what the Fool's job was exactly. He opened and closed doors, told his bad jokes, smiled his wide smile, and took orders from Lear alone, and nobody else. In some ways, he was like a son to Lear. Perhaps he reminded Lear of some time long ago, when Lear had been young and poor himself, trying to make a living on the streets of Chicago.

Later that afternoon, as Lear and the Fool climbed into the back of the Cadillac, the Fool could see that his Boss was in a troubled mood. He tried his best to brighten Lear up with a few jokes.

'Why does a wise man hide his money in his socks?'

'I don't know, Boy,' said Lear. He stared out of the car window, and whispered to himself, 'Cordelia . . . I'm sorry, honey, I'm sorry.'

'One: to keep his feet warm, and two: so that he can't give it away to his daughters. Do you know why your nose is in the middle of your face?'

'No. And watch your step, Boy.'

'To keep your eyes apart, of course, and so that you can smell trouble coming even if you can't see it when it's under your nose.'

Lear stared absent-mindedly at the back of the driver's head. 'Haven't I always been a kind father? Haven't I always given her everything she wanted? Why is Goneril so cruel to me? I don't understand it. It'll drive me mad, Boy, mad.'

CHAPTER TWO

No, I'll not weep.

*I have full cause of weeping; but this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
Or ere I'll weep.*

Act 2, Scene 4

Edmund was feeling good. He had told a great many lies both to his father and his brother. Gloucester now firmly believed that Edgar wanted to murder him, and Edgar knew that he was in deep trouble with his father, but he didn't know why. He was at Gloucester's house that afternoon, for a secret meeting with Edmund, who was trying hard to make him leave town.

Edgar was a pleasant young man, who made friends easily and had few enemies. He felt very confused. 'Someone's been telling lies about me. And what's all this talk about disagreements between Albany and Cornwall?' he asked his brother.

'I don't really know,' Edmund said carefully, 'but Dad believes that you're mixed up in it, and he's really furious with you. He's in a very dangerous mood and you must keep away from him. In fact, you'd better go now before he gets back. He'll be home any minute.'

'But why -' began Edgar, then stopped. They could both hear a car arriving outside. More than one car. Edmund ran to the window and looked out.

'Christ!' he said. 'It's Dad, and Cornwall and Regan are with him! Get out of here fast, man, before they catch you! Go out the back way, and across the building site. Hurry, man! I'll keep them talking.'

When your whole life has been spent in the Family, you run first and ask questions later. So Edgar ran. As soon as he

had left, Edmund pulled out a gun and, very carefully, shot himself in the left arm. Not too seriously, of course, but it made a nice lot of blood. He then ran down to the front door and met his father, with Regan and Cornwall, on the front step. Quickly, he told his story, the blood running through his fingers as he held his arm. Edgar, he said, had tried to kill him because he wouldn't agree to Edgar's plan to murder their father.

Gloucester was too shocked and angry to speak, but Cornwall jumped into action. He ordered his driver and bodyguard to chase Edgar through the site. The two men ran off, guns at the ready, but the light was going fast and there were too many hiding-places on the enormous building site. They fired several shots at shadows, but after a while returned to the house.

Inside, in Gloucester's big sitting-room, Edmund told the story several times over to Cornwall and Regan. They were loud in their anger against Edgar, and Regan told Gloucester he could be certain of their help.

Gloucester shook his grey head sadly. 'He's broken my old heart, lady. I never thought he'd turn into a murdering coward like this.'

'Don't worry,' said Cornwall. 'We'll find him for you, Gloucester, and make sure that he never gives you any trouble again.' He nodded to Edmund. 'And as for your other son . . . He seems a useful kind of **guy**. I guess we can find a good job for him in our team.'

Edmund smiled his thanks. It was the first time he had talked to either Cornwall or Regan, and he soon realized that Regan's hot black eyes were resting on him with some interest. A small, secret smile touched his lips.

Gloucester now brought out his best Scotch whisky, and Regan explained why she and Cornwall had come to visit Gloucester at home.

'We need your advice, Gloucester,' she said in her silvery voice. 'I've had notes from both my sister and my father this afternoon. Things aren't going at all well between them. I hear my father's coming to my house this evening, and I'm not sure what to do. Now, you've known my father for a long time . . .'

Outside, the short winter day was already finished. The weather was changing for the worse, with a strong wind driving black stormclouds down from the north. On the far side of the building site, Edgar lay between the wheels of a lorry. He had heard the chase and the sound of shots, and knew that he was in serious trouble. 'What the hell's going on?' he thought. 'I'm going to stay around and find out, even if it kills me.' He knew he did not dare to show his face as Edgar; he would have to change his appearance. 'A drunk,' he thought. 'I can get hold of some old clothes easily. There are plenty of dirty, smelly, homeless men walking around Chicago with a bottle in one hand. No one's going to look twice at just another drunk.'

◆

Caius had delivered Lear's note to Regan's house. She was in the bath and sent a message by her housekeeper, asking Caius to wait for an answer. A few minutes later Caius saw Oswald arrive, and Oswald was taken straight upstairs to Regan's apartment. Soon after that, Caius saw both Regan and Cornwall leave the house by a side entrance and drive away in Cornwall's BMW. Angrily, Caius wondered whether to wait or return to Lear. He decided to wait, and about an hour later the housekeeper brought him a telephone message, telling him to go to Gloucester's house in the marina.

He drove into the car park outside Gloucester's house at exactly the same moment as Oswald arrived in his car. Caius

had never been a patient man, and when he saw Oswald's smooth smile, he walked straight up to him and pushed his face close to the other man's.

'You're a real son of a bitch, aren't you? A real regular smooth guy, who'd sell his grandmother for a dollar and his mother for fifty cents. Men like you make me sick.'

Oswald stepped backwards. 'What the hell's the matter with you?' he said. His voice was not quite as smooth as usual.

'I'll tell you what's the matter,' said Caius angrily. 'You're a lying piece of dirt. You're carrying lying stories about the Boss from one sister to another, and I don't know why I don't push your teeth down your throat!'

He put his hand flat against Oswald's chest and pushed him back hard against his car. Oswald shouted loudly for help and tried to run round the car. Caius caught the back of his jacket and pulled him back. Then the front door of the house opened and several people ran out.

'What's going on here?' called Gloucester. 'Stop fighting, you two!'

Edmund stepped between Oswald and Caius, and Cornwall looked from one man to the other. 'OK, what's the trouble?' he asked sharply.

'This cowardly rat refuses to fight,' said Caius.

'I don't like to hit an old man,' Oswald said quickly.

'Old man, is it?' said Caius, showing his teeth. 'I could throw you over my shoulder with one hand, you poisonous little snake!'

'Shut up!' shouted Cornwall. 'Just tell me what this fight's about.'

Caius looked at Cornwall. 'I don't like the guy's face,' he said woodenly.

Cornwall stared at him. 'Dear, oh dear,' he said slowly. 'Perhaps you don't like my face, or hers.' He pointed at Regan next to him.



Caius put his hand flat against Oswald's chest and pushed him back hard against his car. Oswald shouted loudly for help.

Caius looked at the circle of faces around him. 'I'm a plain man, and I speak plainly. And to tell you the truth, I don't much like any of the faces I see here.'

Cornwall laughed loudly, as if he had heard a good joke. Oswald stepped forward. 'This guy works for Lear, you know,' he said to Cornwall. 'He knocked me down this morning in Goneril's house. Lear gave him fifty dollars for it. I saw him.'

'We'll have to teach this guy a lesson,' Cornwall said to Regan.

Regan smiled. 'Yeah. Leave him out here in the car park, to cool down.'

Cornwall's bodyguard fetched three pairs of **handcuffs** from the BMW. They made Caius sit down on the ground, and then put the handcuffs on him, fixing each wrist to each ankle and both ankles together. Caius couldn't stand up, or straighten his legs or his back. He looked very uncomfortable and very silly.

Gloucester tried to stop them doing all this, saying that Lear would take it as an insult. But Regan said sharply that her sister's secretary had also been insulted, which wouldn't please Goneril.

They all went back into the house, except Gloucester, who looked down at Caius unhappily. 'I'm sorry about this. Cornwall's a bad man to start an argument with. I'll see what I can do for you later.'

'Don't worry about it, my friend,' said Caius. 'I can sit out here as well as any other place. I've lived through worse things than this.'

After Gloucester had gone, Caius moved himself slowly and painfully along the ground until he could rest his back against the wheel of his car. He thought about the telephone call he had made that afternoon to New York, and remembered the shock in Cordelia's soft voice. She had promised

to do something, and quickly, but Caius did not know what her plan was. He thought about it for a while, then fell asleep.



As the evening passed, the wind grew stronger and the clouds heavier. There was no rain yet, but the storm, when it came, promised to be a violent one. Lear had had an excellent dinner at Gino's, his favourite Italian restaurant downtown. He had even laughed at one or two of the Fool's jokes. The Cadillac picked them up outside and Lear told his driver to drive north straight to Regan's house at the Park. When they got there, the house seemed dark and empty. Lear's driver went to the front door and came back with a long face. 'They're not there,' he reported to Lear. 'The housekeeper says they're spending the night at Gloucester's place in the marina.'

As they drove along the lakeside towards the marina, Lear's eyebrows were a thick black line across his face. The Fool, looking at his Boss, decided to keep quiet for a while.

The Cadillac turned into the car park of Gloucester's house and in the headlights they saw Caius, now awake and **shivering** in the cold wind. Lear got out quickly and stared down at him.

'I wondered what the hell had happened to you, man. Who's done this to you? I'll break his neck!'

'Her,' said Caius. 'Her and him. Your daughter and her husband.'

'No,' said Lear.

'Yes,' said Caius.

'I don't believe it.'

'You've got to believe it, Boss. Look, I delivered your note, but that Oswald arrived with another note from Goneril, and then your daughter and Cornwall rushed down here to

the marina. When I arrived here, I met that oily little rat Oswald and offered to push his teeth down his throat. He started screaming for help, like the coward he is. So your daughter and son-in-law said they would have to teach me a lesson.'

'And where is this daughter of mine?' said Lear through his teeth.

'Inside, with Gloucester and the others.'

Lear turned and went quickly up to the front door. The Fool looked down at Caius's handcuffs.

'When a big wheel starts to run downhill, you ought to let go of it, if you don't want to break your neck. That's good advice, you know. If you ever get better advice, you can give me mine back.'

With difficulty, Caius looked up into the Fool's face. 'So, you're running, are you, Boy?'

'No,' the young man said slowly. 'I guess I'll stay around.'

There was a sudden shout of anger behind them, and they both turned to see Lear at the front door with Gloucester beside him.

'What the hell do you mean, they won't speak to me?' shouted Lear. 'Go in and tell them I want to speak to my daughter and her husband . . . now! D'you hear me?'

'Boss! Don't get excited, Boss, please!' said Gloucester urgently. 'You know what Cornwall's like. He's a real hothead and -'

'He can go to hell! I want to speak to them - here, right now, within the next five seconds! Understand, man?'

'Sure, sure. I *have* told them, Boss, but I'll . . . OK, I'll try again.' Gloucester hurried back inside the house.

Lear walked back to Caius and the Fool. He was breathing deeply and his face was white. Suddenly, he looked like an old, old man. 'I must keep calm,' he whispered to himself. 'My heart's going like a steam engine.'

'Well, that's better than not going at all, Boss,' the Fool said brightly. 'If it stops, that's when you've got to start worrying.'

There was a sudden sound of thunder in the distance, and they all looked up at the heavy black clouds above them. Then Lear turned at the sound of footsteps behind him.

'Good evening,' he said quietly.

'Good evening, sir,' Cornwall said politely.

'It's good to see you, Father,' said Regan.

'Yes,' said Lear slowly, 'Yes, I'm pleased to hear that, Regan. I think your dead mother would be pleased, too. Oh, my dear Regan, your sister has been so cruel to me. She has hurt me deeply. I find it difficult even to tell you about it.'

Regan pulled her coat more tightly around her. The wind blew her black hair across her face. 'I find it hard to believe that my sister has been cruel to you, Father. She just wants you to control your noisy, drunken servants. What's so wrong with that?'

Cornwall's bodyguard had now unlocked the handcuffs on Caius. Caius stood up and stretched his stiff back and legs. Then he moved quietly away. He needed to find a phone box, fast.

Regan was still talking. 'Take my advice, Father. Go back to Goneril tonight, and ask her to forgive you.'

'Forgive *me*! I don't think you quite understand, Regan. Goneril wants me to get rid of half my people; she is rude and insulting to me. What am I supposed to do? Go down on my bended knees, and ask her if she will very kindly give her old father a bed to sleep in and a piece of bread for his supper? She can go to hell and burn there, the ungrateful bitch!'

'You shouldn't speak like that about your own daughter, sir,' said Cornwall.

'I suppose,' said Regan coldly, 'you'll say exactly the same about me when you're in one of your moods.'

'Never, Regan. I'm sure you have a kind heart. You'll never want to spoil my pleasures, or give me a hard time. You won't forget how much I've given you.' He turned to stare at Cornwall. 'Who put my man in handcuffs?'

At that moment a car turned into the marina gates and drove quickly towards the car park. It was Goneril's red Ferrari, and Lear watched in growing anger as she got out and came towards them. Regan smiled warmly at her sister and ran forward to kiss her. Then the two girls turned and looked at their father.

'I'm surprised,' Lear said coldly, 'to see you kiss your sister, Regan. I thought you would be ashamed of her.'

'Listen, Father,' said Regan, 'I'm getting tired of all this. Get rid of half your servants, and go back to Goneril's for the rest of your month. Then you can come to me. But I'm too busy to have you stay just now.'

'I'd rather sleep out on the streets of Chicago than put a foot inside Goneril's house again!'

Goneril yawned, and Lear looked at her furiously. 'It's best that we don't meet again, Goneril. But I hope, in time, that you'll feel ashamed of what you've done. I shall go and live with Regan, *with* all my servants.'

'Oh, Christ, this is getting so boring!' Regan said impatiently. 'You're an old man, Father, and you're fast turning into a silly, boring old fool! I'm not having your army of drunks in my house.'

'Why can't Regan's servants, or mine, look after you?' asked Goneril with her cold, evil smile.

'She's right,' Regan said quickly. 'If you want to live with me, don't bring more than five of your people with you.'

'In fact,' Goneril added, 'you don't really need five, or even three, in our houses. We've plenty of servants ourselves.'

'Yeah. That's right! You don't even need one!' said Regan.

Their father stared at them. 'Need? Need? What does any



Their father stared at them. 'Need? Need? What does any man need?' he said in a low voice. 'I gave you everything. Everything.'

man need?' he said in a low voice. 'I gave you everything. Everything. All I asked for in return was a quiet, comfortable old age, with a few of my own people around me. And this is what I get . . .' He turned away from his daughters and lifted his hands towards the stormy sky. There was rain in the wind now, and the sound of thunder was getting nearer. Lear's voice became louder. 'God, give me patience,' he cried to the angry sky. 'What's left for me in life? Just a sad, useless, lonely old age! What have I done to turn these daughters against me like this? Oh God, don't let me cry . . . No, No . . . I'll punish them, these unnatural bitches! I don't know how, but . . . No, I won't cry. My heart'll break into pieces first . . . Oh, Boy, I'll go mad!'

He walked away across the car park, like a blind man, into the storm. At once, the Fool ran after him, and a few seconds later, so did Gloucester.

Cornwall looked up at the sky. 'Nasty weather,' he said. 'We'd better go inside.'

'I just won't have his servants in my house,' said Regan.

'If he chooses to walk off in that stupid way,' Goneril said, 'that's his problem. He's got to learn a lesson, the old fool.'

They had reached the front door of the house when Gloucester came running back across the car park.

'The Boss is in a terrible way,' he said urgently. 'He's talking very wild. You can't just leave him out here, tonight – not in this storm.'

'He has to learn that he's no longer the Boss,' said Regan coldly. 'He might get violent, so come inside, Gloucester, and lock all your doors.'

'That's good advice, Gloucester,' said Cornwall, putting a heavy hand on the older man's shoulder. 'It's going to be a nasty storm, so come inside. D'you hear?'

CHAPTER THREE

I am a man

More sinned against than sinning.

Act 3, Scene 2

It had taken Caius quite a time to find a phone box that worked. When he hurried back into the car park outside Gloucester's house, he found only Lear's driver, standing shivering next to the cars. Quickly, Caius asked what had happened, and the driver told him.

'Christ, what a mess!' said Caius. 'Listen,' he looked hard into the driver's face, 'are you going to stick by the Boss, or are you joining the rats? I need to know.'

'I've been with him fifteen years,' said the driver. 'I'm not kicking him now he's down. He's been good to me.'

'Good man,' Caius said. 'Now, listen. There's trouble coming, big trouble. If we're not careful, there'll soon be gunfights on the streets of Chicago. Albany and Cornwall aren't fighting yet, but they soon will be. And when a Family starts fighting among themselves, that's bad news. It makes trouble for everyone. Lear's a big name in this city, and a lot of people don't like what's been happening to him. He knows all the right people, he has all the right contacts, and things have always run smoothly with him at the top. One of the big New York mobs* would be happy to take over the day-to-day Family business here in Chicago – with Lear back as the big Boss. Are you with me so far?'

'Yeah,' said the driver. 'I'm with you. What do you want me to do?'

'Get down to O'Hare airport right now and stay by a phone. Some time early tomorrow morning there'll be a

* *Mob*. A slang word for a criminal organization of gangsters.

flight in from New York. Cordelia and a few others will be on it. Tell Cordelia this latest news about her father. I'm going to try and find him now and take him somewhere safe.'

'OK. I'll do that,' said the driver. 'But just who are you, exactly?'

Caius smiled. 'Ask Cordelia. She'll tell you.'

The two men went their separate ways into the night.



The marina building site was a wild, ghostly place that Sunday night. It was a dead place, full of half-finished, eyeless buildings and great mountains of earth and stones. There were deep holes everywhere, now filling with black mud in the heavy rain. The marina itself, by the side of the lake, was still a giant hole in the ground, which yawned like the mouth of hell. It could swallow a hundred, two hundred dead bodies in its thick black mud, and you'd never see them again.

On the half-made road round the marina, there were two men with **torches**, Gloucester and Edmund. They stopped for a moment behind a tall pile of bricks, out of the wind.

Gloucester pushed his wet hair out of his eyes. 'You'd better get back to the house, Edmund. Get the whisky out and keep Cornwall and Regan talking. Say I'm ill and have gone to bed. I'll try and find Lear and look after him. Poor guy! It's all gone too far, Edmund. Some people are going to be punished for this. I've been talking to a few friends this afternoon. Help is on its way from New York. We must put Lear back in control of the Family. If we don't, those two bitches of daughters will tear him, and all of us, to pieces. He should never have given away his power to them. But be careful, Edmund. If a whisper of this gets to Cornwall, he'll shoot me through the head and put me down that hole. Off you go!'

Edmund hurried back to the house, his pale blue eyes burning with excitement. Here was his big chance! His future stretched out before him, golden with promise.



The storm now decided to stop playing games and become serious. The rain came sideways out of the black sky, in great hard drops like freezing bullets. The wind, whistling and screaming like a madman, tried to tear apart the unfinished buildings. Lightning burst through the clouds almost continuously, followed immediately by deafening, bone-shaking thunder. Some god up there was in a very nasty mood. It was the kind of night when you'd let a wild dog come in and sit by your fire; the kind of night when the homeless of Chicago wished they were in prison, or dead.

On the far side of the site Lear stood up to his ankles in mud, screaming at the sky. Around him a new building was growing and long thin pieces of metal stuck up out of the ground like dead men's bones. Rain ran down his face and clothes in rivers.

'More! More!' he screamed. 'Go on! Finish the job! Hit me, burn me, flatten me, knock me down! Knock the whole **goddamned** world down!'

The Fool, shivering and shaking with fear, held on to Lear's arm. 'Boss!' he shouted. 'Boss, let's get back to the house! We're not doing any good out here. Any house is better than none on a night like this!'

But Lear could hear nothing but the storm around him. 'What have I done?' he shouted to the sky. 'I'm just a poor weak old man! Why do my daughters kick me in the teeth? Hey? Tell me that, will you! How can they do that to me!'

At that moment Caius found them. He hurried through the mud and took Lear's other arm. 'Come on, Boss, we've got to get you out of here. You'll die of cold in this storm!'

Lear looked at him with wide, crazy eyes. 'The guilty will



Lear stood up to his ankles in mud, screaming at the sky. Rain ran down his face and clothes in rivers.

be punished,' he said loudly. 'There'll be no time for apologies, no forgiveness at the gates of hell! God knows, I've done wrong in my time, but more wrong has been done to me.'

'It's OK, Boss, take it easy now,' Caius said quickly. 'Look, you're wet to the skin. Let's get out of this rain somewhere.'

Lear stared at him, confused. Then he looked down at the Fool holding on to his other arm. 'How are you doing, Boy? You OK? Cold? I'm cold myself. Come on, let's go hide somewhere. This is a hell-hole out here . . . those cruel ungrateful bitches . . . shutting me out on a night like this . . . their kind old father . . . on a night like this . . . I'll go mad, Boy . . . I've got to keep calm . . .'

Between them, Caius and the Fool helped the old man through the mud back to firmer ground. They hurried him along a path towards a small wooden building which the site workers used to rest in. Caius pushed the door open and then fell back down the steps as a man jumped out. He was a young man, in torn and muddy clothes, and shoes with holes in. His shirt was grey with dirt and there was mud in his hair. He smelt strongly of whisky, and held a large bottle tightly in one hand. He looked like any homeless Chicago drunk, but his eyes were sharp and watchful. He took a quick swallow from his bottle, then coughed loudly.

Lear stared at him. 'Look at this poor guy! He's cold, dirty, hungry . . . How the hell does he stay alive? No home, no friends, just a bottle of whisky . . . Who looks after guys like these, eh? Tell me that!' Lear looked wildly around him into the driving rain. The Fool tried to pull him towards the steps, but Lear would not move. 'There are thousands, millions like him!' he said loudly, pointing at the drunk. 'They're all out there . . . in the mud and the rain . . . They get kicked in the teeth, chased by the law . . . Nobody gives a **damn** if they live or die! I've never thought about it . . . thousands of them . . .'

Another crash of thunder shook the air, and over the noise

Caius shouted, 'Let's get inside, Boss! Never mind this drunk – he'll look after himself.' He put his hand under Lear's arm.

Lear pushed his hand away. He nodded slowly at the drunk. 'He gave everything to his daughters, you know. And look at him now. God will punish your daughters, sir.'

'He hasn't got any daughters. He's just a drunk, Boss,' said Caius.

The drunk took another swallow from his bottle. 'Nobody gives anything to poor Tom. Have to steal my own whisky, I do.'

Lear shook his head sadly. 'Poor guy, poor guy. Just the shirt on his back. He gave everything to them.'

'He's got trousers as well, Boss,' said the Fool, shivering with cold. 'They'd put him in a nice warm prison if he didn't wear trousers. Can't we go inside, Boss? We'll *all* go mad if we stay out here much longer.'

'Don't worry about it,' said Tom the drunk, waving his bottle around. 'It'll all be the same in a hundred years. Keep away from women, moneylenders, and only drink the best whisky.' He began to sing, drunkenly.

Lear laughed. 'What a guy! Listen to him! His daughters take everything from him, and he can still sing! There's **philosophy** for you!'

Behind them there was a shout through the rain, and Gloucester appeared, waving a torch in one hand. Caius hurried up to him. 'The Boss is losing his mind,' he said urgently. 'Try and get him to go inside, will you?'

But Lear would not be separated from his new friend. 'I must talk with this philosopher,' he said loudly, looking angrily into Gloucester's face.

'OK, Boss, OK. He can come inside too,' said Gloucester.

'A party! Let's have a party!' shouted Tom the drunk. He ran up the steps into the building, keeping his face turned away from Gloucester. Lear and the Fool followed, and after

them Caius and Gloucester. Inside there were a few wooden chairs and some locked cupboards. The rain thundered down on the thin metal roof, sounding like **machine-gun** fire.

Gloucester stood in the doorway and spoke privately to Caius. 'His daughters have ordered me to keep him out of my house and do nothing to help him. How can they be so cruel? On a night like this! The whole world's going crazy . . . My own son wants to murder me . . .' He shook his head unhappily. 'I'll do what I can. I'll get back to the house now and fetch some food and dry clothes for him.'



'The dirty little rat! The son of a bitch!' Cornwall said furiously. He walked up and down Gloucester's comfortable sitting-room, his face red with anger. 'We'd heard rumours about possible trouble from the New York mob, but we weren't sure. So, help for the old man is on its way, is it? We'll see about that!' He took a large mouthful of whisky. 'I'll have Gloucester's head on a plate for this! He'll wish he'd never been born!'

Edmund's face was very serious. 'It's not easy for me, you know, sir,' he said quietly. 'I wish with all my heart that I didn't have to tell you this news about my father, but the good of the Family must come first, I know that.' He looked sadly at the floor.

'I understand, Edmund. It's not easy.' Cornwall put his hand on the young man's shoulder. 'But you'll find a better father in me, my boy. From tonight, you're my number two. Gloucester's job, house, everything he owns – is now yours.'



Outside, the storm still crashed and thundered along the shores of Lake Michigan. On the far side of the marina the wind screamed angrily round the walls of the rough wooden building, where a kind of mad party was taking place.

Tom the drunk sat on the floor, with his back against the wall and his knees pulled up under his chin, talking to his whisky bottle.

'Man's best friend. Better than dogs, horses, women . . .'

'Women should be kind and gentle,' said Lear suddenly, shaking his head. Water from his wet hair ran down his neck.

'Not many are, Boss,' said the Fool, from the corner where he sat shivering. 'They'll steal the clothes off your back if you give them half a chance.'

Tom began to sing another drunken song about a redhead from Las Vegas called Susie, who ate men for breakfast.

'It's unnatural . . . against the laws of nature!' said Lear excitedly. 'We'll bring them in and tell them – right now! This wise man here, this philosopher,' he nodded at Tom, 'he can be their **judge**. He'll tell them! He knows what women are like!' He jumped to his feet and pulled a wooden chair into the middle of the room. 'Stand there, Goneril, and listen to the judge! That'll take the smile off your face!'

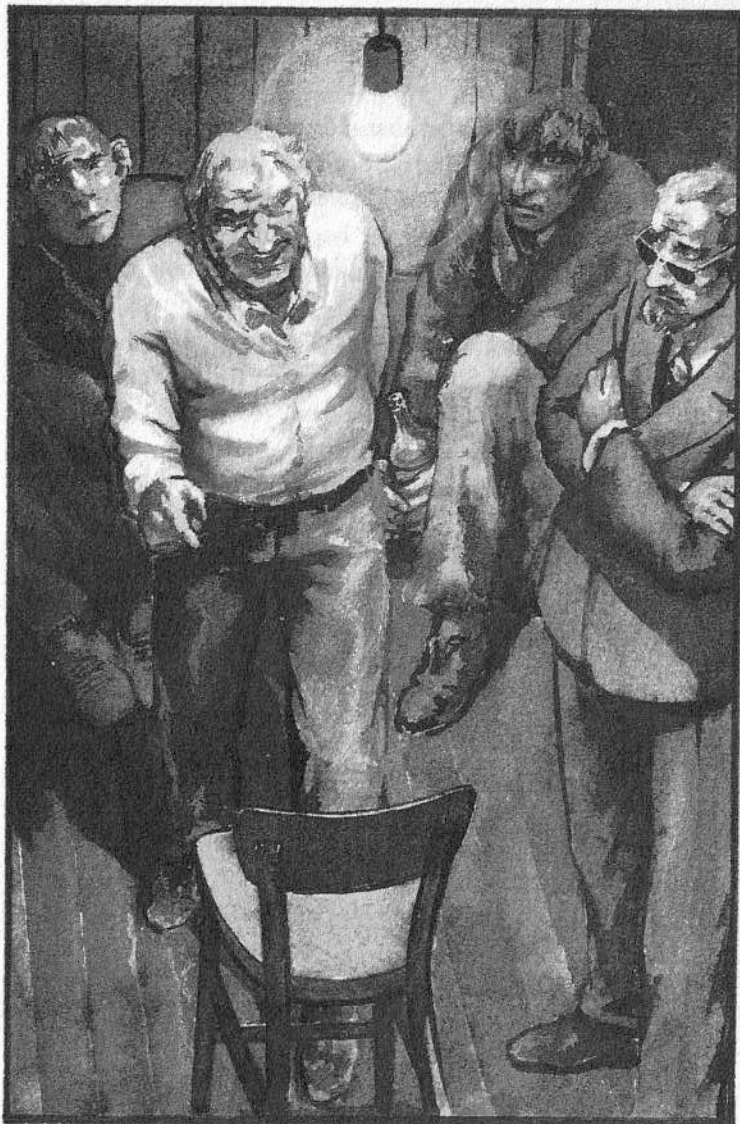
Caius watched Lear with pity in his eyes. 'Take it easy, Boss. Take it easy,' he said softly. He stepped forward, but Lear pushed him away.

'You listen, too,' Lear said to him. 'All of you listen. I'm telling you all, I gave this woman everything, and she kicked her poor old father in the teeth. Look at her! Look at her!' he shouted crazily at the chair.

'She's got a nasty look in her eye,' the Fool said, watching Lear nervously.

'A rich bitch!' cried Tom, waving his bottle. 'They're the worst. Eat your heart out, lady!' He, too, kept a watchful eye on Lear.

'And here's another one!' shouted Lear, picking up a second chair. 'Regan's just as bad as the other one. Tell her, judge, tell her!' He stood there, holding the chair in his arms, suddenly confused and uncertain. Then he put his finger to



*'All of you listen. I'm telling you all, I gave this woman everything
... Look at her!' he shouted crazily at the chair.*

his lips. 'Shhh,' he whispered. 'Shhh!' Caius began to move towards him.

Just then the door crashed open and Gloucester hurried in, wild-eyed and out of breath. He caught hold of Caius's arm.

'Listen, my friend, you've got to get Lear out of here fast! The news is out, God knows how! My housekeeper heard Cornwall and the two women shouting and crashing round the house. They know about the New York plan, everything! They want to be sure Lear's dead before Cordelia gets here to help him! Get him down to the city and hide him somewhere.'

The two men hurried Lear and the Fool out into the rain again. Left alone, Tom lifted his face from his knees and put his whisky bottle carefully on the floor. 'And I thought I had problems,' he said quietly to himself. 'Poor old man. I don't know what the hell's going on, but it sure has knocked old Lear sideways.'



Regan and Goneril, when Cornwall had woken them and told them Edmund's news about Gloucester, had been violently angry.

'Where is the son of a bitch?' said Regan through her teeth.

'I'd like to tear his eyes out,' Goneril said. 'Who the hell does he think he is?'

'There's only one punishment for rats like him,' Cornwall said. 'I've already sent for some men to start searching the site for him and Lear. But we'd better get moving. We don't know exactly when the New York mob are going to jump. Goneril, you go back home and get Albany to start phoning round and collecting the men. We need to get them down to 92nd Street as soon as we can. That's where the New Yorkers will hit first. And take Edmund with you. If we catch

Gloucester tonight, he won't want to watch what happens to his father.'

'Right,' said Goneril. 'Call me as soon as you get back home.'

Edmund helped her on with her coat, and she smiled at him over her shoulder. 'OK, let's go, blue-eyed boy.' She put her hand on his arm, and as they left, Regan stared after her sister with narrowed, suspicious eyes.

Three minutes after Goneril's red Ferrari had left the marina car park, two big cars drove in, carrying eight of Cornwall's gunmen. From the house Regan and Cornwall heard the sounds of shouting and running feet, and a few seconds later the men burst in, holding Gloucester by the arms.

'He was in the car park, Mr Cornwall,' called one of the men. 'He was just getting into his car. You said you wanted to have a talk with him.'

On Cornwall's orders, Gloucester was tied by his hands and feet to a chair, and then the men left to start searching the building site for Lear.

Cornwall nodded to his bodyguard to close the sitting-room door, and he and Regan began to question Gloucester.

'So, you son of a bitch,' began Regan, 'you've been making some new friends, have you? Talking to New York behind our backs.' She hit him hard across the face with her hand.

'Start talking, Gloucester,' said Cornwall. 'And fast.'

'Where's that stupid old fool, my father?' Regan asked. 'Where have you hidden him?'

'What I've done has been for the good of the Family business,' said Gloucester quietly.

'I told you to leave Lear alone,' Cornwall said, in a dangerous voice. 'Nobody, and I mean nobody, disobeys my orders. Where is he?'

'And why have you hidden him?' shouted Regan. 'Tell me that.'

Gloucester was silent, and Cornwall put his hand into his jacket pocket. 'The lady's asking you a question,' he said. 'Answer it.'

'Because,' said Gloucester in a loud, firm voice, 'I couldn't watch you and your bitch of a sister breaking his heart. What kind of daughters are you? He gives you everything, and you kick him out like an old dog! On a night like this! You'll be sorry for it one day, and I hope I see that day soon.'

'Hold him still!' Cornwall shouted to the bodyguard behind the chair. He pulled out of his pocket a small bottle, took the top off, and threw half the contents straight into Gloucester's left eye. Gloucester screamed in pain as the acid burnt into his eye.

Cornwall laughed loudly, and Regan shouted, 'And the other one! He'll never see anything then!'

'Help me! In God's name, someone help me!' screamed the old man, shaking his head violently from side to side.

The bodyguard stepped backwards. He was a big heavy man, paid to carry a gun and watch Cornwall's back for him. He very rarely spoke at all, but now his gun was in his hand and pointing at Cornwall.

'Hold it, Mr Cornwall,' he said in a rough voice. 'Acid's a nasty game. Leave it out.'

Cornwall's face was a picture of shock and fury. 'You —' he began, and pulled out his own gun. But the bodyguard was too quick for him. His bullet went straight into Cornwall's side. Cornwall nearly fell and Regan jumped to his side. She took the gun out of Cornwall's hand and shot the bodyguard three times in the chest. He fell heavily to the floor.

Cornwall's face was white but he was still on his feet. 'I'll

teach you who's boss!' he shouted at Gloucester. 'You'll never see daylight again!' He threw the rest of the acid into Gloucester's other eye, and once again Gloucester gave a terrible scream.

'Oh Edmund, Edmund,' he cried, 'help me, help me!'

'Perhaps this will teach you a lesson,' screamed Regan furiously. 'It was your son Edmund who told us what you were doing, so don't think that he'll help you! Run away and play with your new friends – on your hands and knees, you goddamned rat!'

She turned to her husband and took his arm. 'Regan,' he said, breathing with difficulty, 'get me to a doctor, quick!' He put his hand to his side and it came away sticky with blood. Hurriedly, Regan helped him out to the car and they drove away at top speed.

A few minutes later, hearing the terrible screams from the sitting-room, Gloucester's old housekeeper came nervously to the door and looked in. With shaking hands, she quickly untied his ankles and wrists, called an ambulance, and sat with him until it came, holding his hand in her own.

CHAPTER FOUR

*... I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.*

Act 4, Scene 7

It was quite a short distance from the marina to Goneril's house in the Park, but Goneril and Edmund did not arrive until the first light of day was in the sky. Perhaps they ran out of petrol on the way. Perhaps they stopped for coffee or

something. Certainly, Goneril had made a phone call to Oswald, who was waiting at her house, and told him to give the news about the New York mob to Albany. When they arrived, Oswald met them at the front door. He looked a little worried.

'I told Mr Albany the news,' he said quietly to Goneril, 'and he took it very strangely. He just laughed when I said that the New York mob were going to try to take over the Family here in Chicago. And he said he quite understood why Gloucester had gone over to the other side.'

Goneril looked thoughtful. She nodded her thanks to Oswald, then pulled Edmund into a small room near the front door. 'Albany's not much of a fighter,' she said. 'I can see I'm going to have trouble with him. Perhaps it's best if you don't come in just now. Why don't you go over to Regan's, and find out how many men Cornwall can get together? She and Cornwall should be home by now.' She came and stood very close to him, putting her hands on his chest. 'Remember what I said? My husband's a loser. But you're a winner, aren't you? I like winners. And winners take all the prizes.' She pulled his head down to her own, and gave him a long, hungry kiss, then let him go.

Edmund smiled. 'I'm yours till death, lady,' he said lightly.

Goneril put her fingers on his lips. 'Not a word,' she whispered. 'Off you go, my blue-eyed boy.'

The front door closed quietly behind him, and Goneril, her face now hard and cold, went quickly upstairs. She found her husband in his study, and he looked at her with a face that was as hard and as cold as her own.

'What an evil little bitch you are!' he said. 'I suppose you and your sister think you've been very clever. You kick your father out, throw him away like a piece of rubbish, just because you think he's no longer useful to you. Everything you have come from him, and you're not even grateful. You make me sick.'

'You're just a coward,' replied Goneril unpleasantly. 'You just don't want to fight the New York mob, do you? Nasty guns that make a loud noise! You'd prefer to put your head between your knees and let them walk all over you, huh? Look at you! Sitting there, biting your nails! *You make me sick!*'

'I've never believed in hitting women,' Albany said angrily, 'but if you're not careful, I'll start right now!'

Goneril opened her mouth to make a furious reply, but stopped at the sound of feet running up the stairs. It was Oswald. He knocked quickly and came in.

'What's the matter, man?' asked Albany sharply.

'There's just been a call from Regan,' said the secretary breathlessly. 'Cornwall's dead!'

Albany and Goneril stared. 'How the hell —?' began Albany.

Quickly, Oswald told the story he had heard from Regan. 'It was Cornwall's bodyguard,' he said at the end. 'Cornwall went crazy when Gloucester wouldn't talk, and he threw acid in his eyes. The bodyguard didn't like it, pulled out his gun and shot Cornwall. Regan rushed Cornwall off to a doctor, but he was losing blood fast. He died in the car, Regan said.'

'Jesus!' whispered Albany. 'So Gloucester's had acid in his eyes, just because he wanted to help old Lear? There's going to be trouble about this. Nobody in the Family likes acid. We don't play that kind of game.'

'Cornwall always carried acid,' said Goneril coolly. 'He thought it frightened people more than guns.' She had been thinking busily while Oswald was talking. She didn't care about Cornwall's death. In fact, it was good news. With Cornwall dead, perhaps it would be easier for her to take over the Family and become the big boss. But what was really worrying her at that moment was her blue-eyed boy, her Edmund. Now Regan was free . . . free to marry who she wanted . . . Regan had looked at Edmund's strong young

body with hungry eyes . . . And when Regan wanted something, she usually got it.

Goneril turned to Oswald. 'Come to my office in half an hour,' she said quickly. She left the room without looking at her husband.

Albany sat there, still shocked by the news. 'But what the hell was Edmund doing? Didn't he try to stop Cornwall throwing acid at his own father?'

Oswald looked bored. 'It was Edmund himself who told Cornwall that his father had gone over to the other side. Then Edmund left the house, so that Cornwall and Regan could do what they wanted with Gloucester.'

When Oswald had left the room, Albany stared out of the window. 'Somebody is going to pay for Gloucester's eyes,' he said to himself in a low voice. 'And pay in blood.'



Later that same morning Tom the drunk broke a window at the back of Gloucester's house and quietly climbed in. He had watched the house for some time and it appeared to be empty. There was no sign of the housekeeper so Tom went softly upstairs to look for some dry clothes.

Suddenly a man's voice called from the bathroom. 'Who's that?'

Tom turned, ready to run downstairs. But the bathroom door opened and Gloucester appeared suddenly in the doorway. His eyes were covered in white **bandages** and he held on to the door with both hands. 'Who's that?' he repeated in a shaky voice. 'I can hear you, but I can't see you.'

Tom stared in **horror**, for several seconds unable to speak at all. When at last he spoke, his voice was rough with pity. 'It's OK. Take it easy now. I'm just a poor guy looking for a bit of free food. Thought the house was empty. I don't want to make any trouble.'

Gloucester laughed, a strange hard sound that had no amusement in it. 'You're welcome. Take what you want. I don't need it.'

Tom cleared his throat. 'Right. OK. What, er, what happened to your eyes, then? You had an accident?'

Another strange, hard laugh. 'Yeah, you could say that. I picked the wrong boss, I picked the wrong son, I picked up a bottle of acid and threw it in my own eyes. I'm a stupid old fool whichever way you look at it. They told me at the hospital I'd be blind for the rest of my life, so I came home.'

Pity and anger kept the young man silent. Gloucester went on, 'Listen. Before you go, will you do something for me? It won't take long. I'll give you as much money as you want.'

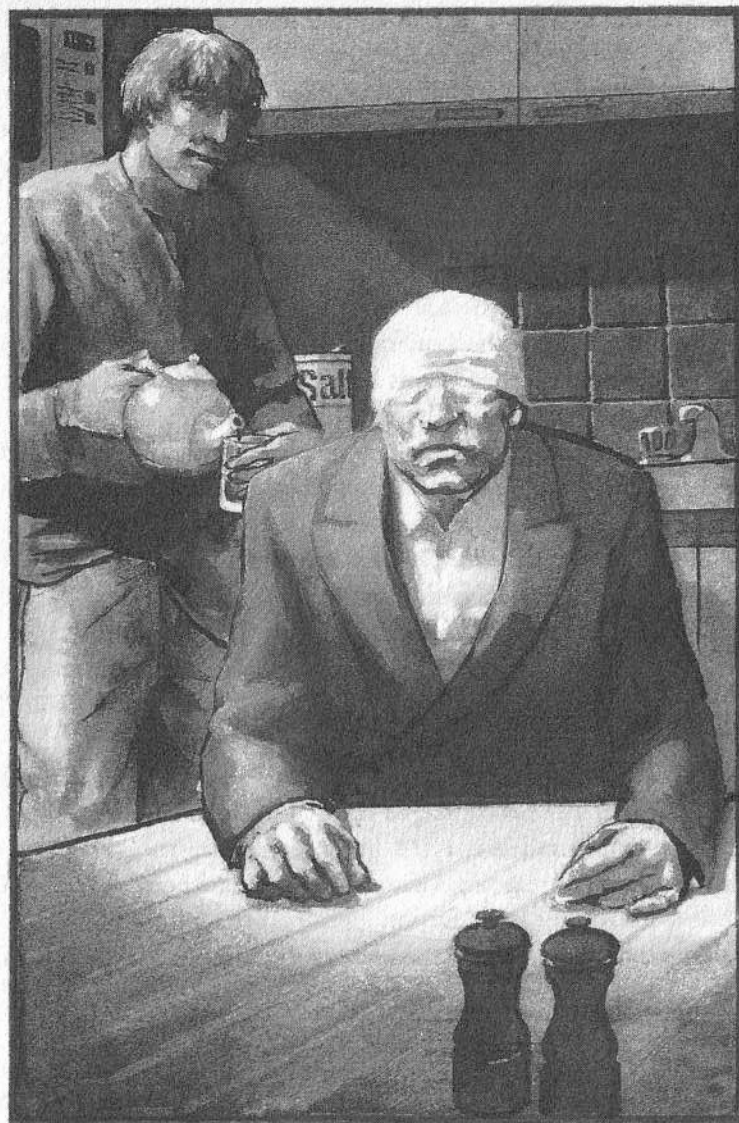
'Sure. I'll do anything for money,' Tom said. He was finding it harder and harder to pretend to be a homeless drunk, but Gloucester was too unhappy to notice anything strange about this unusually friendly burglar.

'I was trying to find a bottle of sleeping pills in the bathroom cupboard,' Gloucester said. 'I know there's a full one in there. Will you find it for me, and then help me down to the kitchen?'

Tom did as he was asked. Then Gloucester told him to put all the pills into hot water, and put this mixture into a large glass of whisky.

'OK,' said Tom quickly. 'I know what you want. You just sit here at the table, sir, and I'll mix your last drink for you.' He moved noisily around the kitchen, talking all the time. He threw the full bottle of pills away, and mixed into the glass of whisky some salt and cold tea. He tried a little of the mixture to make sure it had a really horrible, bitter taste. Then he gave it to Gloucester, and sat down next to him at the table.

'That's it,' said Gloucester. 'You can go now. And here's my wallet for you. There's about five hundred dollars in it. You can live like a king for a few days.' His voice sounded



Tom threw the full bottle of pills away, and mixed into the glass of whisky some salt and cold tea.

old, and very, very tired. His hand shook as he lifted the glass to his lips.

'I'm in no hurry,' said Tom lightly. 'I'll stay for a bit. It's good to have someone to talk to at a time like this.'

Gloucester nodded sadly. He put the empty glass down on the table. For a while he was silent, then slowly he began to talk. He talked about his life, his work in the Family, his old boss Lear and Lear's two terrible daughters . . . and his own two sons. Edmund, the liar and the cheat, who had sold his own father. Edgar, the honest one, who had had to run for his life because of his brother's lies.

Tom listened in growing fury. He was afraid that another shock might kill the old man, so he went on listening as if he was just a friendly burglar. After about an hour Gloucester asked what the time was. Tom told him.

'But I feel just the same!' said Gloucester wildly. 'Nothing's happened – the pills haven't worked!'

'You haven't had any pills,' Tom said quietly. 'I gave you whisky and cold tea with a bit of salt. You've had a rough time, sure. But life's rough for a lot of people, you know. We all have to go through it – take the rough with the smooth. A bottle of pills won't solve your problems.'

Gloucester put his bandaged head in his hands. After a long time he whispered slowly, 'I guess you're right, my friend. Just have to keep going. But I can't do much to help Lear now, without my eyes.'

Tom put his hand on the old man's shoulder. 'Come on, I'll call a taxi and we'll go down to this office on 92nd Street that you told me about. We'll nose around, see if we can pick up any news. If it's true about the New York mob, like you said, then that's where the action will be.'



When Oswald had gone up to Goneril's office, Goneril had given him a letter to deliver to Edmund by hand. Oswald was an excellent private secretary. He always followed orders exactly, whatever they were, and as a result Goneril paid him very well.

Oswald drove first to Regan's house, but Edmund had already left there. Regan was in an evil mood. She had spent a long time on the phone, calling all Cornwall's gunmen, but gunmen don't like taking orders from women. Regan had had to shout and argue. She looked coldly at Oswald when he came in.

'Edmund's out – on my business,' she said sharply. 'Either he's down at 92nd Street, giving orders to my men, or he's looking for Gloucester. A blind man's not a good advertisement. We've got to get rid of him. And what does my sister want Edmund for? He's working for me, not her.'

'I have to deliver an urgent letter to him,' Oswald said smoothly.

'Give it to me. I'll see that he gets it,' Regan said quickly.

Politely, Oswald explained that his orders were to put the letter into Edmund's hands. Regan's black eyes were narrow with suspicion.

'I know Goneril tells you all her secrets, and you can tell her from me to keep her hands off Edmund. *Edmund is mine!* And if you run into Gloucester anywhere, put a bullet between his eyes. OK? There'll be a nice fat reward for that. So get going. I'll see you later at 92nd Street.'

As Oswald drove down into Chicago, he thought coolly about his future. The Family was breaking up fast. Even if the New York mob lost the fight that was coming, the two sisters would still fight each other to the death. There was going to be a lot of killing, and one of the bullets might have *his* name on it. Perhaps the time had come when he should

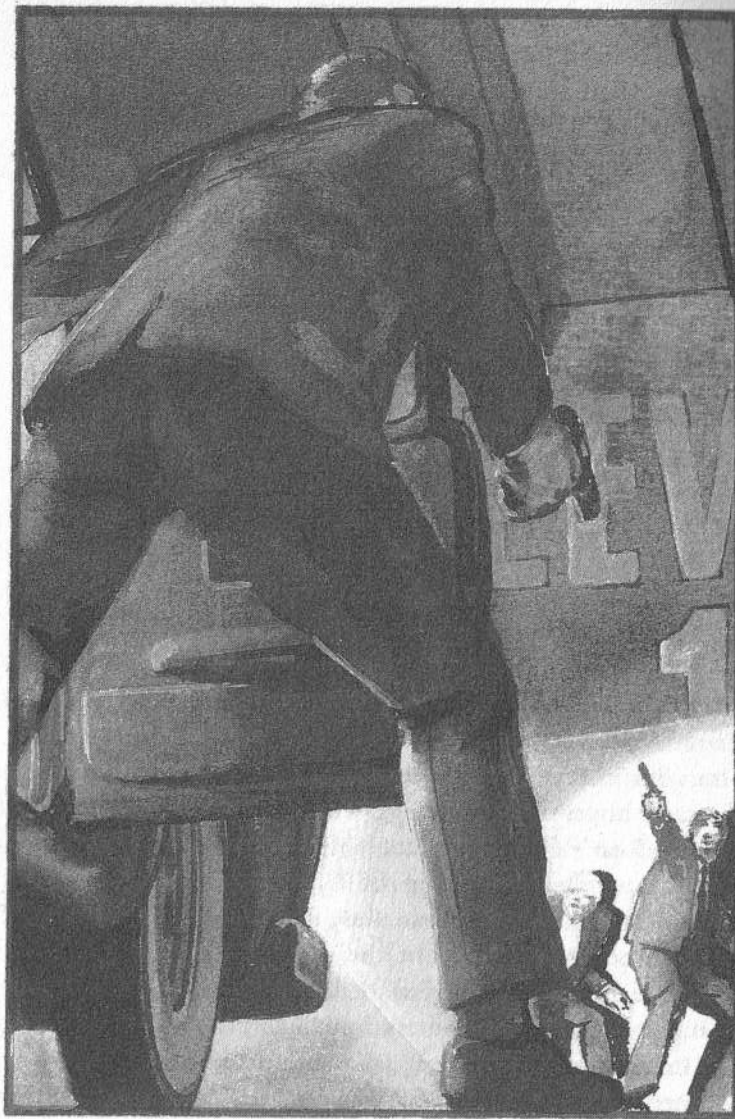
quietly disappear to Mexico. He kept his money in several different banks under false names, and he could live quite comfortably for a time, until all the fighting was over.

He drove along 92nd Street and turned off down to the entrance of the big underground car park of the office building. A guard opened the electric gate to let him through, and nodded to Oswald through the window of his guard box. The gate closed silently behind Oswald's car and the car number was entered into the computer. It wasn't easy to get into the Family's head office unless your face was known. But there was another entrance to the car park, a small door at the back, which led down from a narrow side street. The electric locks on this door could only be opened if you had the right plastic card with the right number. Gloucester had the right card, and at that exact moment Tom had just opened the door. He pulled Gloucester through, shut the door, and began to hurry Gloucester through the shadows along the back wall.

The headlights of Oswald's car caught them before they had gone ten yards. The car screamed to a stop and Oswald jumped out, gun in hand. He had recognized Gloucester immediately and he wanted the prize money for his death. But he was much too slow. The bullet from Tom's silenced gun hit him in the neck and nearly blew his head off. He fell to the ground near the open door of his car; the engine was still running. Working at great speed, Tom went through Oswald's pockets and then put the body into the back of the car. He parked the car tidily against the back wall, turned the engine and lights off, and hurried his father round a corner into deep shadow. There were no shouts, no running footsteps. It had all happened very quickly and the noise of the engine had covered the sound of the gun.

'Well, that's one of them dead,' Tom said in a low voice.

'Who was it?' whispered Gloucester. 'And why -'



The car screamed to a stop and Oswald jumped out, gun in hand.

'What's this?' said Tom quickly. He was looking through the papers from Oswald's pockets and had picked out a letter addressed to Edmund. Quickly he opened it and read it by the light of a match.

Remember what I said to you this morning. You'll have plenty of opportunities to get rid of him. So don't waste time, my blue-eyed boy. As soon as he's gone, there'll be nothing to stop you sharing my life and my bed.

*Your loving wife-to-be,
Goneril*

'My God!' said Tom softly. 'So that's Edmund's game, is it? He's playing for big prizes. Albany is going to be interested in this letter – very interested. I'd better find him as soon as I can.'

Gloucester began to speak, but Tom cut in quickly. 'Listen. It's too dangerous for you here. I'm going to take you somewhere safe, then come back on my own.'



That Monday had been a busy day for Caius. It had also cost him a lot in taxi fares. He had brought Lear into Chicago in the early hours of the morning when the storm was still at its wildest. Lear's favourite restaurant was an Italian place called Gino's, and the owner, big fat Gino, was an old friend of Lear's. Caius had taken Lear there and Gino had lent them a private room upstairs from the restaurant itself. Gino had been understandably nervous. 'I don't want no shootin' here,' he had told Caius. 'Customers don't like it.'

After a few hours' sleep, Caius hurried across town to O'Hare airport. There he found Lear's driver, waiting by the Information Desk. The driver was glad to see him.

'There's going to be trouble tonight,' he said. 'New York have sent a lot of their real heavy men down. I've heard that

more are coming by car – machine-guns, everything. They're spreading all round town, ready to hit 92nd Street sometime tonight.'

Caius nodded. 'Has Cordelia arrived yet?' he asked.

'Yeah, she came in on the first flight. She's over at the Westin Hotel near the airport.' The driver smiled and looked at Caius's beard and dark glasses. 'She sent you her love and warmest thanks, Mr Kent, sir. She's a real nice lady, that one. I've got a lot of time for her.'

Kent smiled in return. 'What did she say when she heard what her sisters had done to her father?'

'She was very unhappy about it, very unhappy. Where's the Boss now, Mr Kent? Are you going to take him to the Westin?'

Kent shook his head sadly. 'I've tried to talk to him. But he won't see Cordelia – he's too ashamed of the way he kicked her out like that. And he's very confused in his mind, he doesn't really know what he's doing or saying. All this trouble with that pair of bitches Goneril and Regan has really torn him apart. He's a broken man.'

The driver said quickly, 'Miss Cordelia said she'd brought a doctor with her from New York. Perhaps he can help with the Boss.'

Kent's face brightened. 'Right. Let's get down to the hotel and pick up the doctor. We'll use taxis, leave the Cadillac here, OK? That car's too well known and we don't want anyone on our tail, do we?'

The two men hurried out of the airport. The storm had passed, leaving a clear blue sky and a biting wind. Chicago was now awake and on its way to work, and it took some time to get through the heavy traffic to the Westin Hotel. They stopped to get Cordelia's doctor, a bright-eyed young man with a long, Polish name. As they drove downtown towards Gino's, Kent explained the problem to the doctor. He listened with interest.

'Shock,' he told Kent. 'Shock can do funny things to the mind, and cause a complete breakdown. He might seem crazy now, but he'll probably come through it. He's an old man, remember, not used to sudden changes. A bit of rest and loving care, and he'll be OK.'

'I hope you're right, Doc,' said Kent.

But when they arrived at Gino's, Lear was not there. Gino was full of excuses and did a lot of arm-waving. 'Says he's goin' for a walk in the park. How can I stop him? He's the Boss, not me.'

Kent tried hard not to get angry. 'Which park, you fool?'

Gino's eyebrows and hands told them that he didn't know.

It was a long search. They tried Douglas Park, Columbus Park, Garfield Park, Grant Park. They finally found him in Grant Park, standing by the shore of Lake Michigan, staring out across the water with a wild and frightening look in his eyes. His lips moved as he talked to himself silently.

Kent took his arm. 'Come on, Boss. It's a cold day for a walk without a coat. Let's go and get a hot coffee somewhere, OK?' He nodded to the doctor, who gently took Lear's other arm.

Lear shook his head slowly from side to side, hearing nothing except the voices in his mind. 'Blind . . . blind . . . we're all blind,' he whispered. 'There's evil everywhere . . . you can hear it, taste it, smell it . . .' He suddenly noticed Kent and the doctor and stared wildly at them. 'Don't you know who I am? I'll pay you anything you want. Can't you hear the dogs? They're coming for us, they'll tear us to pieces!'

Gently but firmly, they led Lear out of the park and got him into a taxi. All the time the doctor kept talking to him in a calm, quiet way. Kent didn't think that Lear heard a word that was said to him.

At the Westin Hotel they took Lear to a room in Cordelia's

apartment, and the doctor gave him something to calm him down. Soon the old man went off into a deep sleep. The doctor stayed with him and Kent went to see Cordelia, who thanked him again and again with tears in her eyes.

'What a kind man you are! How can I ever repay you?' she said.

Kent smiled. 'I don't need thanks,' he said simply. 'I've been with him a long time. I'm too old to change bosses now.'

During that afternoon Kent made a number of phone calls while Lear's driver went out to get news. When the driver came back to the hotel later in the afternoon, he seemed worried.

'The New Yorkers are going to have a hard time,' he told Kent. 'Regan and Goneril have called in all the Family's gunmen. 92nd Street is going to be guarded better than The White House. It'll be one hell of a fight.'

'Yeah,' Kent said. 'But I've heard that Cornwall's dead. And Regan's got a new lover-boy already - Edmund, Gloucester's boy.'

'You heard about Gloucester, did you?' asked the driver.

Kent nodded. 'That was really nasty. Why the hell does anybody have children?'

The two men went up to Cordelia's apartment to find out how Lear was. He was still asleep in an armchair, with Cordelia sitting quietly next to him, waiting for him to wake. The doctor came forward and talked to the two men in a low voice. Suddenly Cordelia called out softly, 'He's waking up.'

When Lear opened his eyes, he saw in front of him the smiling face of his youngest daughter. He stared at her without recognition.

'Why did you wake me?' he whispered. 'Life's sweet for you, my dear, but not for me. My life's old and grey and full of pain.'

Tears ran down Cordelia's face. 'Don't you know me, Father?' She bent forward and took his hands in her own.

Lear's eyes were sad and tired. 'I don't know where I am, or what day of the week it is.' He looked into his daughter's gentle face. 'I'm just a stupid old man,' he whispered. 'Don't laugh at me, but I think . . . I think you're my daughter, my little Cordelia.'

'Oh Dad! Of course I am,' said Cordelia softly, smiling at him through her tears.

Very gently, the old man lifted his hand and touched her wet cheek. 'Don't cry, honey,' he said in a sad, wondering voice. 'Why should you cry for me? I've been a stupid, cruel father to you. How can you ever forgive me?'

In answer, Cordelia put her head on her father's chest. Lear closed his eyes and rested his cheek against her soft, shining hair.

Kent turned his back on them and blew his nose sharply into a large red and blue handkerchief. Then the three men went quietly out of the room, leaving father and daughter in each other's arms.

CHAPTER FIVE

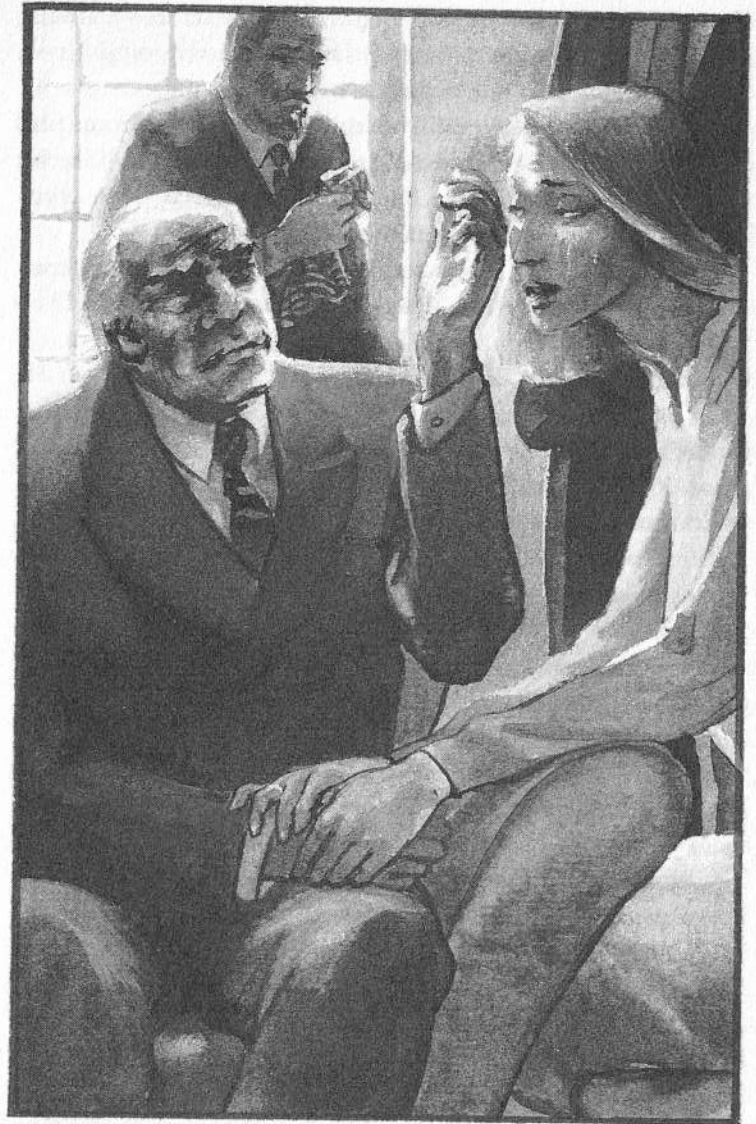
Howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones!

Had I your tongues and eyes I'd use them so

That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever . . .

Act 5, Scene 3

The short winter's day was soon over. Down 92nd Street light streamed from the tall office buildings. A thin rain had begun to fall, and the wet street shone with a hundred different colours from traffic lights, car headlights, and the orange streetlights. From a fifteenth-floor window Edmund watched the busy evening traffic and bit his lip, wondering



Very gently, Lear lifted his hand and touched Cordelia's wet cheek.

'Don't cry, honey,' he said in a sad, wondering voice.

how the night would go. Out there in the city, among ordinary people leading ordinary lives, was a ring of gunmen, slowly moving in on the Family's head office.

Regan came up behind him and put her arms around his waist. 'I guess Goneril and Albany will be here soon.' She bit the back of his neck playfully with her sharp little white teeth. 'I wonder what happened to Oswald.'

'I've no idea,' said Edmund. 'He certainly hasn't been here.'

'And you promise me,' Regan went on jealously, 'that you haven't slept with my sister? Promise?'

Edmund smiled. 'Would I tell you if I had?' he asked. He freed himself from her arms and turned round to look at her.

Regan stared at him greedily. 'You're mine, Edmund. All mine. Keep away from Goneril, or there'll be trouble.'

Edmund put his hand on his heart. 'I'm yours till death, ma'am.'

Regan smiled, but turned as they both heard the sound of the lift door opening. Albany and Goneril came straight in through the open office door. Cold air seemed to follow them into the room. Goneril took her gloves off with quick, sharp movements, and her cat-like eyes jumped suspiciously from Regan's face to Edmund's and back again. Albany looked equally unfriendly.

'Well, my dear sister-in-law,' he said to Regan, 'you're still crying over your dead husband, I see.' He gave her no chance to speak and went on, 'I'll tell you all now, I don't like this business. OK, so we have to fight the New York mob. If we don't, we'll either all be dead or on the next plane out of the country. But I think Lear has had a really rough time. I hear he's with Cordelia now, and there's to be no punishment for either of them. Do I make myself clear?'

'Of course, sir,' began Edmund smoothly, but Goneril cut in quickly before he could continue.

'Let's not start any family arguments now. The first thing

is to get the New York mob off our backs. Right? I know that Edmund' – she turned her head to smile at him – 'has got all our men in place downstairs, but there has been some confusion between my people and my sister's. Gunmen who are suspicious of each other don't make a good army. I suggest that Albany and Edmund go downstairs right now and have a word with all the men. Tell them there'll be good payment for tonight's work – that sort of thing.'

'Good idea,' Edmund said, and turned to Albany. 'Shall we go, sir?' he suggested politely.

Albany agreed, not very willingly, and the two men went out, leaving the sisters alone together. In the lift going down, Edmund quickly explained to Albany where all the guards had been placed and what their orders were. They got out at the third floor to continue down the stairs. Albany saw a men's room near the lift and went towards the door. 'Give me a minute,' he said to Edmund.

Edmund nodded and walked across to the window by the stairs. He was glad of a moment's thought by himself. The look that Goneril had given Regan upstairs was still fresh in his mind. Perhaps it hadn't been a very clever idea to make love to both sisters. He couldn't marry both of them. He couldn't even marry one while the other was still alive and wild with jealousy. And then there was Albany. Perhaps tonight's fight would solve the problem. He smiled to himself. Perhaps this time tomorrow he, Edmund, illegitimate son of Gloucester, would be the new boss of the Chicago Family. He would make sure that Lear and Cordelia were not around to make trouble, never mind what Albany said.

When Albany entered the men's room, he thought he heard a small sound. He tried all the doors and found that the end toilet door was locked. 'Who's in there?' he called sharply. Silence. Albany tried again. 'Listen, man, I know you're in there. I'm Albany, and I want to know who you are.'

A hand suddenly appeared under the toilet door, holding an envelope. Albany went closer and recognized his wife's handwriting on the envelope. Then a voice whispered behind the door.

'Take it and read it. You'll find it interesting. And I'll bring you some more interesting news later on tonight. When you've finished fighting, send for Whisky Tom. I'll be around somewhere.'

Albany bent down and took the envelope. He read the letter in silence; then, tight-lipped with fury, he put it carefully into his pocket.

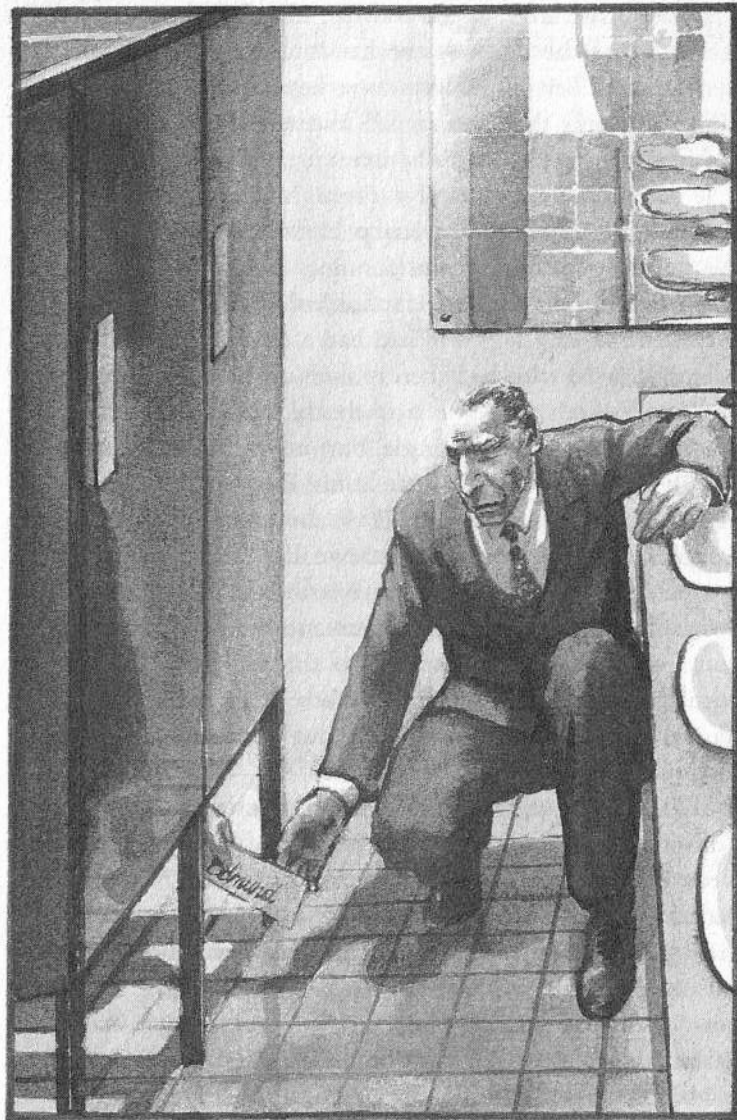
'But who the hell *are* you?' he whispered at the locked door. There was no answer, and Albany looked nervously over his shoulder, afraid that Edmund might come in at any moment. After a second or two, he turned and went out, noisily shutting the door behind him.

Behind the locked toilet door, Edgar smiled to himself. What a piece of luck that had been! He had wondered how he was going to get Albany alone. He decided to wait for a few minutes, then move to another hiding-place in the building. He had no interest in the gangster fight that was coming. His plans were for his brother Edmund, and him alone.

The evening passed slowly into night. The bars and nightclubs downtown filled with people looking for pleasure or quick ways to lose a lot of money. In a police station near 92nd Street a short conversation took place in the Chief's office.

'The word from New York is that there's going to be a big fight tonight. They've sent most of their heavy men down and they're going to try and take over. Are we going to do anything?'

'No. We'll just look the other way. I don't care what they do to each other. They'll get rid of any dead bodies and leave the streets clean and tidy. That's all I care about.'



A hand suddenly appeared under the toilet door, holding an envelope. Albany went closer and recognized his wife's handwriting on the envelope.

In the office in 92nd Street men checked their guns again and watched the clock as the hands moved slowly round to two o'clock. Telephone lines were kept open between the big office upstairs, the men at all the entrances and the men outside, waiting in cars in the street.

It started at 2.25 exactly. From his hiding-place on the second floor Edgar heard sharp bursts of machine-gun fire, the sounds of shouting and running feet, and the scream of overworked car engines. He finished his cup of coffee and stretched his long legs. He had had a quiet word with one of Albany's men, who had then spoken on the phone to Albany upstairs. Edgar's plan was now ready, and he waited for the result of the fight with a single, burning purpose in his mind.

It was all over in half an hour. Five of the New York gunmen had very nearly got in on the first floor from the fire escape stairs. But after the first two had been gunned down, the other three lost their enthusiasm and disappeared back down the stairs again. There was another burst of machine-gun fire by the back entrance to the car park, and a small bomb was thrown into the guard box at the front entrance. It started a fire, which was quickly put out. Soon the building was quiet again.

By the entrance to the lift in the big underground car park, Edmund spoke quickly into a telephone. His pale blue eyes were bright with greed and excitement. The New Yorkers had failed to get into the building and had lost quite a few men. They might try a second time, but Edmund doubted it. It's not easy to break into a well-guarded building through a heavy rain of machine-gun bullets. The gunmen in the car park laughed and joked with each other, and lit cigarettes.

Half an hour passed, then an hour. There was no further sign of the enemy, and soon reports came in from the men out in cars that the New Yorkers were leaving town. Edmund smiled, and made another telephone call. A few minutes later

two cars drove down to the car park entrance and, on Edmund's order, the electric gate was opened to let them in.

Several men got out, guns at the ready, and then Lear and Cordelia slowly got out of the second car. Cordelia looked round at the circle of guns and held her father's hand tightly. Lear looked Edmund up and down in icy silence.

Edmund smiled, a thin ugly smile, and turned to one of the men. 'Take them down below and put them into number five. It's all ready for them. Lock them in and then bring me the key.'

Cordelia lifted her chin bravely and stared at Edmund. 'Aren't we going to see these daughters, these sisters?' she asked angrily.

Lear put his arm round her shoulders. 'No, honey, no. We don't want to see them. We'll go and sit in this prison, and laugh and tell each other jokes and stories. Who cares about the rest of the world? They can go to hell.' He looked down into her face. 'Don't cry, sweetie,' he said softly. 'I'll take care of you.'

Edmund nodded to the men, and Lear and Cordelia were led away to the narrow steps that went down under the car park. There were five airless and windowless strongrooms down there, used as 'interview' rooms because screams did not travel beyond their thick walls.

When the key was brought to Edmund, he sent away his hand-picked team of kidnappers. The cars drove out and Edmund then walked quietly to the back of the car park. A small, thin man stepped silently out of the shadows and Edmund spoke quietly into his ear.

'You've had the first half of your payment. Now earn the second half. You know what to do. When I hear that it's done, you'll be rich for life.' He pressed the key into the man's hand and walked away.

In the private apartment next to the big office on the fifteenth floor, Regan, Goneril, and Albany were drinking champagne. It was now clear that the New York mob were leaving Chicago and did not plan to try again. But there were no smiles of delight on any face in the room. Albany stood near the door, waiting for Edmund to come up in the lift. Goneril was examining her painted fingernails, and Regan was walking around the room with quick impatient steps. She had drunk half a bottle of champagne very quickly, and her cheeks had gone bright pink.

When Edmund came in, he looked as calm and as confident as usual. Albany congratulated him coldly and then, looking at his wife, said:

'The New York problem is over, and it's now time to finish the family arguments. First we must decide what to do about Lear and Cordelia. In my opinion, we should go and see them now at their hotel and —'

Edmund broke in smoothly. 'Lear and Cordelia are not at the Westin Hotel any more. They're quite safe. I have them under lock and key, here in this building.'

Albany stared at him in growing anger. 'And just who the hell do you think you are? You take orders from *me*, little man!'

'Oh no, he doesn't,' Regan said loudly. 'He's working with me now, and you'd better start thinking of him as your new brother-in-law!'

Goneril looked up from the sofa where she was sitting. 'Well, well, well,' she said unpleasantly. 'So my little sister has got a new man for her bed already, has she? You won't keep him long, you know, my dear.'

Regan turned on her sister furiously. 'You're not getting your hands on him — I'll tell you that for a start! He belongs to me!'

'Shut up, both of you!' shouted Albany. 'You're like a couple

of street cats.' He turned to look at Edmund. 'You're finished, Edmund,' he said calmly. 'You think you've been so clever, don't you? But you've come to the end of the road now.'

As he spoke, he moved over to a table, picked up a phone and spoke two words into it. The words sounded like 'Whisky Tom'. Edmund stared at him suspiciously, a small seed of fear growing in his mind.

Regan was standing next to Edmund, holding on to his arm. Now she suddenly sat down on a chair. 'Jesus!' she whispered. 'I feel terrible, really sick . . .' She put her hand to her mouth. 'I have to go to the bathroom.' She got up and ran quickly from the room.

Goneril smiled. A long, slow, evil smile. Edmund began to speak, but at that moment the door crashed open and three of Albany's men came in. Behind them was a tall man with his face covered by a black **hood**. Through eye-holes in the hood a pair of blue eyes stared fixedly at Edmund. The other three men spread out round the room, holding their guns.

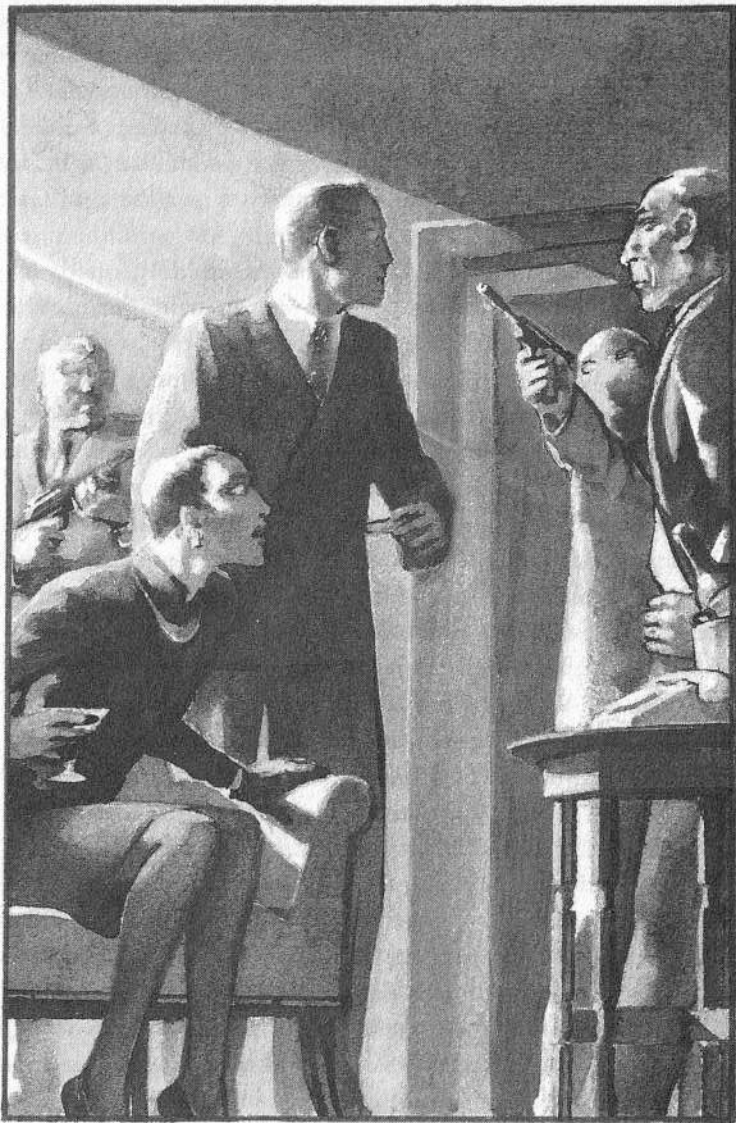
A sudden silence fell, then Albany nodded to the hooded man. 'Go on, Whisky Tom,' he said quietly.

The hooded man stepped forward and his gun was pointing straight at Edmund. 'Let me tell you all about this smooth-faced son of a bitch,' he said. 'He's a liar, a cheat, and a bloody butcher. He sold his own father and turned his back while the old man's eyes were burnt out by acid. He tried to murder his own brother. He intends, with Goneril, to murder Albany. To call him a rat is to insult rats.'

'Who the hell *are* you?' whispered Edmund.

With one quick movement Edgar pulled off his hood. Edmund's eyes widened in horror, and then his brother shot him three times in the stomach.

With a scream Goneril ran forward, but Albany caught his wife's arm and pulled her violently towards him. She fought to get free, shouting, 'Let me get to him!'



The hooded man stepped forward and his gun was pointing straight at Edmund.

'Who the hell are you?' whispered Edmund.

'Shut your mouth, you bitch,' said Albany. 'Your blue-eyed lover is finished — and so are you.' He took out the letter Goneril had written to Edmund and held it in front of her eyes. Goneril's face went white with fear. She stepped back, looked wildly round the room, and then ran to the door. Nobody made any move to stop her.

'So it was *you*, Edgar. I thought you'd left the country,' Albany said. He crossed the room and took Edgar's hand. 'I'm sorry about your poor father's eyes. I had no part in that, please believe me.'

Edgar nodded. 'I know. His troubles are over now, though. He died this afternoon. Heart failure.' Edgar turned his head away. 'I should have told him earlier who I was. When I did, the shock was too much for him.'

'But what happened to you? How did you know all this?' asked Albany. He nodded to his three men, who quietly left the room.

Quickly, Edgar explained. He also told Albany about Kent, who had pretended to be Caius, a new servant, so that he could help and look after his old boss, Lear. 'I met Kent at Gino's this evening,' Edgar said. 'He told me that poor old Lear has had a complete breakdown and —'

'Oh my God! Lear!' Albany said suddenly. 'And Cordelia. I'd almost forgotten them. They're somewhere in this building. Edmund had them kidnapped and brought here.' Albany turned to look at Edmund's body lying on the floor.

Edmund was not dead yet, but he knew he was dying. Though his mind was clouded with pain, he had heard his brother's story, and now something, perhaps a touch of shame, made him try to speak. His voice was a dry, uneven whisper.

'They're in room number five underground. You'd better hurry. I paid a man to kill them.'

Albany and Edgar turned and ran to the lift. The seconds

seemed endless as the lift went silently down at its usual speed. The door opened and the two men burst out, running across the car park towards the strongroom steps. Then Edgar caught Albany's arm. 'Look!' he shouted. 'Look over there!'

Against the opposite wall of the car park was Goneril's red Ferrari, wrecked almost beyond recognition. In what had been the driving seat was a horrible mess of blood and hair. Edgar turned away, sickened by the sight.

Albany's face was white. 'God in heaven,' he whispered. 'What the hell's been happening here?' He looked around wildly. 'Where are all the goddamned guards? What's going on?'

A man came forward nervously from the shadows. He didn't come too close to Albany. 'They've all gone, sir,' he said shakily. 'It was your wife, sir. She came down here, screaming like she was out of her mind. She screamed that she'd murdered her sister Regan with poison, and that we could all go to hell. Then she jumped into her Ferrari, sir, and just drove it, at top speed, straight into the wall. No one could stop her, sir.' The man began to back away slowly, in the direction of the entrance.

Albany put his face in his hands. Then he and Edgar jumped a foot in the air as they heard another voice behind them.

It was Kent. His face was grey with tiredness and he wore a thick bandage round one wrist. He was no longer wearing his dark glasses and his eyes were stony.

'Where's the Boss?' he repeated heavily.

Hurriedly, Albany led the way to the steps going underground. There were no guards anywhere, and all the doors were open. The three men ran down the dark steps and along past the open doors to room number five.

There were three people in the room and two of them were dead. A small thin man lay in one corner. The ugly red

marks on his throat showed that he had died a sudden and a violent death under a strong pair of hands.

Lear sat in the middle of the floor, holding Cordelia in his arms. There was a small, neat bullet hole in the middle of her back. Her face was as gentle in death as it had been in life.

Kent went down on his knees by his Boss's side and covered his eyes with his hand. Lear lifted his head and looked at the three silent men.

'We live by the gun, and we die by the gun. All of us are murderers, all of us.' His voice became low and uncertain. 'I think she's dead. I tried to save her. I killed her murderer with my own hands. But she's getting cold, so cold.' He looked down into his daughter's face, and whispered softly, 'Wait for your old father, honey. Stay a little longer, and talk to me. Don't leave me, sweetie.' He smoothed her hair with a gentle hand.

Albany swallowed hard and stepped slowly forward. 'Sir,' he said quietly, 'we're your friends. Look, here's your old friend Kent by your side. He was your servant Caius, you know.'

'That's right, Boss. I've been with you all the time, Boss,' whispered Kent. 'You can't drive an old dog away.'

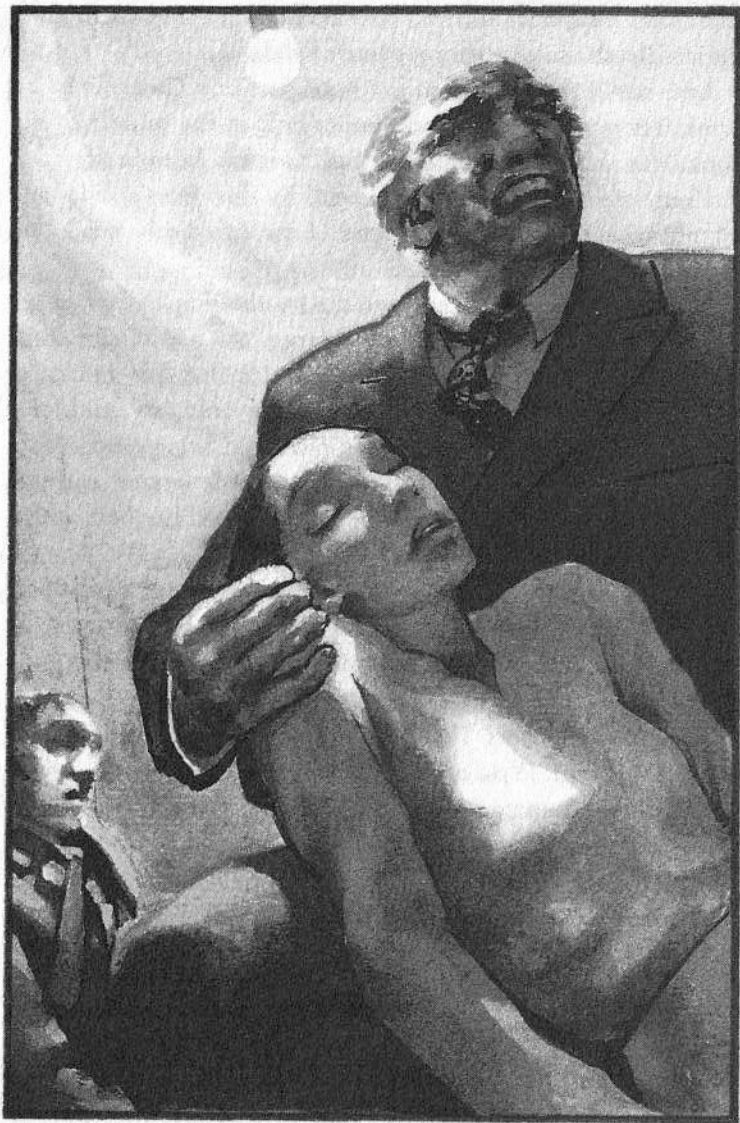
Lear looked up again. 'Yes, yes, I liked Caius,' he said, not understanding. Again he bent his head over his dead daughter.

'Boss,' began Kent again, 'Boss, your other daughters are dead now. They, er, had an accident.'

'Yes, I think so,' Lear said, nodding.

'He doesn't understand what we're saying,' Edgar whispered to Albany.

'Yeah, you're right,' Albany replied quietly. He waited a moment and then spoke again. 'Sir, we want you to become the Boss again. Everything will come back to you, as it was before.'



'She's dead! Look . . . look . . . my little Cordelia, she's gone for ever. Oh, help me, help me . . .'

But Lear did not hear him. He cried out, suddenly, staring down at Cordelia's white face. 'She's dead! Look . . . look . . . my little Cordelia, she's gone for ever. Oh, help me, help me . . .' Very carefully, he laid the dead girl on the floor, then fell lifeless next to her. Hurriedly, Albany felt for Lear's heart, but the old tired body lay still.

Kent stood up slowly. 'He's gone. Don't try and bring him back. What's he got to live for now?'

'Dear God,' Edgar said in a low voice. 'I hope I never live to see another night like this.'

The three men moved slowly towards the door. In silence, they climbed the steps and walked through the car park to the entrance. They opened the gate and went up to the street. The first grey light of morning hung in the sky, turning the streetlamps to small orange points of light. Somewhere nearby a car engine coughed loudly into life, then joined the endless noise of traffic in the distance. Lights came on in the tall buildings as office cleaners started their morning's work. The windy city was slowly waking up for another day.

For a moment the three men stood there, looking out across the street. Behind them lay the yawning mouth of the car park entrance and the black shadows beyond. Then Kent buttoned up his coat, turned and walked away down the street without a word. Albany and Edgar watched him go.

'What the hell's going to happen now?' Edgar whispered to Albany.

'God knows,' was Albany's only reply. Then he, too, turned and walked away down the street.

ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is England's greatest playwright and poet. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and went to London when he was a young man. There he became a successful actor and playwright, and later a part-owner of the famous Globe theatre. He wrote forty plays, and most of them were seen by Queen Elizabeth I of England, and later, King James I. *King Lear*, one of his four great tragedies, was probably written in about 1606.

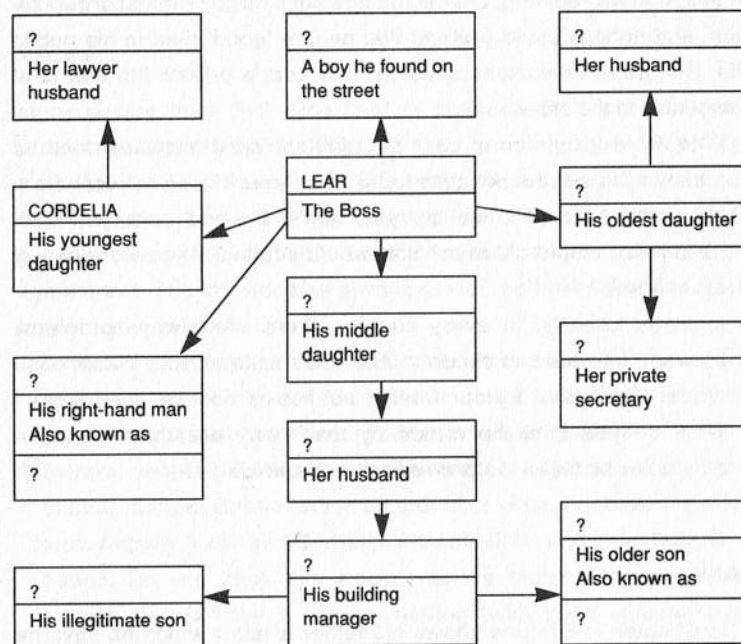
Shakespeare's plays are still popular, and they continue to be acted, in the theatre and on film, four hundred years after they were written. The stories of the plays are both old and modern – they are about love, hate, jealousy, murder, revenge, greed, magic – and people in each century have found new enjoyment and new meaning in Shakespeare's works.

The Simply Shakespeare series retells the stories of the plays for today's world, keeping the names of Shakespeare's characters as a point of contact with the actual play. Other titles in the series are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*.

EXERCISES

Comprehension

Look at this chart. It shows the connections between all the people in the story. Fill in the rest of the names.



- 1 Out of the thirteen people in the chart, only five are still alive at the end of the story. Which five are they?
- 2 Write down the names of the eight people who died, in the order that the deaths happened.