

King Lear: synopsis brief Summary

2 or more elements that
are interconnected or deeply
connected in some way.

deprive s.o. of land,
property or other possessions

make a secret plan to
harm someone
(conspire/plot)
against s.b.

to make s.b. like you
or trust you, in order
to gain some advantage
for yourself. (usually in a
clever or dishonest way).

King Lear is the most complicated of all Shakespeare's plays. There are two plots—the main one concerning the king and his three daughters; and the sub-plot of Gloucester and his two sons. The plots are intricately interwoven with each other, as the characters from Gloucester's sub-plot become involved with those in the king's main action. At the end of the play, the two plots are finally resolved together.

King Lear has planned to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, but when the youngest, Cordelia, ~~suffers from~~ incurs his displeasure he casts her off and gives her share of the land to her sisters—on whom he soon becomes totally dependent. They are greedy and selfish, and eventually dispossess their father entirely. They turn him out of doors into a wild and stormy night with only his Fool and a devoted servant, Kent, as companions. But Gloucester follows them, and leads the king to find shelter in a deserted 'hovel'. ~~an open shed or shelter, a small poorly built house~~

Gloucester has griefs of his own: early in the play we saw how his younger son, Edmund, deceived him into thinking that Edgar, his elder son, was plotting against his father's life. A search warrant was issued against Edgar who, to avoid arrest, disguised himself as 'Poor Tom', a crazy beggar. He, too, has taken refuge from the storm, and in the 'hovel' the king and the Fool encounter the madman.

Gloucester's other son, meanwhile, has been worming his way into the favour of King Lear's elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, and their husbands, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall. These are now rulers of the kingdom—and Edmund is ambitious! He betrays his father by revealing the help that Gloucester has given to the outcast Lear, and he is rewarded for this with the title 'Earl of Gloucester', which has been stripped from his father.

The Dukes of Albany and Cornwall begin to quarrel, each wanting the other's share of Lear's kingdom. They unite only to face a threatened invasion from France—whose troops are led by Lear's youngest daughter. Cordelia is now married to the King of France, and she is coming to rescue her father and restore him to his throne.