

Acting Edition

LOVE YOU MORE

BY NIKHIL MAHAPATRA

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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The world premiere of *LOVE YOU MORE* was originally performed at The Tank (Meghan Finn, Artistic Director) in New York City, running from May 29 to June 19, 2025, and coproduced between The Tank, Nikhil Mahapatra, N // Nicky Maggio, and Eric Shethar. The production was directed by N // Nicky Maggio, with visual design by Aoshuang Zhang, lighting design by Adrian Yuen, and sound design by Joshua Dumas. The production stage manager was Pradanya Subramanyan. The cast was as follows:

CORDELIA..... Jasmine Sharma
GONERIL.....Mahima Saigal
LEAR..... Omar Rahim

CHARACTERS

CORDELIA – Early twenties, female.

GONERIL (GUNNY) – Later twenties/early thirties, female.

LEAR – Mid-fifties to sixties, male.

The first production of this play featured a full South Asian cast. I would recommend casting from the global majority, mindfully from immigrant populations, whatever that looks like wherever you happen to be.

SETTING

At home and far away, wherever that may be.

TIME

Modern day, probably.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A flash can be many things, but whatever it ends up being must clearly denote the shift of time and match the pace of the scene and moment.

_____ denotes a place in the text where the words want to come out but don't want to be said. There are different ways to punctuate it in a live show – you could keep it silent and expressive and forceful, add a sound, or think of a third different thing.

*For my family and friends, as I am nothing but a compilation of the
time and energy they have freely put into me, and I only hope this play
does some little justice to that loving nourishment.*

ACT I

Scene One

(The kitchens of Castle Lear, England.)

(It is a mix of modern and regal – glass and metal, black and silver, but also some stone and banisters.)

(There are a few chairs and a kitchen counter, modern.)

(A fridge?)

(Some of those hanging lights.)

(Perhaps a wine rack and a bowl of fake or real fruit, or a mix.)

*(King **LEAR**, dressed simply in jeans and a crisp white shirt, is removing some stuff from a brown grocery bag.)*

(He takes a cheese block, starts slicing and nibbling a little.)

*(**LEAR** and **CORDELIA** eat constantly, while talking and not, maybe sometimes to the point where food just falls out of their mouths.)*

*(**CORDELIA**, dressed similarly, enters.)*

*(**LEAR** speaks, without taking her in.)*

LEAR. I bought that cheese you liked. They didn't have it at the store for the longest time. I had to check, every week. I was sure I wouldn't be able to get it in time, but lo and behold, it was there, sitting out on its own little pedestal, with a fancy handwritten staff recommendation and a prize-winning seal, primped and fresh like the winner of a dog pageant. It's like the store knew that you were coming home and decided that now it was time to produce its salty, smelly gift, just for you.

CORDELIA. You're rambling.

LEAR. It's the dementia.

CORDELIA. Don't joke like that.

LEAR. I'm getting older.

CORDELIA. You are hardly sixty.

LEAR. I'm exactly sixty.

CORDELIA. You are not!

LEAR. They got my birth certificate wrong at the hospital.
I am older than it says.

CORDELIA. How much older?

LEAR. It's unclear. Time moved different back then.

(CORDELIA walks over, and plucks a piece of cheese.)

CORDELIA. Mmmm.

LEAR. Good?

CORDELIA. Good.

LEAR. *(Finally looks up at her.)* Are you taking the piss?

CORDELIA. No, it's good.

LEAR. Your outfit.

CORDELIA. What's wrong with it?

LEAR. It's my outfit.

CORDELIA. It's jeans and a shirt.

LEAR. It's my outfit.

CORDELIA. I think I look delightful.

LEAR. You do,

but

it's my outfit.

CORDELIA. I wear this all the time in France.

LEAR. I'm sure, but we're not in France.

CORDELIA. Do you want me to change?

LEAR. Never.

CORDELIA. Do you dislike it, when I finally resemble you?

LEAR. You have always resembled me.

CORDELIA. Pfft.

LEAR. It's true.

CORDELIA. Gunny and Reagan look like plaster copies of you. I, on the hand, look more like your bastard daughter by way of slave wench.

LEAR. That's cruel.

CORDELIA. Is it wrong?

LEAR. I loved your mother.

CORDELIA. Did I look like her?

LEAR. Again, I think you look more like me. It's the structure of bones in your face. It's your nose. Most importantly, I think it's what's underneath you.

CORDELIA. And what's that?

LEAR. You roil like I do.

CORDELIA. I do?

LEAR. I think so. We've always been able to talk differently, from your sisters. Of course, I love your sisters.

CORDELIA. As do I. I mean, what's not to love?

LEAR. Well.

I do love them.

CORDELIA. I enjoy our similarities.

LEAR. So you agree, we are alike.

CORDELIA. In personality. And maybe in profile, from an angle.

LEAR. We are two peas in a pod. Which is why I'd like you to consider coming back after your studies in France.

CORDELIA. Why would I not be coming?

LEAR. Are you coming back?

CORDELIA. I've...

Not ruled it out.

LEAR. You like France.

CORDELIA. What's not to like.

LEAR. The French are rude.

CORDELIA. The English are just as bad.

LEAR. We are less snotty.

CORDELIA. Snotty is a word invented by the English. What are we if not that?

LEAR. We're not all so bad.

CORDELIA. No, we're not.

LEAR. But you like France. You like the freedom, the liberté, of being far away from us. You don't like us.

CORDELIA. I do like you.

LEAR. Do you?

CORDELIA. Sometimes, I can have difficulty.

LEAR. With Gunny and Reagan.

CORDELIA. Of course.

LEAR. With me?

CORDELIA. I love you.

LEAR. There is a but.

CORDELIA. No relationship is perfect.

LEAR. I'm your father.

CORDELIA. And I love you, not just as your daughter, but
as someone who deeply enjoys you. We are similar.
I like that.

LEAR. Where is the but?

CORDELIA. We are also different, and sometimes it is
easier to be away and not be reminded of the constant
difference.

LEAR. So it's about your mother again.

CORDELIA. This is not a story about my mother.

It is about me.

LEAR. You are obsessed with setting yourself apart. It's
snobby.

CORDELIA. That's mean.

LEAR. You think yourself better than your sisters.

CORDELIA. Is that a surprise? Did you not treat me
differently?

LEAR. I treated you better. But maybe I should not have.
A parental mistake.

CORDELIA. I guess we'll just have to live with that.

LEAR. I'm sorry. I'm being cruel.

I just miss you. I would love to have you around, after France.

CORDELIA. I miss you too.

LEAR. And I am getting older.

CORDELIA. I could never forget it.

LEAR. I would love to have you around.

CORDELIA. I...

Will think about it.

LEAR. Seriously.

CORDELIA. Seriously.

LEAR. It's not so bad here.

CORDELIA. I don't think it is at all.

LEAR. We can go horse riding. And they have this cheese.

CORDELIA. They have this cheese, occasionally.

LEAR. We can buy a bunch and freeze it. It'll keep.

CORDELIA. I would like that.

LEAR. I would like that too.

(Flash.)

(Scene end.)

Scene Two

(Train station, cold.)

(LEAR enters, wheezing a little, dragging suitcases.)

(CORDELIA enters, dressed fashionably.)

(GONERIL, in the background in the car, on her phone.)

LEAR. Well, here we are. It went by so quickly this time.
Did they shorten your vacations?

CORDELIA. No.

LEAR. Are you sure? It feels so much shorter.

CORDELIA. Nothing's different.

LEAR. I could have sworn –

In any case, maybe they should make them longer.

CORDELIA. That would interfere with the studies.

LEAR. It's such a short time to be with family, and if you
count the travel time.

CORDELIA. Three hours.

LEAR. And barely a week into January, the most depressing
month.

CORDELIA. I –

I guess I can't argue with that.

LEAR. It is the most depressing month, is it not?

CORDELIA. Verily.

LEAR. You could stay for a few days longer, I'm sure they
won't mind.

CORDELIA. There's a change fee on the tickets.

LEAR. I can cover it.

CORDELIA. There's really no need.

LEAR. It's the least I can do.

CORDELIA. I don't want you to.

LEAR. Really, Cordy, it's not a big –

CORDELIA. No, I don't want to stay any longer.

(Pause.)

LEAR. Oh.

CORDELIA. It's not you.

LEAR. No, I understand.

CORDELIA. Really.

LEAR. It's okay.

CORDELIA. Thank you.

LEAR. So, what was it?

CORDELIA. I have classes.

LEAR. Which you skip regularly.

CORDELIA. How do you know?

LEAR. We're friends.

On Facebook.

CORDELIA. Oh. I forgot.

LEAR. I don't like Facebook.

CORDELIA. I don't either.

LEAR. We should go cold turkey. Together.

CORDELIA. But it is quite handy.

LEAR. Oh, yes it is. We should never quit.

CORDELIA. So –

I should go.

LEAR. But what is it? Do you not love it here, with us? Will you be moving away?

CORDELIA. That is –

That is many years from now.

LEAR. That is more a yes than a no.

CORDELIA. Fine. Fine! I got bored, okay!

LEAR. Bored?

I thought I taught you –

CORDELIA. Yes, yes, spare me the lecture, boredom is the flaw of the person, only boring people are bored, do go on endlessly so that I may be bored even more to the point where I turn to dust!

(The lights dim, almost as if being swallowed by an invisible thing.)

(Long pause.)

(Back to normal.)

LEAR. The dramatic writing classes seem to have stuck.

CORDELIA. I'm sorry, Papa. I've just... I've outgrown this place. My friends here...they're different. Or I'm different. I wish it didn't sound so...insolent.

LEAR. And me? Am I boring too?

CORDELIA. Papa.

You've always been boring.

LEAR. Is this my daughter, or a viper in disguise?

CORDELIA. I'm kidding. But I can't sustain my life on you and rewatching *Lord of the Rings*.

LEAR. You play video games too. Do you remember, the first video game I bought you?

CORDELIA. *The Legend of Zelda.*

LEAR. I thought it had something to do with Zelda Fitzgerald.

CORDELIA. Did you really?

LEAR. No.

CORDELIA. Ugh.

LEAR. And you know, at least the *Lord of the Rings* is a very good movie.

CORDELIA. Excellent. Withstood the test of time.

LEAR. There is no doubt. A shame about *The Hobbit*.

CORDELIA. I never watched it.

LEAR. We watched it together.

CORDELIA. You misunderstand me. I never watched it.

LEAR. Is erasing the bad worth erasing the good.

CORDELIA. It was a terrible movie.

LEAR. That's true – I simply meant...

I suppose, the only thing to say is that I miss you deeply.
And that is a wound I'm still learning to treat.

CORDELIA. And I miss you too.

LEAR. Truly?

CORDELIA. So deeply.

That's the train.

LEAR. I will see you in the summer.

CORDELIA. I have to go. We'll talk soon.

LEAR. Wait, I have something for you. And the summer –

CORDELIA. Goodbye, Papa!

(CORDELIA rushes off with her bags.)

(LEAR hangs around, awkwardly, a paper grocery bag in his hands.)

(Flash.)

(Scene end.)

Scene Three

(On the phone.)

(LEAR and CORDELIA.)

(On LEAR's side, GONERIL, seated.)

(Eating a sandwich and chips, loudly.)

LEAR. Are you keeping warm?

CORDELIA. Plenty.

LEAR. I see you bought a new coat.

CORDELIA. It was on sale.

LEAR. It looks good on you.

CORDELIA. Thanks.

LEAR. And classes?

CORDELIA. Going good.

LEAR. Good.

Things are well here as well. Reagan got a new role.

CORDELIA. Good for her.

LEAR. I doubt you'll see her, when you come back. She's out a lot. We barely see her. Sometimes, I wonder if she even exists.

CORDELIA. Wouldn't change much.\

LEAR. Mean. She's your sister.

CORDELIA. She's your daughter.

LEAR. I think of that a lot.

CORDELIA. Mean!

LEAR. I don't mean it like that. I love you all, equally.

CORDELIA. How's Gunny.

LEAR. Oh?

CORDELIA. What?

LEAR. You never ask about your sister.

(The lights flicker.)

(GONERIL looks over momentarily.)

(LEAR smacks the lamp.)

CORDELIA. You initiated it.

LEAR. I mentioned but Reagan.

CORDELIA. That means Goneril will follow.

LEAR. Do you hate your sisters?

CORDELIA. No.

LEAR. No?

CORDELIA. Not anymore. They were cruel, needlessly, when I was young. And it's one thing at home, but at school and out in the world. They never cared to help, to protect or to even think in a kind way. But perhaps I am projecting. It may be more complicated than that. Regardless, I hated them once, and now, I just _____ them.

LEAR. You just _____ them?

CORDELIA. I've lost the hate, but I don't know what's supposed to go in that missing space. I just _____ them.

LEAR. Usually, it would be love.

CORDELIA. It's not love.

LEAR. Okay.

CORDELIA. Okay?

LEAR. I can't make you love someone.

CORDELIA. But you would like me to.

LEAR. Is that too much for me to hope for.

CORDELIA. Maybe. But I won't blame you for hoping.

LEAR. What about when I'm gone? Will you go your separate ways?

CORDELIA. We are still sisters. Just maybe not best friends. Acquaintances, or even business partners more likely.

LEAR. Business partners.

CORDELIA. For the messy part that comes after death, you need a business partner more than a friend.

LEAR. Already divvying up my remains.

CORDELIA. I would hope you never leave that to us.

LEAR. I'll see what I can do.

CORDELIA. So how is Goneril?

LEAR. I think she goes on dates, mostly on the internet. I don't know much about that.

CORDELIA. Good for her.

LEAR. And you?

CORDELIA. Me? I've already updated you.

LEAR. The weather and a coat, on sale.

CORDELIA. I lead a boring life.

LEAR. Any new loves.

CORDELIA. Perpetually single.

LEAR. I think that's a lie.

CORDELIA. I'm not desirable over here. Too English.

LEAR. Why won't you tell me anything about your life?

CORDELIA. I've always been quiet.

LEAR. You were very loud as a child.

CORDELIA. Children grow up.

LEAR. You're being very difficult.

CORDELIA. Learned from the best.

LEAR. I'm being serious.

CORDELIA. What do you want me to say?

LEAR. Anything!

CORDELIA. You have to be more specific.

LEAR. Are you dating anyone.

CORDELIA. I'm not.

LEAR. Were you dating anyone? Have you ever dated anyone?

CORDELIA. Why do you care?

LEAR. Because it's a part of your life! That I feel like you hide from me. Your sisters don't hide it. They drop it all over, like hot rocks for me to find. They don't care at all, and you seem to care a lot and I? I simply wish to understand. I want to be part of it. I don't want you to leave me out, now that you are so far across the sea, spending all the time with foreigners.

CORDELIA. You love foreigners.

LEAR. That's not my problem.

CORDELIA. It's three hours away.

LEAR. Stop dodging!

CORDELIA. I –

Yes.

LEAR. Yes?

CORDELIA. Yes. I have seen some people, but never anything serious.

LEAR. And now?

CORDELIA. And now, I am maybe seeing someone.

LEAR. Maybe.

CORDELIA. Relationships can be amorphous nowadays.
Not unlike sewage runoff.

LEAR. Okay. If it becomes less...amorphous.

CORDELIA. I will try to tell you more. If it does.

LEAR. Thank you.

CORDELIA. Also.

You must know, that it is a woman.

LEAR. Oh.

CORDELIA. And I have nothing more to add to that.

LEAR. I –

I love you no matter –

CORDELIA. Let's change the subject.

LEAR. Right.

We can talk about it, you know.

I am cool.

CORDELIA. Please stop.

LEAR. Did I push too hard?

CORDELIA. It's fine.

LEAR. Did you feel like you could not talk to me because
of this –

Was it my fault?

CORDELIA. No, of course not. How could it be?

It's just who I am.

LEAR. Truly?

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