

Act I, Scene iii

The Duke of Albany's palace

Enter GONERIL and OSWALD, her steward

GONERIL

Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?

"chiding" = *scolding*

"his fool" – Lear's jester (also referred to as an "all-licensed fool"—licensed in that such a jester is given the privilege of teasing or gently spoofing his master)

OSWALD

Yes, madam.

GONERIL

By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other
That sets us all at odds. I'll not endure it.
His knights grow riotous and himself upbraids us
On every trifle. When he returns from hunting,
I will not speak with him. Say I am sick.
If you come slack of former services,
You shall do well. The fault of it I'll answer.

"By day and night" – Goneril may mean *every hour of the day and night*, or perhaps she swears an oath similar to her father's "By Apollo."

"flashes" = *bursts out*

"crime" = *offence* (though not an actual breaking of the law)

"sets us all at odds" = *upsets everyone*

"himself upbraids" = *he scolds*

"come slack" = *fall short*

"answer" = *be responsible for*

OSWALD

He's coming, madam. I hear him.

within – In stage directions where actions are said to occur "within," the actions (usually sounds at a distance) are occurring offstage.

Horns within

GONERIL

Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows. I'd have it come to question.
If he distaste it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine, I know, in that are one,
Not to be over-rul'd. Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again and must be us'd
With checks as flatteries when they are seen abus'd.
Remember what I have said.

"weary negligence" = *casual disobedience* (deliberately poor service)

"I'd have it come to question" = *I want the subject* (of the servants' behavior) *to be raised in discussion*

"distaste" = *does not like it*

"to our sister" = *go to my sister's home*

"in that are one" = *in this matter are the same*

"Idle" = *foolish*

"manage those authorities" = *use those powers*

"us'd / With checks as flatteries" = *treated by our administering rebukes as well as praises*

OSWALD

Well, madam.

"when they are seen abus'd" = *when we see that they* (the old fools) *are deluded*. Note that what Goneril says about treating old parents as though they were children is a point expressed in Edmund's forged letter in the foregoing scene. Note also that the ideas of children parenting their parents and of servants disobeying their masters are expressions of the inversion motif. They are behaviors that, in cases such as the ones Goneril refers to, are to be regarded as unnatural and wrong. Be aware, however, that context is all, and that there are cases in the play where servants defying their masters (where their causes are just) and children caring for their parents (where they act in love) are natural and right. In complex literature, ambiguity is the norm and few conditions are entirely black or entirely white. Much is frustratingly grey—which is as true of life itself.

GONERIL

And let his knights have colder looks among you.
What grows of it, no matter. Advise your fellows so.
I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall,
That I may speak. I'll write straight to my sister
To hold my very course. Prepare for dinner.

Exeunt

"grows of" = *develops from*

"Advise your fellows so" = *Instruct your fellow servants to do the same*

"I would ... hence occasions" = *I wish to use this situation to give me opportunities*

"hold my very course" = *do the same as I do*