

## Act II, Scene iv

### Before Gloucester's castle. KENT in the stocks

Enter LEAR, FOOL, and GENTLEMAN

LEAR

'Tis strange that they should so depart from home,  
And not send back my messenger.

GENTLEMAN

As I learn'd,  
The night before there was no purpose in them  
Of this remove.

"no purpose in them / Of this remove" = *they* (Cornwall and Regan) *had no intention of traveling to this place*

KENT

Hail to thee, noble master!

LEAR

Ha!  
Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?

"Mak'st thou this shame thy pastime?" = *Are you sitting in these stocks for fun?*

KENT

No, my lord.

FOOL

Ha, ha! He wears cruel garters. Horses are tied by th'  
head, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys by th' loins,  
and men by th' legs. When a man's over-lusty at legs,  
then he wears wooden nether-stocks.

"He wears cruel garters" – The Fool makes a three-pronged gag: 1) as a garter circles the leg, so the stocks' holes circle the victim's legs; 2) garters hold up stockings, and Kent has been subjected to stocking (punishment); 3) the word "cruel" puns with *crewel*, which is a kind of thin worsted yarn, out of which stockings may be made.

"over-lusty at legs" = *too much of a vagabond* (i.e. because his legs are full of energy ["lusty"] and eager to walk)

"nether-stocks" = *stocks*

LEAR

What's he that hath so much thy place mistook  
To set thee here?

KENT

It is both he and she,  
Your son and daughter.

"What's he ... thee here?" = *Who has so mistaken your role* (i.e. as Lear's servant) *that he would set you in the stocks* (i.e. to dare to punish you without my authority)?

LEAR

No.

KENT

Yes.

Note that this passage of dialogue, with its exchange of short, sharp lines—a kind of verbal ping-pong called *stichomythia*—emphasizes Kent's quality of plain-speaking and Lear's refusal to see what he does not want to see.

LEAR

No, I say.

KENT

I say yea.

LEAR

No, no, they would not.

KENT  
Yes, they have.

LEAR  
By Jupiter, I swear, no.

KENT  
By Juno, I swear, ay.

"Jupiter" – king of the ancient Roman gods

"Juno" – Jupiter's queen

LEAR  
They durst not do't.  
They could not, would not do't. 'Tis worse than murder,  
To do upon respect such violent outrage.  
Resolve me, with all modest haste, which way  
Thou might'st deserve, or they impose, this usage,  
Coming from us.

"durst" = *dared*

"To do upon respect such violent outrage" = *To do such outrageous insult where they should show respect*

"Resolve me, with all modest haste" = *explain to me, as quickly as you reasonably can*

"which way ... this usage" = *how you could have deserved, or they could have been prepared, to treat you this way*

"Coming from us" = *since you have been sent as a royal messenger*

KENT  
My lord, when at their home  
I did commend your highness' letters to them,  
Ere I was risen from the place that show'd  
My duty kneeling, came there a reeking post,  
Stew'd in his haste, half breathless, panting forth  
From Goneril his mistress salutations,  
Deliver'd letters, spite of intermission,  
Which presently they read, on whose contents,  
They summon'd up their meiny, straight took horse,  
Commanded me to follow and attend  
The leisure of their answer, gave me cold looks.  
And meeting here the other messenger,  
Whose welcome, I perceiv'd, had poison'd mine—  
Being the very fellow that of late  
Display'd so saucily against your highness—  
Having more man than wit about me, drew.  
He rais'd the house with loud and coward cries.  
Your son and daughter found this trespass worth  
The shame which here it suffers.

"commend" = *deliver*

"Ere I was risen ... duty kneeling" = *before ("ere") I had gotten up from the kneeling position that showed my respect*

"reeking post" = *sweating messenger*

"stew'd" = *soaked*

"spite of intermission" = *without stopping to draw breath*

"presently" = *immediately*

"on whose contents" – i.e. the information in the letter

"meiny" = *household* (i.e. their servants)

"straight took horse" = *at once mounted their horses*

"and attend ... their answer" = *wait until they had time to answer*

"Display'd so saucily" = *acted so rudely*

"more man than wit" = *more courage than prudence* (i.e. cautious good sense)

"drew" – i.e. his sword

"rais'd the house" = *woke the people of the house*

"found this ... it suffers" = *considered my fault deserving of the punishment I now endure*

FOOL

Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way.

Fathers that wear rags  
Do make their children blind,  
But fathers that bear bags  
Shall see their children kind.  
Fortune, that arrant whore,  
Ne'er turns the key to the poor.

But, for all this, thou shalt have as many dolours for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year.

"Winter's not ... that way" – The Fool's metaphor says that just as the flight of wild geese is a sign of approaching winter, so the events that Kent has described are signs of bad times to come.

"Fathers that ... children blind" = *The children of poor fathers do not treat their fathers well* (i.e. are blind to their fathers)

"But fathers ... children kind" = *Fathers with moneybags, however, find that their children treat them well*

"Fortune, that ... the poor" = *The goddess Fortune is like a prostitute, who will not open her door to a poor man*

"dolours" = *griefs; sorrows*. (The Fool puns on *dollars*.)

"for all this" = *in spite of this* (i.e. the unkind treatment Lear will receive from his daughters, given that he no longer has moneybags)

"for thy daughters" = *in exchange for your daughters*

"tell" = *count*. (The number of items one could count in a year would be a great sum indeed.)

LEAR

O how this mother swells up toward my heart!  
*Hysterica Passio!* Down, thou climbing sorrow!  
Thy element's below! Where is this daughter?

"this mother ... *Hysterica Passio*" – *Hysterica Passio*, commonly known as "the mother," was the name given to an affliction characterized by a sense of choking and suffocation, starting from the heart and rising to the throat. It was thought to begin in the womb (the word *hysteria*, with its variants, comes from the Greek *hysteria*, meaning *womb*). But not only women suffered the condition. Some people describe intense panic attacks as being similar to this experience of *Hysterica Passio*. **Note, incidentally, that Lear's experience of *Hysterica Passio* in this moment stands as an important foreshadowing.**

"Thy element's below" = *Your proper place is underneath*

**Lear's attempt to control his rising emotion is in keeping with Elizabethan ideals regarding proper human behavior. According to Renaissance conceptions of natural order, the faculty of reason (the ability to be rational) was considered the most important of human attributes—above emotional impulses, certainly above physical appetites—and any impulse away from reason was to be checked, controlled, regarded as potentially self-destructive. Lear, therefore, is doing what all right-thinking Elizabethans would say he *should* do. But observe in the progress of this scene that his repeated attempts to subdue an unruly passion fail and he is caused to fall off a kind of cliff's edge (this metaphor, as we will see, is especially important).**

KENT

With the earl, sir, here within.

LEAR

Follow me not. Stay here.

*Exit*

GENTLEMAN

Made you no more offence but what you speak of?

KENT

None.

How chance the king comes with so small a number?

"How chance" = *why is it that*

"so small a number" – i.e. so few of his knights

FOOL

And thou hadst been set i' th' stocks for that question,  
thou hadst well deserv'd it.

"And thou ... deserv'd it" = *If you were punished for asking that question, you'd certainly have deserved it*

KENT  
Why, fool?

FOOL  
We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no laboring i' th' winter. All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men, and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking. Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following. But the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after. When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again. I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,  
And follows but for form,  
Will pack when it begins to rain  
And leave thee in the storm.  
But I will tarry. The fool will stay,  
And let the wise man fly.  
The knave turns fool that runs away.  
The fool no knave, perdy.

KENT  
Where learn'd you this, fool?

FOOL  
Not i' th' stocks, fool.

*Re-enter LEAR with GLOUCESTER*

LEAR  
Deny to speak with me! They are sick! They are weary!  
They have travel'd all the night! Mere fetches, I say,  
The images of revolt and flying off.  
Fetch me a better answer.

GLOUCESTER  
My dear lord,  
You know the fiery quality of the duke,  
How unremoveable and fix'd he is  
In his own course.

LEAR  
Vengeance! Plague! Death! Confusion!  
Fiery? What "quality"? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester,  
I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.

"We'll set thee to school to an ant" = *I'll make you take basic lessons from an ant*

"to teach ... th' winter" – In Aesop's fable, the ant labored all summer to provide for winter, while the grasshopper played and sang. The winter of Lear's misfortunes has come, and those knightly grasshoppers that were pleased to be with him in summer, when the weather was pleasant, have now deserted him.

"All that ... that's stinking" – All those (in this analogy, the unfaithful knights) who go straight ("that follow their noses") can see where they are going, unless of course they are blind (i.e. the knights can see that Lear is ruined and realize that there is no material advantage for them in staying loyal to him). But there is scarcely any need for eyes anyway, when it comes to detecting ruin, for the nose sees that easily enough.  
**Note that the Fool's analogy here is consistent with the motif of changing perspectives—of interpreting one's circumstances by exchanging one sense for another, of understanding in a new way.**

"Let go ... following" = *Don't hold on to a large wheel when it's rolling downhill, or it may run right over you* (similarly, don't attach yourself to a man whose fortunes are failing, or you may be ruined along with him)

"But the great ... thee after" = *As for a man whose fortunes are rising, latch onto him and share in his benefits*

"for form" = *only to appear loyal*

"tarry" = *wait*

"The fool will stay" – In this case, the fool referred to is Kent—seemingly a fool, that is, but a good man all the same for staying loyal to his master.

"the wise man" – The phrase is used ironically, for the Fool's implication is that the wise man knows where advantage is to be gained, but is nonetheless a knave for deserting his master when times are grim.

"The fool no knave" = *This fool* (which can refer to Kent or to the Fool, or both) *is no scoundrel*

"perdy" = an anglicized pronunciation of the French *per Dieu* (*by God*)

"Deny" = *refuse*

"fetches" = *excuses*

"The images ... flying off" = *the signs of rebellion and desertion*

"quality" = *temperament*

"unremoveable" = *stubborn*

GLOUCESTER

Well, my good lord, I have inform'd them so.

LEAR

Inform'd them! Dost thou understand me, man?

GLOUCESTER

Ay, my good lord.

LEAR

The king would speak with Cornwall. The dear father  
Would with his daughter speak, commands her service.  
Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood!  
Fiery? The fiery duke? Tell the hot duke that—  
No, but not yet. Maybe he is not well.  
Infirmity doth still neglect all office  
Whereto our health is bound. We are not ourselves  
When nature, being oppress'd, commands the mind  
To suffer with the body. I'll forbear,  
And am fall'n out with my more headier will,  
To take the indispos'd and sickly fit  
For the sound man. [Looking on KENT] Death on my  
state! Wherefore  
Should he sit here? This act persuades me  
That this remotion of the duke and her  
Is practice only. Give me my servant forth.  
Go tell the duke and's wife I'd speak with them,  
Now, presently! Bid them come forth and hear me,  
Or at their chamber door I'll beat the drum  
Till it cry sleep to death.

GLOUCESTER

I would have all well betwixt you.

*Exit*

LEAR

O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!

FOOL

Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when  
she put 'em i' th' paste alive. She knapp'd 'em o' th'  
coxcombs with a stick and cried "Down, wantons,  
down!" 'Twas her brother that, in pure kindness to his  
horse, butter'd his hay.

"hot duke" = *hot-tempered duke*

"No, but not yet" – This is one of the moments in which Lear attempts to restrain his nearly uncontrollable emotion.

"Infirmity doth ... is bound" = *Sickness always causes us to neglect duties that we would attend to if we were healthy* (Lear is attempting to see the situation from Cornwall's point of view, trying to accept that the duke really is ill and cannot meet with Lear right now.)

"oppress'd" = *afflicted; sickened*

"forbear" = *be patient*

"am fall'n ... headier will" = *regret my hasty impulse*

"To take ... sound man" = *to mistake the duke's sudden indisposition for the action of a healthy man*

"Death on my state!" – Lear's own "fiery quality" returns when he sees Kent in the stocks and is reminded of the grave insult done to him.  
"Death on my state" is his swearing by his (no longer actual) royal position.

"this remotion ... practice only" = *this removal of Cornwall and Regan (to Gloucester's castle) is a deliberate scheme*

"presently" = *immediately*

"Till it cry sleep to death" = *until sleep is utterly destroyed by the noise*

"my rising heart" – Again, Lear feels an attack of *Hysterica Passio*, which he attempts to keep down.

"Cry to it ... butter'd his hay" – A "cockney" could be a child, a cook, a Londoner, or a pampered woman (or any combination of these). The ignorant girl did not know that the eels should have been killed before they were put into the pie ("paste"), and when they tried to wriggle out, she rapped ("knapped") them on the heads ("coxcombs") and ordered the reckless creatures ("wantons") to lie down. Lear, the Fool urges him, must try to subdue his heart, which (like the eels) should have been calmed before getting into such a mess. As for the cockney's brother, he was a simple-minded boy who put butter on the hay because he wanted to be kind to his horse, not knowing that this very practice was a standard trick of cheating ostlers (horse handlers), who knew that horses cannot eat greasy hay.

*Enter CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER, and servants*

LEAR  
Good morrow to you both.

"Good morrow" – Lear speaks sarcastically in saying "Good morrow" (good day), for it is now evening.

CORNWALL  
Hail to your grace!

*KENT is set at liberty*

REGAN  
I am glad to see your highness.

"I think you are" – i.e. glad to see her father

LEAR  
Regan, I think you are. I know what reason I have to think so. If thou shouldst not be glad, I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, Sepulchring an adult'ress. [To KENT] O are you free? Some other time for that. Beloved Regan, Thy sister's naught. O Regan, she hath tied Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here. [Points to his heart]

"I would ... an adult'ress" – i.e. Lear would not believe that Regan is his own daughter if she were not pleased to see him, and he would declare that her mother's tomb was the burial chamber (sepulcher) of an adulterous woman (i.e. that Regan would be another man's child).

"naught" = worthless

"like a vulture" – Lear may have the myth of Prometheus in mind—a knowledge of which becomes especially relevant when we later study the novel *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux, and which you can look up right now by following this link:

<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Pa-Pr/Prometheus.html>

"quality" = manner

I can scarce speak to thee. Thou'lt not believe With how deprav'd a quality—O Regan!

REGAN  
I pray you, sir, take patience. I have hope You less know how to value her desert Than she to scant her duty.

"I have ... her duty" = I hope it is not you who do not know how to appreciate Goneril's merits ("her desert"), rather than that she should scant (fall short of) her duty

LEAR  
Say, how is that?

"cannot think" = cannot believe

REGAN  
I cannot think my sister in the least Would fail her obligation. If, sir, perchance She have restrain'd the riots of your followers, 'Tis on such ground, and to such wholesome end, As clears her from all blame.

"'Tis on such ground" = it is based on such good reason

"to such wholesome end" = to fulfill such a good purpose

"as clears her" = that it excuses her

LEAR  
My curses on her!

"Nature in you ... her confine" = Your natural life is nearly at its utmost limit (i.e. Lear is near the end of his life). Recall that the image of a man dangerously on the edge of a cliff is important. After all, falling from a great height is nothing if not a significant change of circumstances!

REGAN  
O sir! You are old.  
Nature in you stands on the very verge Of her confine. You should be rul'd and led By some discretion that discerns your state Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you That to our sister you do make return.  
Say you have wrong'd her, sir.

"discretion that ... you yourself" = a thoughtful person who understands your situations better than you understand them on your own

LEAR

Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house.

"Dear daughter, I confess that I am old.

[*Kneeling*] Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg  
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food."

"Do you ... the house" = *Pay attention to how suitable this is to the royal family.* (Lear is speaking sarcastically. He does *not* believe that it "becomes" [is appropriate to] the royal family. He continues his sarcasm in the remainder of this speech—the same sort of sarcasm he applied to Goneril when he pretended not to know her or himself.)

"Age is unnecessary" = *Old people are useless; alternately, Old people do not need much*

"vouchsafe" = *promise; grant*

"raiment" = *clothing*

REGAN

Good sir, no more. These are unsightly tricks.  
Return you to my sister.

"unsightly tricks" = *vulgar ploys.* (Regan reacts to her father's show of sarcasm in the same way that Goneril had reacted to it in the earlier scene.)

LEAR

[*Rising*] Never, Regan.

She hath abated me of half my train,  
Look'd black upon me, struck me with her tongue,  
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart.  
All the stor'd vengeance of heaven fall  
On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,  
You taking airs, with lameness!

"abated" = *deprived*

"All the stor'd ... ingrateful top" = *Let all the retributions of the gods (which they "store up" for just such occasions) be brought down on her ungrateful head*

"young bones" – i.e. the bones of any baby she might bear

"taking" = *infectious; disease-laden*

CORNWALL

Fie, sir, fie!

"Fie" – This word, so frequent in Shakespeare, is an exclamation of contempt, often used in situations where one would say, *Ugh! Don't speak like that!*

LEAR

You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames  
Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,  
You fen-suck'd fogs, drawn by the pow'rful sun,  
To fall and blister her!

"fen-suck'd" = *drawn up from the swamps (fens)*

REGAN

O the blest gods! So will you wish on me  
When the rash mood is on.

"So will ... is on" = *Just the same sort of awful curse will you someday call down on me when you are in a different fit of anger*

**Note, by the way, that the curses Lear pronounces are not given or taken lightly. In the time setting of the play—when people generally would believe in the presence and power of the gods and believe in their responsiveness to human petition—to call down a curse on someone would be the equivalent in our time of making a serious death threat. Goneril and Regan, therefore, would not be likely to react to Lear's curses in a flippant way or dismiss them as the harmless ravings of a toothless lion. They would receive them, rather, with alarm.**

LEAR  
No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse.  
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give  
Thee o'er to harshness. Her eyes are fierce, but thine  
Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee  
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,  
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,  
And in conclusion to oppose the bolt  
Against my coming in. Thou better know'st  
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,  
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.  
Thy half o' th' kingdom hast thou not forgot,  
Wherein I thee endow'd.

"Thy tender-hefted ... to harshness" = *Your tender-hearted personality will not betray you to suffer unkind treatment*

"bandy" = *exchange*

"grudge" = *resent*

"scant my sizes" = *reduce my allowance* (including the number of knights still in his train—which, by the way, as Kent and the Fool's dialogue suggests has already dwindled to nearly nothing)

"oppose the bolt" = *bar the door*

"offices" = *duties*

"Effects of courtesy" = *shows of proper manners*

"dues of gratitude" = *obligations to show thankfulness* (i.e. for the land dowry Lear has bestowed on her)

"endow'd" = *granted; gave as a dowry*

REGAN

Good sir, to the purpose.

"to th' purpose" = *get to the point*

LEAR

Who put my man i' th' stocks?

*Tucket within*

CORNWALL

What trumpet's that?

REGAN

I know't, my sister's. This approves her letter,  
That she would soon be here.

"approves" = *confirms the information in*

*Enter OSWALD*

Is your lady come?

LEAR

This is a slave, whose easy-borrow'd pride  
Dwells in the fickle grace of her he follows.  
Out, varlet, from my sight!

"easy-borrow'd pride" – i.e. Oswald wears his pride (such as it is) like borrowed clothes, for he has done nothing to earn or deserve the pride he affects.

"of her he follows" = *of her, the one he serves*

"fickle grace" = *unstable, unpredictable favors*

"varlet" = *rascal; knave*

CORNWALL

What means your grace?



LEAR

Who stock'd my servant? Regan, I have good hope  
Thou didst not know on't. Who comes here?

*Enter GONERIL*

O heavens,

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway  
Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,  
Make it your cause. Send down and take my part!  
[To GONERIL] Art not asham'd to look upon this  
beard?

O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?

GONERIL

Why not by the hand, sir? How have I offended?  
All's not offence that indiscretion finds  
And dotage terms so.

LEAR

O sides, you are too tough.  
Will you yet hold? How came my man i' th' stocks?

CORNWALL

I set him there, sir. But his own disorders  
Deserv'd much less advancement.

LEAR

You! Did you?

REGAN

I pray you, father, being weak, seem so.  
If, till the expiration of your month,  
You will return and sojourn with my sister,  
Dismissing half your train, come then to me.  
I am now from home and out of that provision  
Which shall be needful for your entertainment.

LEAR

Return to her? And fifty men dismiss'd?  
No, rather I abjure all roofs and choose  
To wage against the enmity o' th' air,  
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl—  
Necessity's sharp pinch! Return with her!  
Why, the hot-blooded France, that dowerless took  
Our youngest born, I could as well be brought  
To kneel his throne and, squire-like, pension beg  
To keep base life afoot. Return with her!  
Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter  
To this detested groom.

*Pointing at OSWALD*

"if your ... obedience" = *if your excellent authority approves of obedience (especially of children to their fathers)*

"take my part" = *support my cause*

"beard" – *as a sign of his age and the respect he deserves*

"All's not ... terms so" = *Not everything that a person who lacks judgment (one of "indiscretion") or is senile (one in his "dotage") calls an offense is actually offensive*

"O sides ... yet hold?" – *i.e. Lear wonders why his chest does not split open to release his swollen heart. Here again is a reference to **Hysterica Passio**.*

"disorders ... less advancement" = *misconduct deserved an even more humiliating punishment (i.e. being merely stocked was practically a promotion compared to what he should have suffered)*

"being weak, seem so" = *given that you are weak, you should behave accordingly (i.e. rather than pretending to be strong)*

"sojourn" = *make your stay*

"from" = *away from*

"out of ... your entertainment" = *without the resources needed to host you properly*

"abjure all roofs" = *refuse ("abjure") to stay under anyone's roof*

"wage" = *fight against*

"enmity" = *hateful persecution*

"enmity o' th' air" = *persecution of the sky (i.e. in the form of harsh weather)*

"wolf and owl" – *symbols of nighttime predators generally*

"hot-blooded France" – *Note that although Gloucester did say the king of France had departed Lear's court in "choler" (angry), this is not necessarily an indication of his being, as a rule, "hot-blooded." Indeed, in his dialogue (in I, i) France is shown to be eminently sensible, a cool-headedly compassionate monarch. That Lear should refer to France as "hot-blooded" reads as a case of projection—that is, of seeing one's own faults in someone else.*

"to kneel" = *to kneel before*

"squire-like, pension beg" = *like a knight's servant, beg what I need ("pension") to stay alive ("base life" = physical life / "afoot" = active)*

"Persuade me ... detested groom" = *You might just as well advise me to be a slave and packhorse for this loathsome servant*

GONERIL

At your choice, sir.

LEAR

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad.  
I will not trouble thee, my child. Farewell.  
We'll no more meet, no more see one another.  
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter—  
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,  
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil!  
A plague-sore! An embossed carbuncle  
In my corrupted blood! —But I'll not chide thee.  
Let shame come when it will. I do not call it.  
I do not bid the thunder bearer shoot,  
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.  
Mend when thou canst. Be better at thy leisure.  
I can be patient. I can stay with Regan,  
I and my hundred knights.

"At your choice" = *as you choose*

"Or rather a disease" – At this point, Lear is overtaken again by his anger, in spite of an attempt shown at the beginning of the speech to be calmly rational.

"plague-sore" = *sore on the skin resulting from an infectious disease ("plague")*

"embossed carbuncle" = *swollen ("embossed") inflamed sores on the skin*

"But I'll not chide thee" – Again, Lear attempts to check his anger. But his rationality will not last long.

"bid the thunder-bearer shoot" = *command Jupiter to fire his thunder bolts (of vengeance)*

"tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove" = *report your crimes to the supreme judge. (Jove is another name for Jupiter, king of the gods in Roman myth; his equivalent in Greek myth is Zeus.)*

"Mend when ... thy leisure" = *Improve your behavior when you are able and in your own time ("at thy leisure")*

"I and my hundred knights" – In his confusion, Lear has forgotten that fifty of his knights have already been dismissed. Nor has he noticed that most of the remaining fifty have drifted away besides.

REGAN

Not altogether so.

I look'd not for you yet, nor am provided  
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister,  
For those that mingle reason with your passion  
Must be content to think you old, and so—  
But she knows what she does.

"look'd not for you" = *did not expect your arrival*

"For those ... you old" = *Because rational people who hear your highly emotional speech would have to conclude that you are old (i.e. with the added implication of being senile)*

LEAR

Is this well spoken?

REGAN

I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers?  
Is it not well? What should you need of more?  
Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger  
Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,  
Should many people, under two commands,  
Hold amity? 'Tis hard. Almost impossible.

"Is this well spoken?" = *Do you really mean this?*

"dare avouch" = *do swear*

"Is it not well?" – i.e. Are fifty not enough?

"sith that ... a number" = *since ("sith") both the expense ("charge") and danger (to us) argue against the idea of our hosting so many*

"under two commands" – i.e. yours and ours

"Hold amity" = *maintain friendship*

GONERIL

Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance  
From those that she calls servants or from mine?

"Why might ... from mine?" = *Why couldn't you, sir, be taken care of by Regan's own servants or mine?*

REGAN  
Why not, my lord? If then they chanc'd to slack ye,  
We could control them. If you will come to me—  
For now I spy a danger—I entreat you  
To bring but five and twenty. To no more  
Will I give place or notice.

"chanc'd to slack ye" = *failed to do their duty properly*

LEAR  
I gave you all—

REGAN  
And in good time you gave it.

Lear and Regan each use the word "gave" with a different sense. Lear means "gave" as *blessed you with*. Regan means it as *relinquished (gave it away)*.

LEAR  
Made you my guardians, my depositaries,  
But kept a reservation to be follow'd  
With such a number. What, must I come to you  
With five and twenty, Regan? Said you so?

"guardians" = *stewards*

"depositaries" = *trustees*

"reservation" = *saving clause (in a legal agreement, a detail noting an exception)*

REGAN  
And speak't again, my lord. No more with me.

LEAR  
Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favor'd,  
When others are more wicked. Not being the worst  
Stands in some rank of praise. [To GONERIL] I'll go  
with thee.  
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,  
And thou art twice her love.

"Those wicked ... more wicked" = *Wicked people can seem somewhat attractive when compared to people who are even more wicked*

"thou art twice her love" = *you show two times the amount of love she shows. Lear is still thinking of love in terms of a thing that can be measured and portioned out as though it were, for example, money or property—which is, of course, the foolish misconception that sparked his catastrophe in the first place.*

GONERIL  
Hear me, my lord.  
What need you five and twenty, ten, or five,  
To follow in a house where twice so many  
Have a command to tend you?

"follow" = *be your servants*

Note that Goneril and Regan's paring down of the number of knights—Goneril's fifty to twenty-five to twenty to ten to five, then to Regan's zero—is a dramatic use of the reduction-to-nothing motif.

REGAN  
What need one?

LEAR  
O reason not the need! Our basest beggars  
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.  
Allow not nature more than nature needs,  
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.  
If only to go warm were gorgeous.  
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,  
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need—  
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!  
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,  
As full of grief as age, wretched in both!  
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts  
Against their father, fool me not so much  
To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger,  
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,  
Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,  
I will have such revenges on you both  
That all the world shall—I will do such things!—  
What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be  
The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep  
No, I'll not weep.  
I have full cause of weeping,

*Storm heard at a distance*

but this heart  
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,  
Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!

*Exeunt LEAR, GLOUCESTER, KENT, and FOOL*

"reason not" = *do not argue about*

"Are in ... thing superfluous" = *have something, however slight, that is more than absolutely essential*

"Allow not ... as beast's" = *If you allow a person no more than his animal needs, then you make him no more than an animal*

"If only ... thee warm" = *If simply being warm were enough to be considered beautiful ("gorgeous"), you wouldn't need these fashionable clothes because they don't really keep you warm*

**Note that references to clothing are also motivic in *King Lear*: clothing as symbolic of the protections generally that people need in a world of predators; clothing as symbolic of the various deceptions that people practice on each other; and clothing as symbolic of the merely temporary, alarmingly changeable nature of human life. We have already seen uses of the motif—in the Fool's coxcomb and motley, in Kent's attacks on Oswald's manner of dressing and his saying that Oswald was made by a tailor, in Edgar's abandoning of his nobleman's garments—and we will see more in dialogue to follow.**

"for true need" = *as for true need. Lear is about to explain the differences between real need and fashionable decoration, but he breaks off in order to pray for what he most needs now—which is patience—and which we can see as his pleading again with the gods to "keep [him] in temper," to keep him sane, for he is even more terrified now than he was before of going genuinely mad.*

"fool me not" = *do not make such a fool of me*

"tamely" = *meekly*

"full cause of" = *ample reason for*

**Note the introduction of the storm, now starting to rise off-stage—said by many readers to be the most famous storm in all of English literature. It stands as a metaphor of tensions increasing in the characters' circumstances generally, but is more pointedly a manifestation of the storm in Lear's mind.**

"flaws" = *fragments*

CORNWALL  
Let us withdraw 'Twill be a storm.

REGAN  
This house is little. The old man and's people  
Cannot be well bestow'd.

GONERIL  
'Tis his own blame. Hath put himself from rest,  
And must needs taste his folly.

REGAN  
For his particular, I'll receive him gladly,  
But not one follower.

GONERIL  
So am I purpos'd.  
Where is my lord of Gloucester?

"bestow'd" = *accommodated*

"blame" = *fault*

"Hath put himself from rest" = *He is responsible for his own upset*

"must needs taste his folly" = *needs to learn the consequence of his own foolishness*

"For his particular" = *as for himself alone*

"So am I purpos'd" = *My intention is the same*

CORNWALL  
Follow'd the old man forth. He is return'd.

*Re-enter GLOUCESTER*

GLOUCESTER  
The king is in high rage.

CORNWALL  
Whither is he going?

"Whither" = *where*

GLOUCESTER  
He calls to horse but will I know not whither.

"He calls ... not whither" = *He is calling for his horses, but I do not know where he wants to go*

CORNWALL  
'Tis best to give him way. He leads himself.

"give him way" = *let him go*

"leads himself" = *insists on having his own way*

GONERIL  
My lord, entreat him by no means to stay.

GLOUCESTER  
Alack, the night comes on, and the bleak winds  
Do sorely ruffle. For many miles about  
There's scarce a bush.

"do sorely ruffle" = *grow strong*

REGAN  
O sir, to willful men,  
The injuries that they themselves procure  
Must be their schoolmasters. Shut up your doors.  
He is attended with a desperate train.  
And what they may incense him to, being apt  
To have his ear abus'd, wisdom bids fear.

"to willful ... schoolmasters" = *headstrong people have to learn lessons from their own errors*

"attended with a desperate train" – Regan seems to think that Lear's knights are still with him. But the entire "train" is probably no more than Kent and the Fool.

"incense" = *provoke*

"being apt ... ear abus'd" = *since he's willing to listen to any lies*

"wisdom bids fear" = *common sense advises us to worry about (for our own sakes)*

CORNWALL  
Shut up your doors, my lord. 'Tis a wild night.  
My Regan counsels well. Come out o' th' storm.

"Shut up your doors, my lord" – Despite his concern for Lear, Gloucester must obey his overlord.

*Exeunt*