

## Act IV, Scene iii

### The French camp near Dover

Enter KENT and GENTLEMAN

KENT

Why the King of France is so suddenly gone back know you the reason?

GENTLEMAN

Something he left imperfect in the state, which since his coming forth is thought of, which imports to the kingdom so much fear and danger that his personal return was most requir'd and necessary.

"Something he ... thought of" = *he left some state business unfinished, and he has remembered this since he has been away*

"imports" = *threatens*

KENT

Who hath he left behind him general?

"general" – i.e. as *the general* (military commander)

GENTLEMAN

The Marshal of France, Monsieur La Far.

"your letters" – The Gentleman seems to have given Kent's "just report."

"pierce the queen" = *move Cordelia*

KENT

Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?

GENTLEMAN

Ay, sir, she took them, read them in my presence. And now and then an ample tear trill'd down Her delicate cheek. It seem'd she was a queen Over her passion, who, most rebel-like, Sought to be king o'er her.

"trill'd" = *trickled*

"passion" = *emotion*

**Note that, in the description of her response to news of her father, Cordelia behaves according to the ideal that Lear has fallen short of. Where his passion, like a traitor to the throne in the kingdom of his body, has risen up and usurped control, Cordelia quells her passion and keeps reason enthroned.**

KENT

O then it mov'd her.

GENTLEMAN

Not to a rage. Patience and sorrow strove Who should express her goodliest. You have seen Sunshine and rain at once. Her smiles and tears Were like a better way. Those happy smilets That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to know What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence, As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief, Sorrow would be a rarity most below'd If all could so become it.

"Patience and sorrow ... her goodliest" = *self-control and pity struggled to see which would make her seem more lovely.* (The Gentleman does not know whether to wonder more at her self-control or her capacity for compassion.)

**Cordelia's simultaneous "smiles and tears," appearing in the form of what we might call a sun-shower (the weather phenomenon of "sunshine and rain at once"), makes for a striking variation on the inversion motif, for in the image of Cordelia in the same moment happy and sad, we see contrasting states not just reversed but actually fused into a single state, which makes it then a paradoxical state.**

"smilets" = *little smiles*

"which parted thence" – i.e. her tears departed from there ("thence")

"As pearls from diamonds dropp'd" – i.e. Cordelia's eyes shone like diamonds, and her flowing tears resembled trickling pearls.

"If all ... become it" = *if it made everyone so lovely*

KENT  
Made she no verbal question?

"Made she no verbal question?" = *Did she not say anything?*

GENTLEMAN  
Faith, once or twice she heav'd the name of "Father"  
Pantingly forth, as if it press'd her heart,  
Cried "Sisters! Sisters! Shame of ladies! Sisters!  
Kent! Father! Sisters! What, i' the storm? I' the night?  
Let pity not believe it!" There she shook  
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,  
And clamor moisten'd. Then away she started  
To deal with grief alone.

"Faith" = *in faith; yes, indeed*

"press'd" = *weighed heavily on*

"And clamor moisten'd" – The meaning here is somewhat obscure. The general sense of the line seems to be that Cordelia's exclamations of pity and outrage were drowned in her tears.

"The holy water from her heavenly eyes" – Recall that Edgar has been identified as a Christ figure. And note that he is not the only one. Cordelia is one too. And in this line is a strong suggestion of that, for her tears are called "holy water," and her eyes are not merely lovely. They are "heavenly." Another strong touch to the idea of Cordelia as Christ figure appears in an allusion in the next scene.

KENT  
It is the stars,  
The stars above us, govern our conditions.  
Else one self mate and make could not beget  
Such different issues. You spoke not with her since?

"conditions" = *characters*

"Else one ... different issues" = *otherwise the same wife and husband could not produce such different children (i.e. Cordelia is much different from Goneril and Regan)*

GENTLEMAN  
No.

KENT  
Was this before the king return'd?

GENTLEMAN  
No, since.

KENT  
Well, sir, the poor distress'd Lear's i' th' town,  
Who sometime, in his better tune, remembers  
What we are come about, and by no means  
Will yield to see his daughter.

"sometime" = *sometimes*

"better tune" = *more lucid moments (i.e. when he seems to be less insane)*

GENTLEMAN  
Why, good sir?

KENT  
A sovereign shame so elbows him. His own unkindness,  
That stripp'd her from his benediction, turn'd her  
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights  
To his dog-hearted daughters, these things sting  
His mind so venomously that burning shame  
Detains him from Cordelia.

"sovereign" = *overwhelming*

"elbows him" = *holds him back*

"benediction" = *blessing*

"turn'd her / To foreign casualties" = *turned her over to take her chances in a strange land*

"dog-hearted" = *pitiless*

GENTLEMAN  
Alack, poor gentleman!

KENT  
Of Albany's and Cornwall's powers you heard not?

"powers" = *armies*


GENTLEMAN  
'Tis so. They are afoot.

"afoot" = *on the march*

KENT

Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master Lear,  
And leave you to attend him. Some dear cause  
Will in concealment wrap me up awhile.  
When I am known aright, you shall not grieve  
Lending me this acquaintance. I pray you, go  
Along with me.

*Exeunt*



"Some dear ... up awhile" = *There is a good reason for me to stay disguised for a time. (Though we are never told what Kent's "cause" might be.)*

"aright" = *rightly; for who I really am*

"you shall ... this acquaintance" = *you won't regret having befriended me*