

## Act IV, Scene vii

**A tent in the French camp. LEAR on a bed asleep. Soft music playing. Gentleman and others attending**

*Enter CORDELIA, KENT, and DOCTOR*

CORDELIA

O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work  
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short  
And every measure fail me.

"And every measure fail me" = *Every length to which I go (to thank you) will be insufficient*

KENT

To be acknowledg'd, madam, is o'erpaid.  
All my reports go with the modest truth,  
No more nor clipp'd but so.

"To be ... is o'erpaid" = *Just being recognized by you is more than enough reward*

"All my ... but so" = *Everything I have told you is the simple truth, nothing added and nothing taken away ("clipp'd"), only what is*

CORDELIA

Be better suited.

These weeds are memories of those worser hours.  
I prithee, put them off.

"suited" = *dressed*. (Kent still wears the garments he has been wearing as Lear's servant.)

"weeds" = *clothes*

"memories" = *reminders*

KENT

Pardon me, dear madam.

Yet to be known shortens my made intent.  
My boon I make it that you know me not  
Till time and I think meet.

"shortens my made intent" = *interferes with the plan I have made*. (Though, again, we do not later discover just what his "intent" is for remaining disguised.)

"boon" = *request*

"that you know me not" = *that you do not reveal that you know my identity*

"meet" = *appropriate*

CORDELIA

Then be't so, my good lord. [*To the DOCTOR*] How  
does the king?

DOCTOR

Madam, sleeps still.

**The two half-lines "Madam, sleeps still" and "O you kind gods" indicate that pauses—which help to increase dramatic tension—are to be taken after each utterance.**

CORDELIA

O you kind gods,  
Cure this great breach in his abused nature!  
Th' untun'd and jarring senses, O wind up  
Of this child-changed father!

"breach" = *break; rupture*

"untun'd" = *out of pitch; unharmonious*

"wind up / Of" = *put in tune* (as by tightening [winding up] the strings of, say, a lute or guitar)

"child-changed" = *changed back to a child or changed by children*

DOCTOR

So please your majesty  
That we may wake the king. He hath slept long.

"So please your majesty" = *if it pleases your majesty*. (Cordelia is addressed as "her majesty" because she is the Queen of France.)

CORDELIA

Be govern'd by your knowledge and proceed  
I' th' sway of your own will. Is he array'd?

"I' th' sway" = *according to*

"Is he arrayed?" = *Is he dressed?*

*Enter LEAR in a chair carried by servants*

GENTLEMAN

Ay, madam. In the heaviness of sleep  
We put fresh garments on him.

"In the heaviness of sleep" = *while he was fast asleep*

DOCTOR

Be by, good madam, when we do awake him.  
I doubt not of his temperance.

"temperance" = *sanity*

CORDELIA

Very well.

*Music*

DOCTOR

Please you, draw near. Louder the music there!

CORDELIA

O my dear father! Restoration hang  
Thy med'cine on my lips, and let this kiss  
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters  
Have in thy reverence made!

"Restoration hang / Thy med'cine on my lips" = *may my lips carry the medicine that will heal you*

"in thy reverence made" = *made to your reverend (respected) self*

KENT

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA

Had you not been their father, these white flakes  
Had challeng'd pity of them. Was this a face  
To be oppos'd against the warring winds?  
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?  
In the most terrible and nimble stroke  
Of quick, cross lightning? To watch—poor *perdu*!—  
With this thin helm? Mine enemy's dog,  
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night  
Against my fire. And wast thou fain, poor father,  
To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn  
In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!  
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once  
Had not concluded all. He wakes. Speak to him.

"Had you not" = *even if you had not*

"these white flakes" = *this thin white hair*

"Had challeng'd pity of them" = *should have claimed pity from them*

"deep dread-bolted thunder" = *loud noise of dreaded thunderbolts*

"cross" = *forked*

"perdu" = *lonely sentry and perhaps lost soul*

"helm" = *helmet (i.e. his head)*

"Against" = *in front of*

"wast thou fain" = *were you forced*

"rogues forlorn" = *outcast vagabonds*

"short and musty straw" = *stale straw spread thin for animal litter*

"concluded all" = *given up altogether*

DOCTOR  
Madam, do you. 'Tis fittest.

"do you" = *you speak to him*

CORDELIA  
How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

LEAR  
You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave.  
Thou art a soul in bliss. But I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like moulten lead.

"You do ... th' grave" = *You hurt me by bringing me back to life*

"bliss" – i.e. heavenly bliss (for he believes she is a spirit)

"wheel of fire" – one of the torments of the damned in medieval representations of hell

"that" = *so that*

"moulten lead" – i.e. lead so hot that it is in liquid form

CORDELIA  
Sir, do you know me?

LEAR  
You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?

CORDELIA  
Still, still far wide!

"far wide" = *wandering in his mind*

DOCTOR  
He's scarce awake. Let him alone awhile.

LEAR  
Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?  
I am mightily abus'd. I should e'en die with pity  
To see another thus. I know not what to say.  
I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see.  
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd  
Of my condition!

"e'en" = *even; almost*

"To see another thus" = *to see someone else in a condition like mine*

"Would" = *I wish*

CORDELIA  
O look upon me, sir,  
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.  
No, sir, you must not kneel.

"benediction" = *blessing*

LEAR  
Pray, do not mock me.  
I am a very foolish fond old man,  
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less,  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.  
Methinks I should know you and know this man,  
Yet I am doubtful, for I am mainly ignorant  
What place this is, and all the skill I have  
Remembers not these garments, nor I know not  
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,  
For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia.

"fond" = *doting* (i.e. in one's dotage—failing mental strength associated with growing old)

"Fourscore and upward" = *eighty or more years old*. (Strictly speaking, the qualifying phrase "not an hour more nor less" does not make sense, given that Lear says his age is *something* [how much?] above 80.)

"deal plainly" = *to tell the truth*. **Here is another half-line. Note again, a half-line suggests that a pause is to be taken after the utterance. In this case, Lear may be pausing to work up, as it were, the courage to confess that he is "not in [his] perfect mind."** As well, the pause following the phrase "deal plainly" gives the audience a moment to register an important detail—namely, that Lear certainly seems to have absorbed something of Kent's virtue of "plain speaking," of presenting oneself honestly to others—without flattery, without treachery.

"mainly" = *entirely*

"these garments" – The fact that Lear is wearing "fresh garments" suggests symbolically the transformation he has undergone as a result of his suffering and forced foray into madness. Often in performance, the new garments will be white, which suggests purification and blankness—conditions associated with newborns.

CORDELIA  
And so I am. I am.

"I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia" – This moment is comparable to the breaking of a fever, the moment when a sickness appears to be abating.

LEAR

Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.  
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.  
I know you do not love me. For your sisters  
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.  
You have some cause. They have not.

CORDELIA

No cause, no cause.

LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

In your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR

Do not abuse me.

"abuse" = *deceive*

DOCTOR

Be comforted, good madam. The great rage,  
You see, is kill'd in him. And yet it is danger  
To make him even o'er the time he has lost.  
Desire him to go in. Trouble him no more  
Till further settling.

"rage" = *delirium; madness*

"even o'er" = *try to remember; piece together*

"Till further settling" = *until he is calmer*

CORDELIA

Will't please your highness walk?

LEAR

You must bear with me.  
Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.

*Exeunt all but KENT and GENTLEMAN*

GENTLEMAN

Holds it true, sir, that the Duke of Cornwall was so  
slain?

"Holds it true" = *is it still believed*

KENT

Most certain, sir.

"conductor" = *leader*

GENTLEMAN

Who is conductor of his people?

KENT

As 'tis said, the bastard son of Gloucester.

GENTLEMAN

They say Edgar, his banish'd son, is with the Earl of  
Kent in Germany.

KENT  
Report is changeable. 'Tis time to look about. The  
powers of the kingdom approach apace.

"Report is changeable" = *There are varying reports*

"powers" = *armies*

"apace" = *swiftly*

GENTLEMAN  
The arbitrement is like to be bloody. Fare you well, sir.

"arbitrement is like to be" = *final settlement is likely to be*

*Exit*

KENT  
My point and period will be thoroughly wrought,  
Or well or ill, as this day's battle's fought.

"my point and period" = *my last full stop (i.e. the completion of his life's work)*

"thoroughly wrought" = *thoroughly finished*

"Or well or ill" = *either for good or for bad*

*Exit*