

The Winter's Tale

2.3

Enter Leontes

LEONTES

Nor night nor day, no rest! It is but weakness
To bear the matter thus, mere weakness. If
The cause were not in being part o'th' cause,
She, th'adulteress; for the harlot King
Is quite beyond mine arm, out of the blank 5
And level of my brain, plot-proof; but she
I can hook to me. Say that she were gone,
Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest
Might come to me again. Who's there?

Enter a Servant

SERVANT

My lord.

LEONTES

How does the boy?

SERVANT

He took good rest tonight. 10

'Tis hoped his sickness is discharged.

LEONTES

To see his nobleness!

Conceiving the dishonour of his mother
He straight declined, drooped, took it deeply,
Fastened and fixed the shame on't in himself; 15
Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,
And downright languished. Leave me solely. Go,
See how he fares.

Exit Servant

Fie, fie, no thought of him.

The very thought of my revenges that way
Recoil upon me. In himself too mighty, 20
And in his parties, his alliance. Let him be
Until a time may serve. For present vengeance,
Take it on her. Camillo and Polixenes
Laugh at me, make their pastime at my sorrow.
They should not laugh if I could reach them, nor 25
Shall she, within my power.

*Enter Paulina, carrying a babe, with Antigonus,
Lords, and the Servant, trying to restrain her*

A LORD You must not enter.

PAULINA

Nay rather, good my lords, be second to me.
Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas,
Than the Queen's life?±±a gracious, innocent soul,
More free than he is jealous.

ANTIGONUS

That's enough.

30

SERVANT

Madam, he hath not slept tonight, commanded
None should come at him.

PAULINA

Not so hot, good sir.

I come to bring him sleep. 'Tis such as you,
That creep like shadows by him, and do sigh
At each his needless heavings, such as you
Nourish the cause of his awaking. I
Do come with words as medicinal as true,
Honest as either, to purge him of that humour
That presses him from sleep.

35

LEONTES

What noise there, ho?

PAULINA

No noise, my lord, but needful conference
About some gossips for your highness.

40

LEONTES

How?

Away with that audacious lady! Antigonus,
I charged thee that she should not come about me.
I knew she would.

ANTIGONUS I told her so, my lord,

On your displeasure's peril and on mine,
She should not visit you.

45

LEONTES

What, canst not rule her?

PAULINA

From all dishonesty he can. In this,
Unless he take the course that you have done±±
Commit me for committing honour±±trust it,
He shall not rule me.

ANTIGONUS

La you now, you hear.

50

When she will take the rein I let her run,
But she'll not stumble.

PAULINA (to Leontes) Good my liege, I come±±

And I beseech you hear me, who professes

Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
Your most obedient counsellor; yet that dares 55
Less appear so in comforting your evils
Than such as most seem yours±±I say, I come
From your good queen.

LEONTES Good queen?

PAULINA

Good queen, my lord, good queen, I say good queen, 60
And would by combat make her good, so were I
A man, the worst about you.

LEONTES (to Lords) Force her hence.

PAULINA

Let him that makes but trifles of his eyes
First hand me. On mine own accord, I'll off.
But first I'll do my errand. The good Queen±± 65
For she is good±±hath brought you forth a daughter±±
Here 'tis±±commends it to your blessing.
She lays down the babe

LEONTES

Out!

A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o'door±±
A most intelligencing bawd.

PAULINA

Not so.

I am as ignorant in that as you 70
In so entitling me, and no less honest
Than you are mad, which is enough, I'll warrant,
As this world goes, to pass for honest.

LEONTES (to Lords)

Traitors,

Will you not push her out?

(To Antigonus)

Give her the bastard.

Thou dotard, thou art woman-tired, unroosted 75
By thy Dame Partlet here. Take up the bastard,
Take't up, I say. Give't to thy crone.

PAULINA (to Antigonus)

For ever

Unvenerable be thy hands if thou
Tak'st up the princess by that forceÁd baseness
Which he has put upon't.

LEONTES

He dreads his wife.

80

PAULINA

So I would you did. Then 'twere past all doubt

You'd call your children yours.

LEONTES

A nest of traitors.

ANTIGONUS

I am none, by this good light.

PAULINA

Nor I, nor any

But one that's here, and that's himself, for he

The sacred honour of himself, his queen's,

85

His hopeful son's, his babe's, betrays to slander,

Whose sting is sharper than the sword's; and will

not±±

For as the case now stands, it is a curse

He cannot be compelled to't±±once remove

The root of his opinion, which is rotten

90

As ever oak or stone was sound.

LEONTES (*to Lords*) A callat

Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband,

And now baits me! This brat is none of mine.

It is the issue of Polixenes.

Hence with it, and together with the dam

95

Commit them to the fire.

PAULINA

It is yours,

And might we lay th'old proverb to your charge,

So like you 'tis the worse. Behold, my lords,

Although the print be little, the whole matter

And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,

100

The trick of's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,

The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,

The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.

And thou good goddess Nature, which hast made it

So like to him that got it, if thou hast

105

The ordering of the mind too, 'mongst all colours

No yellow in't, lest she suspect, as he does,

Her children not her husband's.

LEONTES (*to Antigonus*) A gross hag!±±

And lozel, thou art worthy to be hanged,

That wilt not stay her tongue.

ANTIGONUS

Hang all the husbands

110

That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself

Hardly one subject.

LEONTES

Once more, take her hence.

PAULINA

A most unworthy and unnatural lord
Can do no more.

LEONTES I'll ha' thee burnt.

PAULINA

I care not.

It is an heretic that makes the fire, 115
Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen±±
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hinged fancy±±something
savours

Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you, 120
Yea, scandalous to the world.

LEONTES (*to Antigonus*) On your allegiance,
Out of the chamber with her! Were I a tyrant,
Where were her life? She durst not call me so
If she did know me one. Away with her!

PAULINA

I pray you do not push me, I'll be gone. 125
Look to your babe, my lord; 'tis yours. Jove send her
A better guiding spirit. What needs these hands?
You that are thus so tender o'er his follies
Will never do him good, not one of you.
So, so. Farewell, we are gone. 130

Exit

LEONTES (*to Antigonus*)

Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to this.
My child? Away with't! Even thou, that hast
A heart so tender o'er it, take it hence
And see it instantly consumed with fire.
Even thou, and none but thou. Take it up straight. 135
Within this hour bring me word 'tis done,
And by good testimony, or I'll seize thy life,
With what thou else call'st thine. If thou refuse
And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so.
The bastard brains with these my proper hands 140
Shall I dash out. Go, take it to the fire;
For thou set'st on thy wife.

ANTIGONUS

I did not, sir.

These lords, my noble fellows, if they please

Can clear me in't.

LORDS We can. My royal liege,
He is not guilty of her coming hither. 145

LEONTES You're liars all.

A LORD
Beseech your highness, give us better credit.
We have always truly served you, and beseech
So to esteem of us. And on our knees we beg,
As recompense of our dear services 150
Past and to come, that you do change this purpose
Which, being so horrible, so bloody, must
Lead on to some foul issue. We all kneel.

LEONTES
I am a feather for each wind that blows.
Shall I live on, to see this bastard kneel 155
And call me father? Better burn it now
Than curse it then. But be it. Let it live.
It shall not neither.
(To Antigonus) You, sir, come you hither,
You that have been so tenderly officious
With Lady Margery your midwife there, 160
To save this bastard's life±±for 'tis a bastard,
So sure as this beard's grey. What will you adventure
To save this brat's life?

ANTIGONUS Anything, my lord,
That my ability may undergo,
And nobleness impose. At least thus much, 165
I'll pawn the little blood which I have left
To save the innocent; anything possible.

LEONTES
It shall be possible. Swear by this sword
Thou wilt perform my bidding.

ANTIGONUS I will, my lord.

LEONTES
Mark, and perform it. Seest thou? For the fail 170
Of any point in't shall not only be
Death to thyself but to thy lewd-tongued wife,
Whom for this time we pardon. We enjoin thee,
As thou art liegeman to us, that thou carry
This female bastard hence, and that thou bear it 175

To some remote and desert place, quite out
Of our dominions; and that there thou leave it,
Without more mercy, to it own protection
And favour of the climate. As by strange fortune
It came to us, I do in justice charge thee, 180
On thy soul's peril and thy body's torture,
That thou commend it strangely to some place
Where chance may nurse or end it. Take it up.

ANTIGONUS

I swear to do this, though a present death
Had been more merciful. Come on, poor babe, 185
Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses. Wolves and bears, they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity. Sir, be prosperous
In more than this deed does require; *(to the babe)* and
blessing 190
Against this cruelty, fight on thy side,
Poor thing, condemned to loss.
Exit with the babe

LEONTES

No, I'll not rear

Another's issue.

Enter a Servant

SERVANT

Please your highness, posts

From those you sent to th'oracle are come
An hour since. Cleomenes and Dion, 195
Being well arrived from Delphos, are both landed,
Hasting to th' court.

A LORD *(to Leontes)* So please you, sir, their speed
Hath been beyond account.

LEONTES

Twenty-three days

They have been absent. 'Tis good speed, foretells
The great Apollo suddenly will have 200
The truth of this appear. Prepare you, lords.
Summon a session, that we may arraign
Our most disloyal lady; for as she hath
Been publicly accused, so shall she have
A just and open trial. While she lives 205
My heart will be a burden to me. Leave me,
And think upon my bidding.

Exeunt severally