

# The Winter's Tale

## 2.1

*Enter Hermione, Mamillius, and Ladies*

**HERMIONE**

Take the boy to you. He so troubles me  
'Tis past enduring.

**FIRST LADY** Come, my gracious lord,  
Shall I be your play-fellow?

**MAMILLIUS** No, I'll none of you.

**FIRST LADY** Why, my sweet lord? 5

**MAMILLIUS**

You'll kiss me hard, and speak to me as if  
I were a baby still. *(To Second Lady)* I love you better.

**SECOND LADY**

And why so, my lord?

**MAMILLIUS** Not for because  
Your brows are blacker±±yet black brows they say  
Become some women best, so that there be not 10  
Too much hair there, but in a semicircle,  
Or a half-moon made with a pen.

**SECOND LADY** Who taught 'this?

**MAMILLIUS**

I learned it out of women's faces. Pray now,  
What colour are your eyebrows?

**FIRST LADY** Blue, my lord.

**MAMILLIUS**

Nay, that's a mock. I have seen a lady's nose 15  
That has been blue, but not her eyebrows.

**FIRST LADY** Hark ye,

The Queen your mother rounds apace. We shall  
Present our services to a fine new prince  
One of these days, and then you'd wanton with us,  
If we would have you.

**SECOND LADY** She is spread of late 20  
Into a goodly bulk, good time encounter her.

**HERMIONE**

What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come sir, now  
I am for you again. Pray you sit by us,  
And tell's a tale.

MAMILLIUS Merry or sad shall't be? 25

HERMIONE As merry as you will.

MAMILLIUS  
A sad tale's best for winter. I have one  
Of sprites and goblins.

HERMIONE Let's have that, good sir.  
Come on, sit down, come on, and do your best  
To fright me with your sprites. You're powerful at it. 30

MAMILLIUS  
There was a man±±

HERMIONE Nay, come sit down, then on.

MAMILLIUS *(sitting)*  
Dwelt by a churchyard.±±I will tell it softly,  
Yon crickets shall not hear it.

HERMIONE  
Come on then, and give't me in mine ear.  
*Enter apart Leontes, Antigonus, and Lords*

LEONTES  
Was he met there? His train? Camillo with him? 35

A LORD  
Behind the tuft of pines I met them. Never  
Saw I men scour so on their way. I eyed them  
Even to their ships.

LEONTES How blest am I  
In my just censure, in my true opinion!  
Alack, for lesser knowledge±±how accursed 40  
In being so blest! There may be in the cup  
A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,  
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
Is not infected; but if one present  
Th'abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known 45  
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,  
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.  
Camillo was his help in this, his pander.  
There is a plot against my life, my crown.  
All's true that is mistrusted. That false villain 50  
Whom I employed was pre-employed by him.  
He has discovered my design, and I  
Remain a pinched thing, yea, a very trick  
For them to play at will. How came the posterns

So easily open?

**A LORD** By his great authority, 55  
Which often hath no less prevailed than so  
On your command.

**LEONTES** I know't too well.  
(To Hermione) Give me the boy. I am glad you did not  
nurse him.  
Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you  
Have too much blood in him.

**HERMIONE** What is this? Sport? 60

**LEONTES** (to a Lord)  
Bear the boy hence. He shall not come about her.  
Away with him, and let her sport herself  
With that she's big with, (to Hermione) for 'tis  
Polixenes  
Has made thee swell thus.  
*Exit one with Mamillius*

**HERMIONE** But I'd say he had not,  
And I'll be sworn you would believe my saying, 65  
Howe'er you lean to th' nayward.

**LEONTES** You, my lords,  
Look on her, mark her well. Be but about  
To say she is a goodly lady, and  
The justice of your hearts will thereto add  
'Tis pity she's not honest, honourable.' 70  
Praise her but for this her without-door form±±  
Which on my faith deserves high speech±±and  
straight  
The shrug, the 'hum' or 'ha', these petty brands  
That calumny doth use±±O, I am out,  
That mercy does, for calumny will sear 75  
Virtue itself±±these shrugs, these 'hum's' and 'ha's',  
When you have said she's goodly, come between  
Ere you can say she's honest. But be't known  
From him that has most cause to grieve it should be,  
She's an adultress.

**HERMIONE** Should a villain say so, 80  
The most replenished villain in the world,  
He were as much more villain. You, my lord,  
Do but mistake.

**LEONTES** You have mistook, my lady±±  
 Polixenes for Leontes. O, thou thing,  
 Which I'll not call a creature of thy place 85  
 Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,  
 Should a like language use to all degrees,  
 And mannerly distinguishment leave out  
 Betwixt the prince and beggar. I have said  
 She's an adultress, I have said with whom. 90  
 More, she's a traitor, and Camillo is  
 A federary with her, and one that knows  
 What she should shame to know herself,  
 But with her most vile principal: that she's  
 A bed-swerver, even as bad as those 95  
 That vulgars give bold'st titles; ay, and privy  
 To this their late escape.

**HERMIONE** No, by my life,  
 Privy to none of this. How will this grieve you  
 When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that  
 You thus have published me? Gentle my lord, 100  
 You scarce can right me thoroughly then to say  
 You did mistake.

**LEONTES** No. If I mistake  
 In those foundations which I build upon,  
 The centre is not big enough to bear  
 A schoolboy's top.±±Away with her to prison! 105  
 He who shall speak for her is afar-off guilty,  
 But that he speaks.

**HERMIONE** There's some ill planet reigns.  
 I must be patient till the heavens look  
 With an aspect more favourable. Good my lords,  
 I am not prone to weeping, as our sex 110  
 Commonly are; the want of which vain dew  
 Perchance shall dry your pities. But I have  
 That honourable grief lodged here which burns  
 Worse than tears drown. Beseech you all, my lords,  
 With thoughts so qualified as your charities 115  
 Shall best instruct you, measure me; and so  
 The King's will be performed.

**LEONTES** Shall I be heard?

**HERMIONE**

Who is't that goes with me? Beseech your highness  
My women may be with me, for you see  
My plight requires it.±±Do not weep, good fools, 120  
There is no cause. When you shall know your  
mistress

Has deserved prison, then abound in tears  
As I come out. This action I now go on  
Is for my better grace.±±Adieu, my lord.  
I never wished to see you sorry; now 125  
I trust I shall. My women, come, you have leave.

**LEONTES** Go, do our bidding. Hence!  
*Exit Hermione, guarded, with Ladies*

**A LORD**  
Beseech your highness, call the Queen again.

**ANTIGONUS** *(to Leontes)*  
Be certain what you do, sir, lest your justice  
Prove violence, in the which three great ones suffer±± 130  
Yourself, your queen, your son.

**A LORD** *(to Leontes)* For her, my lord,  
I dare my life lay down, and will do't, sir,  
Please you t'accept it, that the Queen is spotless  
I'th' eyes of heaven and to you±±I mean  
In this which you accuse her.

**ANTIGONUS** *(to Leontes)* If it prove 135  
She's otherwise, I'll keep my stables where  
I lodge my wife, I'll go in couples with her;  
Than when I feel and see her, no farther trust her.  
For every inch of woman in the world,  
Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false 140  
If she be.

**LEONTES** Hold your peaces.

**A LORD** Good my lord±±

**ANTIGONUS** *(to Leontes)*  
It is for you we speak, not for ourselves.  
You are abused, and by some putter-on  
That will be damned for't. Would I knew the villain±±  
I would land-damn him. Be she honour-flawed±± 145  
I have three daughters: the eldest is eleven;  
The second and the third nine and some five;  
If this prove true, they'll pay for't. By mine honour,

I'll geld 'em all. Fourteen they shall not see,  
To bring false generations. They are co-heirs, 150  
And I had rather glib myself than they  
Should not produce fair issue.

**LEONTES** Cease, no more!  
You smell this business with a sense as cold  
As is a dead man's nose. But I do see't and feel't  
As you feel doing thus; and see withal 155  
The instruments that feel.

**ANTIGONUS** If it be so,  
We need no grave to bury honesty;  
There's not a grain of it the face to sweeten  
Of the whole dungy earth.

**LEONTES** What? Lack I credit?  
**A LORD**

I had rather you did lack than I, my lord, 160  
Upon this ground; and more it would content me  
To have her honour true than your suspicion,  
Be blamed for't how you might.

**LEONTES** Why, what need we  
Commune with you of this, but rather follow  
Our forceful instigation? Our prerogative 165  
Calls not your counsels, but our natural goodness  
Imparts this; which, if you±±or stupefied  
Or seeming so in skill±±cannot or will not  
Relish a truth like us, inform yourselves  
We need no more of your advice. The matter, 170  
The loss, the gain, the ord'ring on't, is all  
Properly ours.

**ANTIGONUS** And I wish, my liege,  
You had only in your silent judgement tried it  
Without more overture.

**LEONTES** How could that be?  
Either thou art most ignorant by age 175  
Or thou wert born a fool. Camillo's flight  
Added to their familiarity,  
Which was as gross as ever touched conjecture  
That lacked sight only, naught for approbation  
But only seeing, all other circumstances 180  
Made up to th' deed±±doth push on this proceeding.

Yet for a greater confirmation±±  
For in an act of this importance 'twere  
Most piteous to be wild±±I have dispatched in post  
To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple, 185  
Cleomenes and Dion, whom you know  
Of stuffed sufficiency. Now from the oracle  
They will bring all, whose spiritual counsel had  
Shall stop or spur me. Have I done well?

**A LORD** Well done, my lord. 190

**LEONTES**

Though I am satisfied, and need no more  
Than what I know, yet shall the oracle  
Give rest to th' minds of others such as he,  
Whose ignorant credulity will not  
Come up to th' truth. So have we thought it good 195  
From our free person she should be confined,  
Lest that the treachery of the two fled hence  
Be left her to perform. Come, follow us.  
We are to speak in public; for this business  
Will raise us all.

**ANTIGONUS** (*aside*) To laughter, as I take it, 200  
If the good truth were known.

*Exeunt*