

The Winter's Tale

1.2

*Enter Leontes, Hermione, Mamillius, Polixenes, and
[Camillo]*

POLIXENES

Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
Without a burden. Time as long again
Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks,
And yet we should for perpetuity 5
Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher,
Yet standing in rich place, I multiply
With one 'We thank you' many thousands more
That go before it.

LEONTES Stay your thanks a while,
And pay them when you part.

POLIXENES Sir, that's tomorrow. 10
I am questioned by my fears of what may chance
Or breed upon our absence, that may blow
No sneaping winds at home to make us say
'This is put forth too truly.' Besides, I have stayed
To tire your royalty.

LEONTES We are tougher, brother, 15
Than you can put us to't.

POLIXENES No longer stay.

LEONTES
One sennight longer.

POLIXENES Very sooth, tomorrow.

LEONTES
We'll part the time between's, then; and in that
I'll no gainsaying.

POLIXENES Press me not, beseech you, so. 20
There is no tongue that moves, none, none i'th' world
So soon as yours, could win me. So it should now,
Were there necessity in your request, although
'Twere needful I denied it. My affairs
Do even drag me homeward; which to hinder
Were, in your love, a whip to me; my stay 25

To you a charge and trouble. To save both,
Farewell, our brother.

LEONTES Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you.

HERMIONE

I had thought, sir, to have held my peace until
You had drawn oaths from him not to stay. You, sir,
Charge him too coldly. Tell him you are sure 30
All in Bohemia's well. This satisfaction
The bygone day proclaimed. Say this to him,
He's beat from his best ward.

LEONTES Well said, Hermione!

HERMIONE

To tell he longs to see his son were strong.
But let him say so then, and let him go. 35
But let him swear so and he shall not stay,
We'll thwack him hence with distaffs.
(*To Polixenes*) Yet of your royal presence I'll adventure
The borrow of a week. When at Bohemia
You take my lord, I'll give him my commission 40
To let him there a month behind the gest
Prefixed for's parting.±±Yet, good deed, Leontes,
I love thee not a jar o'th' clock behind
What lady she her lord.±±You'll stay?

POLIXENES No,
madam.

HERMIONE Nay, but you will? 45

POLIXENES I may not, verily.

HERMIONE Verily?

You put me off with limber vows. But I,
Though you would seek t'unsphere the stars with
oaths,
Should yet say `Sir, no going.' Verily 50
You shall not go. A lady's `verily' 's
As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?
Force me to keep you as a prisoner,
Not like a guest: so you shall pay your fees
When you depart, and save your thanks. How say
you? 55
My prisoner? or my guest? By your dread `verily',
One of them you shall be.

POLIXENES Your guest then, madam.
 To be your prisoner should import offending,
 Which is for me less easy to commit
 Than you to punish.

HERMIONE Not your jailer then, 60
 But your kind hostess. Come, I'll question you
 Of my lord's tricks and yours when you were boys.
 You were pretty lordings then?

POLIXENES We were, fair Queen,
 Two lads that thought there was no more behind
 But such a day tomorrow as today, 65
 And to be boy eternal.

HERMIONE Was not my lord
 The verier wag o'th' two?

POLIXENES
 We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun,
 And bleat the one at th'other. What we changed 70
 Was innocence for innocence. We knew not
 The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
 That any did. Had we pursued that life,
 And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared
 With stronger blood, we should have answered
 heaven 75
 Boldly, 'Not guilty', the imposition cleared
 Hereditary ours.

HERMIONE By this we gather
 You have tripped since.

POLIXENES O my most sacred lady,
 Temptations have since then been born to's; for
 In those unfledged days was my wife a girl. 80
 Your precious self had then not crossed the eyes
 Of my young playfellow.

HERMIONE Grace to boot!
 Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
 Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on.
 Th'offences we have made you do we'll answer, 85
 If you first sinned with us, and that with us
 You did continue fault, and that you slipped not
 With any but with us.

LEONTES Is he won yet?

HERMIONE

He'll stay, my lord.

LEONTES

At my request he would not.

Hermione, my dearest, thou never spok'st

90

To better purpose.

HERMIONE

Never?

LEONTES

Never but once.

HERMIONE

What, have I twice said well? When was't before?

I prithee tell me. Cram's with praise, and make's

As fat as tame things. One good deed dying tongueless

Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.

95

Our praises are our wages. You may ride's

With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere

With spur we heat an acre. But to th' goal.

My last good deed was to entreat his stay.

What was my first? It has an elder sister,

100

Or I mistake you. O, would her name were Grace!

But once before I spoke to th' purpose? When?

Nay, let me have't. I long.

LEONTES

Why, that was when

Three crabbeÁd months had soured themselves to death

Ere I could make thee open thy white hand

105

And clap thyself my love. Then didst thou utter,

'I am yours for ever.'

HERMIONE

'Tis grace indeed.

Why lo you now; I have spoke to th' purpose twice.

The one for ever earned a royal husband;

Th'other, for some while a friend.

[She gives her hand to Polixenes.]

They stand aside

LEONTES *(aside)*

Too hot, too hot: 110

To mingle friendship farre is mingling bloods.

I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances,

But not for joy, not joy. This entertainment

May a free face put on, derive a liberty

From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,

115

And well become the agent. 'T may, I grant.

But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,

As now they are, and making practised smiles

As in a looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
The mort o'th' deer±±O, that is entertainment 120
My bosom likes not, nor my brows.±±Mamillius,
Art thou my boy?

MAMILLIUS Ay, my good lord.

LEONTES I'fecks,
Why, that's my bawcock. What? Hast smutched thy
nose?

They say it is a copy out of mine. Come, captain,
We must be neat±±not neat, but cleanly, captain. 125
And yet the steer, the heifer, and the calf
Are all called neat.±±Still virginalling
Upon his palm?±±How now, you wanton calf±±
Art thou my calf?

MAMILLIUS Yes, if you will, my lord.

LEONTES
Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have, 130
To be full like me. Yet they say we are
Almost as like as eggs. Women say so,
That will say anything. But were they false
As o'er-dyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false
As dice are to be wished by one that fixes 135
No bourn 'twixt his and mine, yet were it true
To say this boy were like me. Come, sir page,
Look on me with your welkin eye. Sweet villain,
Most dear'st, my collop! Can thy dam±±may't be?±±
Affection, thy intention stabs the centre. 140
Thou dost make possible things not so held,
Communicat'st with dreams±±how can this be?±±
With what's unreal thou coactive art,
And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent
Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost±± 145
And that beyond commission; and I find it±±
And that to the infection of my brains
And hard'ning of my brows.

POLIXENES What means Sicilia?

HERMIONE
He something seems unsettled.

POLIXENES How, my lord!

LEONTES

What cheer? How is't with you, best brother?

HERMIONE

You

look 150

As if you held a brow of much distraction.
Are you moved, my lord?

LEONTES

No, in good earnest.

How sometimes nature will betray its folly,
Its tenderness, and make itself a pastime
To harder bosoms! Looking on the lines 155
Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched,
In my green velvet coat; my dagger muzzled,
Lest it should bite its master, and so prove,
As ornament oft does, too dangerous. 160
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman.±±Mine honest friend,
Will you take eggs for money?

MAMILLIUS

No, my lord, I'll fight.

LEONTES

You will? Why, happy man be's dole!±±My brother,
Are you so fond of your young prince as we 165
Do seem to be of ours?

POLIXENES

If at home, sir,

He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter;
Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;
My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all.
He makes a July's day short as December, 170
And with his varying childness cures in me
Thoughts that would thicken my blood.

LEONTES

So stands this squire

Officed with me. We two will walk, my lord,
And leave you to your graver steps. Hermione,
How thou lov'st us show in our brother's welcome. 175
Let what is dear in Sicily be cheap.
Next to thyself and my young rover, he's
Apparent to my heart.

HERMIONE

If you would seek us,

We are yours i'th' garden. Shall's attend you there?

LEONTES

To your own bents dispose you. You'll be found, 180

Be you beneath the sky. (*Aside*) I am angling now,
Though you perceive me not how I give line.

Go to, go to!

How she holds up the neb, the bill to him,

And arms her with the boldness of a wife

185

To her allowing husband!

Exeunt Polixenes and Hermione

Gone already.

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked

one!±±

Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I

Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue

Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour

190

Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been,

Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now,

And many a man there is, even at this present,

Now, while I speak this, holds his wife by th'arm,

That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence, 195

And his pond fished by his next neighbour, by

Sir Smile, his neighbour. Nay, there's comfort in't,

Whiles other men have gates, and those gates opened,

As mine, against their will. Should all despair

That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind

200

Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none.

It is a bawdy planet, that will strike

Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful. Think it:

From east, west, north, and south, be it concluded,

No barricado for a belly. Know't,

205

It will let in and out the enemy

With bag and baggage. Many thousand on's

Have the disease and feel't not.±±How now, boy?

MAMILLIUS

I am like you, they say.

LEONTES

Why, that's some comfort.

What, Camillo there!

CAMILLO [*coming forward*]

Ay, my good lord.

210

LEONTES

Go play, Mamillius, thou'rt an honest man.

Exit Mamillius

Camillo, this great sir will yet stay longer.

CAMILLO

You had much ado to make his anchor hold.
When you cast out, it still came home.

LEONTES

Didst note it?

CAMILLO

He would not stay at your petitions, made 215
His business more material.

LEONTES

Didst perceive it?

(*Aside*) They're here with me already, whisp'ring,
rounding,

`Sicilia is a so-forth'. 'Tis far gone
When I shall gust it last.±±How came't, Camillo,
That he did stay?

CAMILLO

At the good Queen's entreaty. 220

LEONTES

`At the Queen's' be't. `Good' should be pertinent,
But so it is, it is not. Was this taken
By any understanding pate but thine?
For thy conceit is soaking, will draw in
More than the common blocks. Not noted, is't, 225
But of the finer natures? By some severals
Of head-piece extraordinary? Lower messes
Perchance are to this business purblind? Say.

CAMILLO

Business, my lord? I think most understand
Bohemia stays here longer. 230

LEONTES Ha?

CAMILLO Stays here longer.

LEONTES Ay, but why?

CAMILLO

To satisfy your highness, and the entreaties
Of our most gracious mistress.

LEONTES

Satisfy?

235

Th'entreaties of your mistress? Satisfy?
Let that suffice. I have trusted thee, Camillo,
With all the near'st things to my heart, as well
My chamber-counsels, wherein, priest-like, thou
Hast cleansed my bosom, I from thee departed 240
Thy penitent reformed. But we have been
Deceived in thy integrity, deceived

In that which seems so.

CAMILLO Be it forbid, my lord.

LEONTES

To bide upon't: thou art not honest; or
If thou inclin'st that way, thou art a coward, 245
Which hoxes honesty behind, restraining
From course required. Or else thou must be counted
A servant grafted in my serious trust
And therein negligent, or else a fool
That seest a game played home, the rich stake drawn, 250
And tak'st it all for jest.

CAMILLO My gracious lord,
I may be negligent, foolish, and fearful.
In every one of these no man is free,
But that his negligence, his folly, fear,
Among the infinite doings of the world 255
Sometime puts forth. In your affairs, my lord,
If ever I were wilful-negligent,
It was my folly. If industriously
I played the fool, it was my negligence,
Not weighing well the end. If ever fearful 260
To do a thing where I the issue doubted,
Whereof the execution did cry out
Against the non-performance, 'twas a fear
Which oft infects the wisest. These, my lord,
Are such allowed infirmities that honesty 265
Is never free of. But beseech your grace
Be plainer with me, let me know my trespass
By its own visage. If I then deny it,
'Tis none of mine.

LEONTES Ha' not you seen, Camillo±±
But that's past doubt; you have, or your eye-glass 270
Is thicker than a cuckold's horn±±or heard±±
For, to a vision so apparent, rumour
Cannot be mute±±or thought±±for cogitation
Resides not in that man that does not think±±
My wife is slippery? If thou wilt confess±± 275
Or else be impudently negative
To have nor eyes, nor ears, nor thought±±then say
My wife's a hobby-horse, deserves a name

As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
Before her troth-plight. Say't, and justify't. 280

CAMILLO

I would not be a stander-by to hear
My sovereign mistress clouded so without
My present vengeance taken. 'Shrew my heart,
You never spoke what did become you less
Than this, which to reiterate were sin 285
As deep as that, though true.

LEONTES

Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh?±±a note infallible
Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot? 290
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift,
Hours minutes, noon midnight? And all eyes
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing, 295
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings
If this be nothing.

CAMILLO

Good my lord, be cured

Of this diseased opinion, and betimes,
For 'tis most dangerous.

LEONTES

Say it be, 'tis true. 300

CAMILLO

No, no, my lord.

LEONTES

It is. You lie, you lie.

I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee,
Pronounce thee a gross lout, a mindless slave,
Or else a hovering temporizer, that
Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil, 305
Inclining to them both. Were my wife's liver
Infected as her life, she would not live
The running of one glass.

CAMILLO

Who does infect her?

LEONTES

Why, he that wears her like her medal, hanging
About his neck, Bohemia, who, if I 310

Had servants true about me, that bare eyes
To see alike mine honour as their profits,
Their own particular thrifts, they would do that
Which should undo more doing. Ay, and thou
His cupbearer, whom I from meaner form 315
Have benched, and reared to worship, who mayst see
Plainly as heaven sees earth and earth sees heaven,
How I am galled, mightst bespice a cup
To give mine enemy a lasting wink,
Which draught to me were cordial.

CAMILLO Sir, my lord, 320
I could do this, and that with no rash potion,
But with a ling'ring dram, that should not work
Maliciously, like poison. But I cannot
Believe this crack to be in my dread mistress,
So sovereignly being honourable. 325
I have loved thee±±

LEONTES Make that thy question, and go rot!
Dost think I am so muddy, so unsettled,
To appoint myself in this vexation?
Sully the purity and whiteness of my sheets±±
Which to preserve is sleep, which being spotted 330
Is goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps±±
Give scandal to the blood o'th' prince, my son±±
Who I do think is mine, and love as mine±±
Without ripe moving to't? Would I do this?
Could man so blench?

CAMILLO I must believe you, sir. 335
I do, and will fetch off Bohemia for't,
Provided that when he's removed your highness
Will take again your queen as yours at first,
Even for your son's sake, and thereby for sealing
The injury of tongues in courts and kingdoms 340
Known and allied to yours.

LEONTES Thou dost advise me
Even so as I mine own course have set down.
I'll give no blemish to her honour, none.

CAMILLO
My lord, go then, and with a countenance as clear
As friendship wears at feasts, keep with Bohemia 345

And with your queen. I am his cupbearer.
If from me he have wholesome beverage,
Account me not your servant.

LEONTES This is all.
Do't, and thou hast the one half of my heart;
Do't not, thou splitt'st thine own.

CAMILLO I'll do't, my lord. 350

LEONTES
I will seem friendly, as thou hast advised me.

Exit

CAMILLO
O miserable lady. But for me,
What case stand I in? I must be the poisoner
Of good Polixenes, and my ground to do't
Is the obedience to a master±±one 355
Who in rebellion with himself, will have
All that are his so too. To do this deed,
Promotion follows. If I could find example
Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
And flourished after, I'd not do't. But since 360
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment bears not one,
Let villainy itself forswear't. I must
Forsake the court. To do't, or no, is certain
To me a break-neck.

Enter Polixenes

Happy star reign now!

Here comes Bohemia.

POLIXENES (*aside*) This is strange. Methinks 365
My favour here begins to warp. Not speak?±±
Good day, Camillo.

CAMILLO Hail, most royal sir.

POLIXENES
What is the news i'th' court?

CAMILLO None rare, my lord.

POLIXENES
The King hath on him such a countenance
As he had lost some province, and a region 370
Loved as he loves himself. Even now I met him
With customary compliment, when he,
Wafting his eyes to th' contrary, and falling

A lip of much contempt, speeds from me, and
So leaves me to consider what is breeding 375
That changes thus his manners.

CAMILLO I dare not know, my lord.

POLIXENES

How, `dare not'? Do not? Do you know, and dare not?
Be intelligent to me. 'Tis thereabouts.
For to yourself what you do know you must,
And cannot say you `dare not'. Good Camillo, 380
Your changed complexions are to me a mirror
Which shows me mine changed, too; for I must be
A party in this alteration, finding
Myself thus altered with't.

CAMILLO There is a sickness
Which puts some of us in distemper, but 385
I cannot name th' disease, and it is caught
Of you that yet are well.

POLIXENES How caught of me?
Make me not sighted like the basilisk.
I have looked on thousands who have sped the better
By my regard, but killed none so. Camillo, 390
As you are certainly a gentleman, thereto
Clerk-like experienced, which no less adorns
Our gentry than our parents' noble names,
In whose success we are gentle: I beseech you,
If you know aught which does behove my knowledge 395
Thereof to be informed, imprison't not
In ignorant concealment.

CAMILLO I may not answer.

POLIXENES

A sickness caught of me, and yet I well?
I must be answered. Dost thou hear, Camillo,
I conjure thee, by all the parts of man 400
Which honour does acknowledge, whereof the least
Is not this suit of mine, that thou declare
What incidency thou dost guess of harm
Is creeping toward me; how far off, how near,
Which way to be prevented, if to be; 405
If not, how best to bear it.

CAMILLO Sir, I will tell you,

Since I am charged in honour, and by him
That I think honourable. Therefore mark my counsel,
Which must be e'en as swiftly followed as
I mean to utter it; or both yourself and me 410
Cry lost, and so good night!

POLIXENES On, good Camillo.

CAMILLO

I am appointed him to murder you.

POLIXENES

By whom, Camillo?

CAMILLO By the King.

POLIXENES For what?

CAMILLO

He thinks, nay, with all confidence he swears
As he had seen't, or been an instrument 415
To vice you to't, that you have touched his queen
Forbiddenly.

POLIXENES O, then my best blood turn
To an infected jelly, and my name
Be yoked with his that did betray the Best!
Turn then my freshest reputation to 420
A savour that may strike the dullest nostril
Where I arrive, and my approach be shunned,
Nay hated, too, worse than the great'st infection
That e'er was heard or read.

CAMILLO Swear his thought over

By each particular star in heaven, and 425
By all their influences, you may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the moon
As or by oath remove or counsel shake
The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
Is piled upon his faith, and will continue 430
The standing of his body.

POLIXENES How should this grow?

CAMILLO

I know not, but I am sure 'tis safer to
Avoid what's grown than question how 'tis born.
If therefore you dare trust my honesty,
That lies encloseÁd in this trunk which you 435
Shall bear along impawned, away tonight!

Your followers I will whisper to the business,
And will by twos and threes at several posterns
Clear them o'th' city. For myself, I'll put
My fortunes to your service, which are here 440
By this discovery lost. Be not uncertain,
For by the honour of my parents, I
Have uttered truth; which if you seek to prove,
I dare not stand by; nor shall you be safer
Than one condemn'd by the King's own mouth, 445
Thereon his execution sworn.

POLIXENES I do believe thee,
I saw his heart in's face. Give me thy hand.
Be pilot to me, and thy places shall
Still neighbour mine. My ships are ready, and
My people did expect my hence departure 450
Two days ago. This jealousy
Is for a precious creature. As she's rare
Must it be great; and as his person's mighty
Must it be violent; and as he does conceive
He is dishonoured by a man which ever 455
Professed to him, why, his revenges must
In that be made more bitter. Fear o'ershades me.
Good expedition be my friend and comfort
The gracious Queen, part of his theme, but nothing
Of his ill-ta'en suspicion. Come, Camillo, 460
I will respect thee as a father if
Thou bear'st my life off hence. Let us avoid.

CAMILLO
It is in mine authority to command
The keys of all the posterns. Please your highness
To take the urgent hour. Come, sir, away. 465
Exeunt