

# The Winter's Tale

## 3.2

*Enter Leontes, Lords, and Officers*

**LEONTES**

This sessions, to our great grief we pronounce,  
Even pushes 'gainst our heart: the party tried  
The daughter of a king, our wife, and one  
Of us too much beloved. Let us be cleared  
Of being tyrannous since we so openly 5  
Proceed in justice, which shall have due course  
Even to the guilt or the purgation.  
Produce the prisoner.

**OFFICER**

It is his highness' pleasure  
That the Queen appear in person here in court.  
*Enter Hermione guarded, with Paulina and Ladies*  
Silence. 10

**LEONTES** Read the indictment.

**OFFICER** *(reads)* Hermione, queen to the worthy Leontes,  
King of Sicilia, thou art here accused and arraigned of  
high treason in committing adultery with Polixenes,  
King of Bohemia, and conspiring with Camillo to take 15  
away the life of our sovereign lord the King, thy royal  
husband; the pretence whereof being by circumstances  
partly laid open, thou, Hermione, contrary to the faith  
and allegiance of a true subject, didst counsel and aid  
them for their better safety to fly away by night. 20

**HERMIONE**

Since what I am to say must be but that  
Which contradicts my accusation, and  
The testimony on my part no other  
But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me  
To say 'Not guilty'. Mine integrity 25  
Being counted falsehood shall, as I express it,  
Be so received. But thus: if powers divine  
Behold our human actions±±as they do±±  
I doubt not then but innocence shall make  
False accusation blush, and tyranny 30  
Tremble at patience. You, my lord, best know±±

Who least will seem to do so±±my past life  
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true  
As I am now unhappy; which is more  
Than history can pattern, though devised 35  
And played to take spectators. For behold me,  
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe  
A moiety of the throne; a great king's daughter,  
The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing  
To prate and talk for life and honour, fore 40  
Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it  
As I weigh grief, which I would spare. For honour,  
'Tis a derivative from me to mine,  
And only that I stand for. I appeal  
To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes 45  
Came to your court how I was in your grace,  
How merited to be so; since he came,  
With what encounter so uncurrent I  
Have strained t'appear thus. If one jot beyond  
The bound of honour, or in act or will 50  
That way inclining, hardened be the hearts  
Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin  
Cry 'Fie' upon my grave.

**LEONTES** I ne'er heard yet  
That any of these bolder vices wanted  
Less impudence to gainsay what they did 55  
Than to perform it first.

**HERMIONE** That's true enough,  
Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me.

**LEONTES**  
You will not own it.

**HERMIONE** More than mistress of  
Which comes to me in name of fault, I must not  
At all acknowledge. For Polixenes, 60  
With whom I am accused, I do confess  
I loved him as in honour he required;  
With such a kind of love as might become  
A lady like me; with a love, even such,  
So, and no other, as yourself commanded; 65  
Which not to have done I think had been in me  
Both disobedience and ingratitude

To you and toward your friend, whose love had spoke  
Even since it could speak, from an infant, freely  
That it was yours. Now for conspiracy, 70  
I know not how it tastes, though it be dished  
For me to try how. All I know of it  
Is that Camillo was an honest man;  
And why he left your court, the gods themselves,  
Wotting no more than I, are ignorant. 75

**LEONTES**

You knew of his departure, as you know  
What you have underta'en to do in's absence.

**HERMIONE** Sir,

You speak a language that I understand not.  
My life stands in the level of your dreams, 80  
Which I'll lay down.

**LEONTES** Your actions are my `dreams'.

You had a bastard by Polixenes,  
And I but dreamed it. As you were past all shame±±  
Those of your fact are so±±so past all truth;  
Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as 85  
Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,  
No father owning it±±which is indeed  
More criminal in thee than it±±so thou  
Shalt feel our justice, in whose easiest passage  
Look for no less than death.

**HERMIONE** Sir, spare your threats. 90

The bug which you would fright me with, I seek.  
To me can life be no commodity.  
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,  
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone  
But know not how it went. My second joy, 95  
And first fruits of my body, from his presence  
I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,  
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,  
The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,  
Haled out to murder; myself on every post 100  
Proclaimed a strumpet, with immodest hatred  
The childbed privilege denied, which 'longs  
To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried  
Here, to this place, i'th' open air, before

I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege, 105  
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,  
That I should fear to die. Therefore proceed.  
But yet hear this±±mistake me not±±no life,  
I prize it not a straw; but for mine honour,  
Which I would free: if I shall be condemned 110  
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else  
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you  
'Tis rigour, and not law. Your honours all,  
I do refer me to the oracle.  
Apollo be my judge.

**A LORD** This your request 115  
Is altogether just. Therefore bring forth,  
And in Apollo's name, his oracle.

*[Exeunt certain Officers]*

**HERMIONE**  
The Emperor of Russia was my father.  
O that he were alive, and here beholding  
His daughter's trial; that he did but see 120  
The flatness of my misery±±yet with eyes  
Of pity, not revenge.

*[Enter Officers with Cleomenes and Dion]*

**OFFICER**  
You here shall swear upon this sword of justice  
That you, Cleomenes and Dion, have  
Been both at Delphos, and from thence have brought 125  
This sealed-up oracle, by the hand delivered  
Of great Apollo's priest; and that since then  
You have not dared to break the holy seal,  
Nor read the secrets in't.

**CLEOMENES AND DION** All this we swear. 130

**LEONTES** Break up the seals, and read.

**OFFICER** *(reads)* Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless,  
Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his  
innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live  
without an heir if that which is lost be not found. 135

**LORDS**

Now blesseÁd be the great Apollo!

**HERMIONE** Praised!

**LEONTES** Hast thou read truth?

**OFFICER**

Ay, my lord, even so as it is here set down.

**LEONTES**

There is no truth at all i'th' oracle.

The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood. 140

*Enter a Servant*

**SERVANT**

My lord the King! The King!

**LEONTES**

What is the business?

**SERVANT**

O sir, I shall be hated to report it.

The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear

Of the Queen's speed, is gone.

**LEONTES**

How, 'gone'?

**SERVANT**

Is dead.

**LEONTES**

Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves

145

Do strike at my injustice.

*Hermione falls to the ground*

How now there?

**PAULINA**

This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down

And see what death is doing.

**LEONTES**

Take her hence.

Her heart is but o'ercharged. She will recover.

I have too much believed mine own suspicion.

150

Beseech you, tenderly apply to her

Some remedies for life.

*Exeunt Paulina and Ladies, carrying Hermione*

Apollo, pardon

My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle.

I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,

New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo,

155

Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy;

For being transported by my jealousies

To bloody thoughts and to revenge, I chose

Camillo for the minister to poison

My friend Polixenes, which had been done,

160

But that the good mind of Camillo tardied

My swift command. Though I with death and with

Reward did threaten and encourage him,

Not doing it, and being done, he, most humane  
And filled with honour, to my kingly guest 165  
Unclassed my practice, quit his fortunes here±±  
Which you knew great±±and to the certain hazard  
Of all incertainties himself commended,  
No richer than his honour. How he glisters  
Through my rust! And how his piety 170  
Does my deeds make the blacker!

*Enter Paulina*

**PAULINA** Woe the while!  
O cut my lace, lest my heart, cracking it,  
Break too.

**A LORD** What fit is this, good lady?

**PAULINA** *(to Leontes)*

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?  
What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying, boiling 175  
In leads or oils? What old or newer torture  
Must I receive, whose every word deserves  
To taste of thy most worst? Thy tyranny,  
Together working with thy jealousies±±  
Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle 180  
For girls of nine±±O think what they have done,  
And then run mad indeed, stark mad, for all  
Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it.  
That thou betrayed'st Polixenes, 'twas nothing.  
That did but show thee, of a fool, inconstant, 185  
And damnable ingrateful. Nor was't much  
Thou wouldst have poisoned good Camillo's honour  
To have him kill a king±±poor trespasses,  
More monstrous standing by, whereof I reckon  
The casting forth to crows thy baby daughter 190  
To be or none or little, though a devil  
Would have shed water out of fire ere done't.  
Nor is't directly laid to thee the death  
Of the young prince, whose honourable thoughts±±  
Thoughts high for one so tender±±cleft the heart 195  
That could conceive a gross and foolish sire  
Blemished his gracious dam. This is not, no,  
Laid to thy answer. But the last±±O lords,  
When I have said, cry woe! The Queen, the Queen,

The sweet'st, dear'st creature's dead, and vengeance  
for't 200

Not dropped down yet.

**A LORD** The higher powers forbid!

**PAULINA**

I say she's dead. I'll swear't. If word nor oath  
Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring  
Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,  
Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you 205  
As I would do the gods. But O thou tyrant,  
Do not repent these things, for they are heavier  
Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee  
To nothing but despair. A thousand knees,  
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting, 210  
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter  
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods  
To look that way thou wert.

**LEONTES** Go on, go on.

Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved  
All tongues to talk their bitt'rest.

**A LORD** (*to Paulina*) Say no more. 215

Howe'er the business goes, you have made fault  
I'th' boldness of your speech.

**PAULINA** I am sorry for't.

All faults I make, when I shall come to know them  
I do repent. Alas, I have showed too much  
The rashness of a woman. He is touched 220  
To th' noble heart. What's gone and what's past help  
Should be past grief.

(*To Leontes*) Do not receive affliction  
At my petition. I beseech you, rather  
Let me be punished, that have minded you  
Of what you should forget. Now, good my liege, 225  
Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman.

The love I bore your queen±±lo, fool again!  
I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children.  
I'll not remember you of my own lord,  
Who is lost too. Take your patience to you, 230  
And I'll say nothing.

**LEONTES** Thou didst speak but well

When most the truth, which I receive much better  
Than to be pitied of thee. Prithee bring me  
To the dead bodies of my queen and son.  
One grave shall be for both. Upon them shall 235  
The causes of their death appear, unto  
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit  
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there  
Shall be my recreation. So long as nature  
Will bear up with this exercise, so long 240  
I daily vow to use it. Come, and lead me  
To these sorrows.

*Exeunt*