

IV. Questions 27 to 37 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from the play *The Winter's Tale*.

from THE WINTER'S TALE, Act II, scene i

**CHARACTERS:**

LEONTES—King of Sicilia  
 HERMIONE—wife of Leontes  
 LADIES—attendants to the Queen  
 LORDS—attendants to the King  
 POLIXENES—King of Bohemia and long-time friend of Leontes  
 MAMILLIUS—young son of Hermione and Leontes

*For nearly a year, LEONTES and HERMIONE have been hosts to POLIXENES. HERMIONE is about to give birth to her second child. LEONTES has misinterpreted his wife's graciousness as a hostess to POLIXENES as infidelity. In a fit of jealous rage, he ordered his councillor, CAMILLO, to poison POLIXENES. Instead, CAMILLO warned POLIXENES to return to Bohemia and then escaped with him. As this scene begins, LEONTES and his attendants enter a room in the palace where HERMIONE and her LADIES have been playing with MAMILLIUS. LEONTES questions his attendants on the whereabouts of POLIXENES.*

**LEONTES:** Was he met there? his train?<sup>1</sup> Camillo with him?

**FIRST LORD:** Behind the tuft of pines I met them; never  
 Saw I men scour so on their way. I ey'd  
 Them even to their ships.

5 **LEONTES:** How blest am I  
 In my just censure, in my true opinion!  
 Alack, for lesser knowledge! How accurs'd  
 Is being so blest! There may be in the cup  
 A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,  
 10 And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
 Is not infected; but if one present  
 Th' abhorr'd ingredient to his eye, make known  
 How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,  
 With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.  
 15 Camillo was his help in this, his pander.  
 There is a plot against my life, my crown.

*Continued*

<sup>1</sup>train—entourage, party of attendants

All's true that is mistrusted. That false villain  
Whom I employ'd was pre-employ'd by him.  
He has discover'd my design, and I  
20 Remain a pinch'd thing; yea, a very trick  
For them to play at will. How came the posterns<sup>2</sup>  
So easily open?

**FIRST LORD:** By his great authority;  
Which often hath no less prevail'd than so  
25 On your command.

**LEONTES:** I know't too well.  
Give me the boy.<sup>3</sup> I am glad you did not nurse him.  
Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you  
Have too much blood in him.

30 **HERMIONE:** What is this? Sport?

**LEONTES:** Bear the boy hence; he shall not come about her.  
Away with him! and let her sport herself  
With that she's big with; for 'tis Polixenes  
Has made thee swell thus.

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

**LEONTES:** You, my lords,  
Look on her, mark her well; be but about  
40 To say she is a goodly lady, and  
The justice of your hearts will thereto add  
'Tis pity she's not honest,<sup>4</sup> honorable.  
Praise her but for this her without-door<sup>5</sup> form,  
Which on my faith deserves high speech, and straight  
45 The shrug, the hum or haw, these petty brands  
That calumny<sup>6</sup> doth use—O, I am out—  
That mercy does, for calumny will sear  
Virtue itself; these shrugs, these hums and haws  
When you have said she's goodly, come between  
50 Ere you can say she's honest: but be't known,

*Continued*

<sup>2</sup>posterns—palace gates

<sup>3</sup>the boy—Mamillius. Leontes is speaking to Hermione

<sup>4</sup>honest—chaste

<sup>5</sup>without-door—outward

<sup>6</sup>calumny—slander

From him that has most cause to grieve it should be,  
She's an adultress.

**HERMIONE:** Should a villain say so,  
The most replenish'd villain in the world,  
55 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,<sup>7</sup>  
60 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;  
65 More, she's a traitor, and Camillo is  
A [fedary] with her, and one that knows  
What she should shame to know herself  
But with her most vile principal, that she's  
A bed-swerger, even as bad as those  
70 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  
75 You thus have publish'd me! Gentle, my lord,  
You scarce can right me throughly then to say  
You did mistake.

**LEONTES:** No; if I mistake  
In those foundations which I build upon,  
80 The centre<sup>8</sup> is not big enough to bear  
A school-boy's top. Away with her, to prison!  
He who shall speak for her is afar off guilty  
But that he speaks.

**HERMIONE:** There's some ill planet reigns;  
85 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

*Continued*

<sup>7</sup>Which I'll not call a creature of thy place—a term I'll not apply to one of your rank  
<sup>8</sup>centre—earth

Commonly are, the want of which vain dew  
Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have  
90 That honourable grief lodg'd here which burns  
Worse than tears drown. Beseech you all, my lords,  
With thoughts so qualified as your charities  
Shall best instruct you, measure me; and so  
The King's will be perform'd!

95 **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;  
There is no cause. When you shall know your mistress  
100 Has deserv'd 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 wish'd to see you sorry; now  
I trust I shall. My women, come; you have leave.

105 **LEONTES:** Go, do our bidding; hence!

*[Exit QUEEN guarded, with ladies]*

*William Shakespeare*