

VI. Questions 42 to 51 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from the play *The Winter's Tale*.

from THE WINTER'S TALE, Act III, scene ii

CHARACTERS:

LEONTES—King of Sicilia
 HERMIONE—Queen of Sicilia and Leontes' wife
 POLIXENES—King of Bohemia and a childhood friend of Leontes
 CAMILLO—Sicilian lord and close advisor to Leontes
 CLEOMENES } messengers to King Leontes
 DION }
 PAULINA—chief attendant to Queen Hermione
 Attendant LORDS and OFFICERS

POLIXENES *had recently been a guest of LEONTES and HERMIONE. In a fit of jealous rage, LEONTES imprisoned HERMIONE on grounds of adultery with POLIXENES and of conspiracy with CAMILLO. CAMILLO, horrified by LEONTES' order to poison POLIXENES, helped POLIXENES flee to Sicilia. LEONTES forbade HERMIONE to see their young son, and the baby she gave birth to in prison was taken far away. LEONTES has sent messengers to the oracle at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi to learn the truth of HERMIONE'S guilt and is awaiting their return. He has ordered HERMIONE before him, and she responds to his charges . . .*

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 boot¹ me
 5 To say "Not guilty." Mine integrity
 Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it,
 Be so receiv'd. But thus:—If powers divine
 Behold our human actions, as they do,
 I doubt not then but innocence shall make
 10 False accusation blush, and tyranny
 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
 15 Than history can pattern, though devis'd
 And play'd to take spectators. For behold me,
 A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
 A moiety² of the throne, a great king's daughter,

Continued

¹boot—aid, help, advantage

²moiety—half

20 The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
 To prate and talk for life and honour 'fore
 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
 25 To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
 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 strain'd t'appear thus; if one jot beyond
 30 The bound of honour, or in act or will
 That way inclining, hard'ned 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
 35 That any of these bolder vices wanted
 Less impudence to gainsay³ what they did
 Than to perform it first.
HERMIONE: That's true enough;
 Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me.
 40 **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,
 With whom I am accus'd, I do confess
 45 I lov'd him as in honour he requir'd,
 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;
 Which not t'have done I think had been in me
 50 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,
 I know not how it tastes, though it be dish'd
 55 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,
 Wotting⁴ no more than I, are ignorant.
LEONTES: You knew of his departure, as you know
 60 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,

Continued

³gainsay—deny, dispute, speak against

⁴Wotting—knowing

Which I'll lay down.

65 **LEONTES:** Your actions are my dreams;
 You had a bastard by Polixenes,
 And I but dream'd 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
 70 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.

75 **HERMIONE:** Sir, spare your threats.
 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,
 80 But know not how it went. My second joy
 And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
 I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort,
 Starr'd most unluckily, is from my breast,
 The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
 85 Hal'd out to murder; myself on every post
 Proclaim'd a strumpet; with immodest hatred
 The child-bed privilege⁵ deni'd, which longs
 To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
 Here to this place, i' th' open air, before
 90 I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
 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,
 95 Which I would free,—if I shall be condemn'd
 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:
 100 Apollo be my judge!

FIRST LORD: This your request
 Is altogether just; therefore bring forth,
 And in Apollo's name, his oracle.

(Enter OFFICERS, with CLEOMENES and DION.)

Continued

⁵child-bed privilege—Hermione was denied attendants at the birth of her infant in prison

105 **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
 This seal'd up oracle, by the hand deliver'd
 Of great Apollo's priest, and that since then
 110 You have not dar'd to break the holy seal
 Nor read the secrets in't.
CLEOMENES and **DION:** All this we swear.
LEONTES: Break up the seals and read.
OFFICER (*Reads*): "Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true
 115 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."
LORDS: Now blessed be the great Apollo!
HERMIONE: Praised!
LEONTES: Hast thou read truth?
 120 **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.

(*Enter a SERVANT.*)

125 **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 conceit⁶ and fear
 Of the Queen's speed,⁷ is gone.
 130 **LEONTES:** How! gone?
SERVANT: Is dead.
LEONTES: Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves
 Do strike at my injustice. (*HERMIONE swoons.*)
 How now there!
 135 **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'ercharg'd; she will recover.
 I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion.
 140 Beseech you, tenderly apply to her
 Some remedies for life.
 (*Exeunt PAULINA and LADIES, with HERMIONE.*)

William Shakespeare

⁶conceit—apprehensive imaginings

⁷speed—well being, fate