

The Winter's Tale 2020 - Audition information

As a director, I always cast age/colour/gender-blind wherever possible. However, because of the importance of genetic offspring and inherited traits between certain characters, there are some that cannot be played any other gender than scripted without significant explaining needing to be added to the text, and certain physical features that need to match up. As such, where 'required' the gender is ***noted in bold italics***.

All actors will play the same characters sixteen years apart (unless their character dies in the first half or wasn't born yet in the first) so age is by default 'playing age' only. Oh, and Clown who is an infant in the first half and a teenager in the second.

Currently I'm thinking Bohemia might be northern English accents and Sicily southern English – but I'm open to any and all interpretations. The important thing is a naturalistic delivery, especially in the 'Past' section. The farcical 'Present' can be a little more declamatory GCSE Shakespeare, but the human drama of the tragedy must be spoken as if it were written today. It is therefore vital that you understand every single word. My 'interpretations' of the audition pieces are available upon request, or you can direct yourself to the various Shakespeare language interpretation websites such as "Shakescleare" or "No Fear Shakespeare" for some quality interpretations.

AUDITION ROLES BY SIZE OF PART

LEONTES – 531 lines – ***Male (can't be female)*** – Lord of Sicily – Older adult (must be believably same age as Polixenes) – Plays himself two ages, sixteen years apart
Spends most of his time falling deeper and deeper into jealous miasma, believing his wife to be having an affair, only to repent and then dedicate himself to preserving love where he finds it. Showing the difference between these emotions – chronicling the descent into madness, the 'come to', and the change of ways vital to ensure he is seen as nasty when nasty, but sympathetic when reformed. Large part. His jealousy drives the tale. Some great speeches and a veritable thesaurus for the word 'whore'. Some combat. Uses a wheelchair in the 'present'.

PAULINA – 293 lines – ***Female (can't be male)*** – Hermione's lady's maid and loyal servant to Sicily – Adult – plays herself two ages, sixteen years apart
Along with Camillo, one of two characters who consistently have their heads screwed on straight. Sees through her master's miasma, and does her best to keep the family together. Almost succeeds, but can't stop Leontes in time to save Mamillius – but she has a plan up her sleeve for Hermione. Married to Antigonus. Very sympathetic character, but with a mischievous streak.

CAMILLO – 269 lines – ***Male (could be female as CAMILLA)*** – A most honest servant of both Sicily and Bohemia – Adult – plays himself two ages, sixteen years apart
The puppetmaster of the second half, helping to reconcile the estranged brothers of Leontes and Polixenes. His quick thinking saved Polixenes' life sixteen years ago, but it cost

him exile from his home which he loves. An honest fellow. Perhaps too honest for his own good.

POLIXENES – 220 lines – **Male (can't be female)** – Lord of Bohemia – Older adult (must be believably same age as Leontes) – Plays himself two ages, sixteen years apart
Along with Hermione, the focus of the brunt of Leontes' rage – thankfully, he escapes before Leontes can enact his plan to have him killed. In the present, he follows his son, Florizel, to a festival to catch him in the act of flirting with a Shepherd girl unacceptable for his social station. Eventually relents and realises true love will out, and reconciles with his old friend. Quite old fashioned. Almost faints at the word 'dildo'.

HERMIONE – 170 lines – **Female (can't be male)** – Lady of Sicily – adult of age to be pregnant – 'past' only
Leontes' wronged wife, falsely accused of adultery. Most of her lines are fantastic speeches she makes in her defence during her kangaroo court trial. She is not very emotional: she speaks how she is not one to weep. But she knows her mind and loves her husband and feels no shame in putting him in his place as he starts spreading false rumours of her infidelity. Unfortunately she can't convince him of her innocence in time, but she has some great moments as she tries.

PERDITA – 157 lines – **Female (can't be male)** – A Shepherd's daughter, Clown's sister, a seamstress – 16 years old (playing age) – 'present' only
The tomboyish daughter of a Shepherd. She is a bit rough around the edges. Sports bra, dungarees, preferably short or rough hair – always engaging in play fights and pranks with her brother, Clown, or drinking and singing bawdy songs at the local pub. Changes costumes on stage to adopt a disguise, so briefly seen in underwear. Ideally would accompany herself during her songs with an instrument of some kind – guitar, uke, banjo, accordion, concertina, etc.

FLORIZEL – 148 lines – **Male (could be female)** – The Prince of Bohemia – late teens/early 20s – 'present' only
The foppish son of Polixenes who falls for a girl below his station (Perdita) so adopts the disguise of a shepherd to woo her without his father noticing (spoiler: he notices). Quite charming in a posh, princely way. Idealistic and happy to cast aside all primness and properness to chase after the woman he loves. He quite enjoys the shepherd life, and is willing to give up royalty and be a full time commoner. Changes costumes on stage to adopt a disguise, so briefly seen in underwear.

ANTIGONUS – 125 lines – **Male (could be female as ANTIGONE)** – Servant to Sicily and partner to Paulina – older adult – 'past' only
Put upon older servant to Leontes, and devoted husband to Paulina. He's not afraid to challenge his master when he speaks badly of Paulina, but willing to suffer any abuse or task himself. Sympathetic character – does all he can to save Hermione and her unborn child, but doesn't quite manage.

SHEPHERD – 116 lines – **Male (can't be female)** – A Shepherd, and father of Clown and Perdita – Older adult (must feasibly have a twenty year old son) – plays himself two ages,

sixteen years apart

A shepherd. He falls for Florizel's disguise and thinks him just another (albeit odd) shepherd. Very proud of his two children – one a champion sheep shearer, and the other an artistic and musical prodigy. He is eager to ensure Florizel will look after his little girl, but also resolute that love is the most important thing, and if the young man can promise to love her, he is happy... until threatened by Polixenes

CLOWN – 98 lines – ***Male (can't be female)*** – A Shepherd's son, Perdita's brother, a sheep shearer

A simple sheep shearer, but very good at his job. He and his sister have a friendly rivalry, but they love each other very much and always looking out for each other. He joins in with her pranks and silly songs (even though he doesn't quite understand the rude bits) and is friendly with her new boyfriend. He also knows a little secret or two about her... He donates his clothes to Florizel to aid in his escape, so seen in underwear for about half a scene.

FIRST LADY/OFFICER – 56 lines (9/47) DUAL ROLE – A rather forward woman who quite fancies Mamillius/A forensic scientist – ***Female (could be male as 'first gentleman')*** – any age, as long as could feasibly be involved with Mamillius – 'past' only

As lady, one of two women who cavort with the young prince, eager for a taste of royalty. Potentially quite a sexy role in the 'cavorting', for any actor so inclined. As officer, a DNA expert and forensics officer who aids Leontes to discover the true parentage of his unborn child and to prove his wife's unfaithfulness. These two roles could be re-split should enough people audition.

SECOND LADY/OFFICER – 53 lines (11/42) DUAL ROLE – A rather forward woman who quite fancies Mamillius/A forensic scientist – ***Female (could be male as 'first gentleman')*** – any age, as long as could feasibly be involved with Mamillius – 'past' only

As lady, one of two women who cavort with the young prince, eager for a taste of royalty. Potentially quite a sexy role in the 'cavorting', for any actor so inclined. As officer, a DNA expert and forensics officer who aids Leontes to discover the true parentage of his unborn child and to prove his wife's unfaithfulness. These two roles could be re-split should enough people audition.

MAMILLIUS – 32 lines – The Prince of Sicily – ***Male (can't be female)*** – mid to late teens – 'past' only

A young prince, who's not really bothered by the whole royalty element. He just likes reading and romping with young ladies. But he dotes upon his mother, and is loath to hear his father badmouth her with no evidence. He defends her honour. Potentially quite a sexy role in the 'romping', for any actor so inclined. Drunk in one scene (acting – not real life please) and very, very ill in another. Some combat. Dies on stage (spoilers).

TIME – 30 lines – The physical personification of Time – ***Any gender, any age***

With wings, scythe and hourglass, Time announces to the audience how time in the play works – how it is not beholden to the classical unities, and we're going to be travelling to two times and two places. Needs to be absolutely electric. Magnetic. Godly. Very otherworldly. Mind bogglingly handsome/beautiful, and completely engaging in their

delivery. Must captivate from first movement. Small role, but very memorable. Opens and ends the play.

YOUNG CLOWN – 0 lines – Clown as an infant – *any gender* – ideally young primary school age (playing age)

Clown, the Shepherd's son, is about 20 in the 'present'. In his appearance in the 'past', he is still a small child. No lines, but wanders onto the stage, playing with his teddy bear. He discovers a parcel of fairy gold, then his father – the Shepherd – wanders on after him, worried sick, but relieved he's found him. Shepherd then brings Young Clown and the fairy gold off stage. Very small role, no lines, but huge adorability factor, and a great opportunity for a young child who wants a first taste of the stage with nothing too strenuous. Could be played by multiple children – different each night – to ease workload for parents.

Auditions

For the characters who appear in both time periods, auditions will consist of two pieces – a dialogue piece from one time period, and a monologue/soliloquy from the other. The aim for this is to get an idea of how your delivery will change as the same character sixteen years apart. The exception is Leontes, who will have three pieces (because it's a bloody big part with lots of emotions). Of those who only appear in one time period, I'll only want a single piece audition, with the exception of Hermione, for whom I want to see her usual carefree starting self, and her on trial for adultery. I'd also like to see Mamillius' piece performed several times, each time becoming more ill until he's practically dead. I would also like to hear potential Perdita sing for me. Definitely not a pristine perfect voice – a heavily accented rough folk/punk/protest voice, like Grace Petrie or Frank Turner. A Capella, or accompanying yourself with some instrument. The pieces are as follows:

MONOLOGUES:

**LEONTES, PAULINA, CAMILLO, POLIXENES, HERMIONE, ANTIGONUS,
SHEPHERD, TIME**

DIALOGUES

**CLOWN/SHEPHERD, PERDITA/FLORIZEL, POLIXENES/CAMILLO,
*MAMILLIUS/LADIES, HERMIONE/LEONTES, LEONTES/PAULINA**

**two ladies, so technically a triologue*

LEONTES

Context: Past, so Leontes is the younger of his ages. Leontes has convinced himself of his wife's infidelity, and watches as she partakes in a perfectly innocent walk with Polixenes – but Leontes sees only a whore. He describes how he is feelings, and what his wife must be doing behind his back.

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 the arm,
That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence
And his pond fish'd by his next neighbour, by
'Sir Smile', his neighbour: nay, there's comfort in't
Whiles other men have gates and those gates open'd,
As mine, against their will. Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves. Physic for't there is 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;
It will let in and out the enemy
With bag and baggage: many thousand on's
Have the disease, and feel't not.

PAULINA

Context: Past, so Paulina is the younger of her two ages. Paulina, despite her best efforts, has just watched Hermione die. This is the most angry, sarcastic, biting speech in the play. She drills her judgement into Leontes in one of the most significant and palpable shifts of status on stage. Leontes has realised he was wrong, and Paulina is not going to let him get off light

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?
What wheels? racks? fires? what flaying? boiling?
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
For girls of nine, O, think what they have done
And then run mad indeed, stark mad! for all
Thy by-gone fooleries were but spices of it.
That thou betray'dst Polixenes, 'twas nothing;
That did but show thee, of a fool, inconstant
And damnable ingrateful: nor was't much,
Thou wouldst have poison'd 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
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
That could conceive a gross and foolish sire
Blemish'd 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 not dropp'd down yet.

CAMILLO

Context: Present, so Camillo is the older of his two ages. Camillo is giving Florizel the idea to run away to Sicily and present himself before Leontes – Leontes will be so eager to reconcile with Polixenes, he will welcome Perdita as a princess and, once she has Leontes' favour, Polixenes' will follow, and they will be able to marry in spite of their different stations. Florizel just needs to pretend his father sent him to 'make up' with Leontes...

Then list to me:

This follows, if you will not change your purpose
But undergo this flight, make for Sicilia,
And there present yourself and your fair princess,
For so I see she must be, 'fore Leontes:
She shall be habited as it becomes
The partner of your bed. Methinks I see
Leontes opening his free arms and weeping
His welcomes forth; asks thee the son forgiveness,
As 'twere i' the father's person; kisses the hands
Of your fresh princess; o'er and o'er divides him
'Twixt his unkindness and his kindness; the one
He chides to hell and bids the other grow
Faster than thought or time. I'll write you down:
[writes a note]

The which shall point you forth at every sitting
What you must say; that he shall not perceive
But that you have your father's bosom there
And speak his very heart!

POLIXENES

Context: The present, so Polixenes is the older of his two ages. He has just revealed himself to his son, and is chiding him for cavorting with a farm girl, chiding the farm girl for bewitching him thus, the farm girl's father for allowing it, and threatening death to all if this nonsense doesn't cease. Real overprotective, snobby, bigoted dad vibes.

[to FLORIZEL] Mark your divorce, young sir!
Whom son I dare not call; thou art too base
To be acknowledged: thou a sceptre's heir,
That thus affect'st a sheep-hook! [to SHEPHERD] Thou old traitor,
I am sorry that by hanging thee I can
But shorten thy life one week!
And thou, [to PERDITA] fresh piece
Of excellent witchcraft, who of force must know
The royal fool thou copest with,--
I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briers, and made
More homely than thy state. [to FLORIZEL] For thee, fond boy,
If I may ever know thou dost but sigh
That thou no more shalt see this knack, as never
I mean thou shalt, we'll bar thee from succession;
Not hold thee of our blood, no, not our kin,
Far than Deucalion off: mark thou my words:
Follow us to the court. Thou churl, for this time,
Though full of our displeasure, yet we free thee
From the dead blow of it. And you, enchantment.--
Worthy enough a herdsman: yea, him too,
That makes himself, but for our honour therein,
Unworthy thee,--if ever henceforth thou
These rural latches to his entrance open,
Or hoop his body more with thy embraces,
I will devise a death as cruel for thee
As thou art tender to't!

HERMIONE

Context: This is Hermione's final defence speech before demanding validation by the Oracle. She begins, maintaining her cool – but by the end, betrays her usual calmness. She does not cry – she mentions earlier in the play she is not one for tears – but there is venom and anger in her words at the man she once loved and who once loved her, who now has exiled their infant daughter and spread the false rumour of her adultery far and wide.

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,

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,

Haled out to murder: myself on every post

Proclaimed a strumpet: with immodest hatred

The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs

To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried

Here to this place, i' the open air, before

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,

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 rigor and not law. Your honours all,

I do refer me to the oracle:

Apollo be my judge!

ANTIGONUS

Context: Tasked with the duty of exiling an infant, and leaving her to die on a hillside, Antigonus laments his task which he swore to do before knowing what it entailed. He weighs up what is more humane – leaving the child to the elements, or ending it for her cleanly. At the same time, he himself, an old man, is near to succumbing to the harsh winter winds, too, and he knows he is unlikely to see his home or his wife again. (abridged monologue)

Come, poor babe:

I have heard, but not believed,
the spirits o' the dead

May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother
Appear'd to me last night in pure white robes.

Did this break-from her: 'Good Antigonus,
Since fate, against thy better disposition,
Hath made thy person for the thrower-out

Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,
Places remote enough are in Bohemia,

There weep and leave it crying; and, for the babe
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,

I prithee, call't. *[He writes her name down]* For this ungentle business

Put on thee by my lord, thou ne'er shalt see

Thy wife Paulina more.' And so, with shrieks

She melted into air. Affrighted much,

I did in time collect myself and thought

This was so and no slumber. Dreams are toys:

[He coats a finger in whisky and feeds it to the freezing, starving child]

Blossom, speed thee well!

There lie, and there thy character: there these;

Which may, if fortune please, both breed thee, pretty,

And still rest thine. The storm begins; poor wretch,

That for thy mother's fault art thus exposed

To loss and what may follow! Weep I cannot,

But my heart bleeds; and most accursed am I

To be by oath enjoin'd to this. Farewell!

[He begins to smother the child to save from pain and starvation in the cold desert night. He cries.]

SHEPHERD

Context: The past, so Shepherd is at his younger age. He has entered the stage, looking for his son, Clown, only to find him playing with a baby in a cot, abandoned in the wilderness, its caretaker having succumbed to the elements.

Why, boy, how is it?

[notices his son is playing with the crying infant]

I would you did but see how it chafes, how it rages,
O, the most piteous cry of the poor soul!

[sees ANTIGONUS, dead] Name of mercy.

[Searches through to find identification]

His name was Antigonus, a nobleman.

Would I had been by, to have helped the old man.

Heavy matters! heavy matters! but look thee here,
boy. Now bless thyself: I mettest with things
dying, thou with things newborn. Here's a sight for
thee; look thee, a bearing-cloth for a squire's
child! look thee here; take up, take up, boy;
So, let's see: it was told me I should be
rich by the fairies. This is some changeling:

[picking up the baby]

This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so: up
with't, keep it close: home, home, the next way.

We are lucky, boy; and to be so still requires
nothing but secrecy. Let my sheep go: come, good
boy, the next way home.

'Tis a lucky day, boy, and we'll do good deeds on't.

TIME

Context: The personification of time, as a god or goddess, addresses the audience directly to explain the difference in the two locations and time periods.

I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror
Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,
Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
To use my wings. Impute it not a crime
To me or my swift passage, that I slide
O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom. Let me pass
The same I am, ere ancient'st order was
Or what is now received: I witness to
The times that brought them in; so shall I do
To the freshest things now reigning and make stale
The glistening of this present, as my tale
Now seems to it. Your patience this allowing,
I turn my glass and give my scene such growing.

Summer. Winter.

Sicily. Bohemia.

As you had slept between: Leontes leaving,
The effects of his fond jealousies so grieving
That he shuts up himself, imagine me,
Gentle spectators, now in Sicily.

SHEPERD AND CLOWN

Context: Present, so Shepherd is the older of his ages. Drunk, he bemoans the fact King Polixenes blames him for his daughter bewitching the Prince Florizel. His son, Clown, explains the only thing they can do is prove to the king Perdita is adopted, and not related by blood – and their crime might be seen as lesser.

SHEPHERD

O sir! [**hic**]

You have undone a man of *four**score three,
That thought to fill his grave in quiet, yea,
To die upon the bed my father died,
To lie close by his honest bones!

**adjust to actor age*

CLOWN

See, see; what a man you are now!
There is no other way but to tell the king
she's a changeling and none of your flesh and blood.

SHEPHERD

Go to, then.

CLOWN

She being none of your flesh and blood, your flesh
and blood has not offended the king; and so your
flesh and blood is not to be punished by him. Show
those things you found about her, those secret
things, all but what she has with her: this being
done, let the law go whistle: I warrant you.

SHEPHERD

I will tell the king all, every word, yea, and his
son's pranks too; who, I may say, is no honest man,
neither to his father nor to me, to go about to make
me the king's brother-in-law.

CLOWN

Indeed, brother-in-law was the farthest off you
could have been to him and then your blood had been
the dearer by I know how much an ounce.

SHEPHERD

Well, let us to the king: there is that in this
fardel will make him scratch his beard.

PERDITA/FLORIZEL

Context: When they think no one is around to watch them, the two lovers steal a moment. Think two teenagers round the back of the bike sheds – very hormone driven. They are both in a costume – Perdita in a dress as 'queen of the festival' and Prince Florizel as a farmer.

FLORIZEL

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Do give a life: no shepherdess, but Flora!

PERDITA

You have obscured, the gracious mark o' the land,
With a swain's wearing, and me, poor lowly maid,
Most goddess-like prank'd up.

FLORIZEL

I bless the time
When my good falcon made her flight across
Thy father's ground.

PERDITA

Now Jove afford you cause!
[They kiss, then she stops] To think your father, by some accident,
Should pass this way as you did: O, the Fates!
How would he look, to see his work so noble
Vilely bound up? What would he say?

FLORIZEL

Apprehend
Nothing but jollity. The gods themselves,
Humbling their deities to love, have taken
The shapes of beasts upon them:

PERDITA

O, but, sir,
Your resolution cannot hold, when 'tis
Opposed, as it must be, by the power of the king:

FLORIZEL

Thou dearest Perdita,
With these forced thoughts, I prithee, darken not!

POLIXENES/CAMILLO

Context: The past, so both characters are at their younger age. Camillo has just been charged with murdering Polixenes, but changes his mind and decides to warn him instead. A big tone shift from jovial to serious when this is revealed.

POLIXENES

Good day, Camillo.

CAMILLO

Hail, most royal sir!

POLIXENES

What is the news i' the court?

CAMILLO

None rare, my lord.

POLIXENES

The king hath on him such a countenance,
So leaves me to consider what is breeding
That changeth thus his manners.

CAMILLO

I dare not know, my lord.

POLIXENES

Good Camillo,
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 alter'd with 't.

CAMILLO

There is a sickness
Which puts some of us in distemper, but
I cannot name the 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 look'd on thousands, who have sped the better

By my regard, but kill'd none so. Camillo,--

In whose success we are gentle,--I beseech you,

If you know aught which does behove my knowledge

Thereof to be inform'd, imprison't not

In ignorant concealment.

CAMILLO

Sir, I will tell you;

Since I am charged in honour and by him

That I think honourable: therefore mark my counsel.

POLIXENES

On, good Camillo.

CAMILLO

I am appointed him to murder you.

POLIXENES *[thinking this is a joke]*

By whom, Camillo?

CAMILLO

By the king.

POLIXENES *[still not quite taking this seriously]*

For what?

CAMILLO

He thinks, nay, with all confidence he swears,

As he had seen't or been an instrument

To vice you to't, that you have touch'd 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!

POLIXENES/CAMILLO

Context: Mamillius, on a night out, has seduced a couple of ladies who are eager for a taste of royalty. The language is all very suggestive and it's quite hot and heavy.

FIRST LADY

Come, my gracious lord,
Shall I be your playfellow?

MAMILLIUS

No, I'll none of you.

FIRST LADY

Why, my sweet lord?

MAMILLIUS

You'll kiss me hard and speak to me as if
I were a baby still. 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
Too much hair there, but in a semicircle
Or a half-moon made with a pen.

SECOND LADY

Who taught you this?

MAMILLIUS

I learnt 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
That has been blue, but not her eyebrows.

FIRST LADY

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

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?

FIRST LADY

As merry as you will.

MAMILLIUS

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

SECOND LADY

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.

MAMILLIUS

There was a man--

SECOND LADY

Nay, come, sit down; then on.

MAMILLIUS

Dwelt by a churchyard: I will tell it softly;
Yond crickets shall not hear it.

FIRST LADY

Come on, then,
And give't me in mine ear.

LEONTES/HERMIONE

Context: The past, so Leontes is the younger of his ages. He is happy his wife has spoken so well and convinced Polixenes to stay – the last time she spoke so well was when they were wed. The jealousy has not yet taken hold, so they are happy and in love.

LEONTES

Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you.

HERMIONE

I had thought, sir, to have held my peace until
You have drawn oaths from him not to stay. You, sir,
Charge him too coldly.

LEONTES

At my request he would not stay.
Hermione, my dearest, thou never spokest
To better purpose.

HERMIONE

Never?

LEONTES

Never, but once.

HERMIONE

What! have I twice said well? when was't before?

LEONTES

Why, that was when
Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
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 the purpose twice:
The one for ever earn'd a royal husband;
The other for some while a friend.

LEONTES/PAULINA

Context: The present, so both characters are older. Leontes is wheelchair-bound. He is aged by grief, having spent sixteen years in mourning. Even Paulina thinks he's suffered enough. They reminisce over Hermione.

PAULINA

Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
A saint-like sorrow: no fault could you make,
Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass: at the last,
Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil;
With them forgive yourself.

LEONTES

Whilst I remember
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
My blemishes in them, and so still think of
The wrong I did myself; which was so much,
That heirless it hath made my kingdom and
Destroy'd the sweet'st companion that e'er man
Bred his hopes out of.

PAULINA

True, too true, my lord:
If, one by one, you wedded all the world,
Or from the all that are took something good,
To make a perfect woman, she you kill'd
Would be unparallel'd.

LEONTES

Good Paulina,
Who hast the memory of Hermione,
I know, in honour, O, that ever I
Had squared me to thy counsel! then, even now,
I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,
Have taken treasure from her lips--

PAULINA

And left them
More rich for what they yielded.