



The Winter's Tale

When Leontes' old friend Polixenes wishes to leave after a court visit, Leontes asks his wife, Hermione, to try persuading him to stay longer. Hermione succeeds, but Leontes then suspects her of having an affair with Polixenes. His jealousy getting the better of him, Leontes plots to poison Polixenes. Camillo, however, warns Polixenes of Leontes' wrath, and the two escape to Bohemia. Meanwhile, Hermione is thrown in jail and brought to trial for adultery despite the words of the Delphic oracle (who has proclaimed Hermione innocent). While imprisoned, Hermione gives birth to a daughter, which Leontes promptly disowns. He also commands Antigonus, the husband of Paulina, to abandon the baby in the desert. Antigonus does so, but is devoured soon after by a bear.

Tragedy soon besets Leontes as the trial progresses. His only son, Mamilius, dies from grief over his mother's predicament. Hermione too is reported dead by her waiting woman, Paulina. This is enough to make even Leontes realize what his jealousy has cost him; in mourning, he goes into seclusion. In Bohemia, a shepherd discovers the abandoned baby, Perdita, and raises her as his own daughter. Sixteen years later, the son of Polixenes, Florizel, has fallen in love with Perdita; Polixenes, however, is less than pleased that his son, a prince, is in love with a shepherdess. Florizel and Perdita make plans to escape to Sicilia, aided by old Camillo.

In Sicilia, Florizel and Perdita are welcomed at the court of Leontes. Polixenes soon follows (accompanied by the old shepherd), and he and Leontes eventually reconcile. Perdita's identity as the king's daughter is revealed, and Leontes and Polixenes are delighted that their children will be wed. Leontes' new joy, however, is tempered by the bitter memory of Hermione's death. Paulina then takes Leontes and the rest to see a statue of the queen that is actually Hermione herself—the queen has lived in hiding for the past sixteen years. Thus Leontes is reunited with his wife and daughter, his best friend, and his close advisor, Camillo. Even Paulina regains a husband when Leontes promises her hand to Camillo in gratitude for helping Hermione. Hence, everything is set back aright in Sicilia by the end of the play.

Dramatis Personae

Leontes, King of Sicilia
Mamilius, Prince of Sicilia
Camillo, a lord of Sicilia
Antigonus, a lord of Sicilia
Cleomenes, a lord of Sicilia
Dion, a lord of Sicilia
Polixenes, King of Bohemia
Florizel, Prince of Bohemia
Archidamus, a lord of Bohemia
An Old Shepherd; reputed father of Perdita
Clown, his son
Autolycus, a rogue
A Mariner
A Jailer
Hermione, Queen to Leontes
Perdita, daughter of Leontes and Hermione
Paulina, wife of Antigonus
Emilia, a lady to Hermione
Mopsa, a shepherdess
Dorcas, a shepherdess
Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen
Officers and Servants
Shepherds and Shepherdesses
Guards
Time, as Chorus