

# THE WINTER'S TALE

## SYNOPSIS

### PART ONE

Polixenes, the King of Bohemia, has spent nine months visiting his childhood friend Leontes, King of Sicilia. Polixenes is persuaded to stay a few days longer by Leontes' queen, Hermione. The evident affability between Polixenes and Hermione awakens a sudden and violent jealousy in Leontes. He becomes convinced that the pair are lovers and that Polixenes is the father of Hermione's unborn child. Leontes hatches a plot with his servant Camillo to poison Polixenes. Camillo seems to agree to the plan, but secretly warns Polixenes. Together, they steal out of Sicilia and hurry to Bohemia.

Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery. She denies it, but Leontes sends her to prison. He sends two messengers to the oracle to provide proof of his wife's infidelity. In prison, Hermione delivers a baby girl. Leontes charges that Paulina's husband, Antigonus, take the baby to a remote place and leave its survival to chance.

The two messengers bring word from the oracle. Hermione is pronounced innocent, but Leontes rejects the god's judgment. Immediately, news comes of the death of Mamillius. The queen collapses and is carried away. Paulina returns to report that Hermione has died.

Antigonus, arriving in Bohemia, leaves the baby with a quantity of gold in a remote place. Before he can return, he is eaten by a bear. Two shepherds find the child and the old shepherd adopts her.

### PART TWO

Time announces the passing of 16 years. Perdita has grown up, as has Prince Florizel, the son of Polixenes. His father wonders why Florizel spends so much time in the company of an old shepherd. He enlists the help of Camillo to help him find out what Florizel is up to. They arrive in disguise at a sheepshearing festival, where they find Florizel posing as a shepherd, calling himself Doricles, and courting Perdita. Florizel, who refuses to answer why his father should not be told of his intention to marry a shepherd's daughter, invites the disguised Polixenes to witness his betrothal. Polixenes, enraged that he has been kept in the dark, reveals himself and forbids the match. At Camillo's behest, Florizel agrees to elope with Perdita to Sicilia.

To escape punishment for treason, the old shepherd resolves to present proof of Perdita's origins to Polixenes.

The story returns to Sicilia. Paulina has kept the memory of Hermione constantly alive in Leontes. He welcomes Florizel and Perdita. The prince gives out that they are married and that Perdita is a princess. Leontes undertakes to try and reconcile Polixenes to their match. News comes from the old shepherd: Perdita is revealed as Leontes' long-lost daughter and Polixenes consents to her engagement to Florizel. The royal party withdraws to Paulina's house to admire a wonderfully lifelike statue of Hermione...