

The Winter's Tale

SYNOPSIS

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Polixenes, King of Bohemia, has been staying with his childhood friend Leontes, King of Sicilia, for nine months. Leontes would like his friend to stay longer, but when Polixenes is only persuaded by Leontes' pregnant wife Hermione, Leontes becomes jealous, thinking they are having an affair. He tells his most trusted courtier, Camillo, to poison Polixenes. Convinced the Queen is innocent, Camillo warns Polixenes and they leave for Bohemia together. When Hermione's daughter is born, Hermione is imprisoned, and another courtier, Antigonus, is ordered to abandon the child on the shores of Bohemia.

Hermione is put on trial for treason. She appeals to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi. When the Oracle's answer arrives, saying that Hermione is innocent, Leontes rejects it. Soon after, his son Mamillus dies. Antigonus' wife Paulina blames Leontes, and announces that Hermione is also dead. Now Leontes regrets what he has done, and is left with the last part of the Oracle's answer: that he will die without an heir unless what has been lost can be found.

Meanwhile, after leaving the baby on the shore, Antigonus is torn to pieces by a bear. A shepherd and his son find the baby and bring her up as their own, naming her Perdita.

Sixteen years later King Polixenes' son Florizel falls in love with Perdita and disguises himself as a shepherd to woo her. Polixenes and Camillo follow Florizel secretly and see them together at the sheep-shearing festival, where the rogue and pedlar Autolycus is tricking shepherds out of their money. When his father forbids him to see Perdita any more because of the difference in their class, Florizel escapes with Autolycus' help to Sicilia with Perdita and the shepherds who have brought her up. There Perdita's true identity is revealed, so that Polixenes agrees to their wedding. What was lost has now been found, and Paulina tells everyone she has a life-like statue of Hermione, which she brings to life for the assembled company.

Media:

DVD:

The Winter's Tale (BBC TV Shakespeare 1978), dir. Jane Howell

The Winter's Tale (RSC 1998), dir. Greg Doran, with Anthony Sher

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 6 (2007) *Othello* and *A Winter's Tale*

CD Audio:

The Winter's Tale (Caedmon)

The Winter's Tale (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]