

A WINTER'S TALE SYNOPSIS



BY RESIDENT DRAMATURG
PHILIPPA KELLY

WHERE IT ALL BEGINS: Sicilia, kingdom of King Leontes

WHO'S THERE: Various servants herald the entrance of Leontes; his heavily pregnant wife, Hermione; and his childhood friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia.

DON'T LET YOUR HEART OUTSHOUT YOUR BRAIN: Leontes begs Polixenes to stay a week longer; Polixenes says he can't. Leontes occupies himself somewhere else while Hermione presses his case. Polixenes relents, agreeing to stay; and, out of nowhere, Leontes decides that because he didn't succeed and his wife did, there has to be something going on between the two of them. Leontes gives birth to this suspicion; his imagination does the rest.

ASK AN ORACLE BEFORE, NOT AFTER: Leontes orders Polixenes gone; he sends Hermione to jail, where she delivers a baby girl; Leontes sends the child away to be killed and asks an oracle to tell him the truth of what has gone on; the oracle confirms that Hermione was true to her husband. But it's too late: Leontes' pre-teen son dies of grief and trauma; Hermione falls in a swoon and her servant reports that she, too, has died.

NOT EVEN A GOOD ACT CAN SAVE YOU FROM A BEAR: Antigonus, charged with murdering the infant, leaves her on the Bohemian coast instead. A bear chases and kills him. The baby is found by a shepherd.

SIXTEEN YEARS LATER: The infant, Perdita, has been raised by the shepherd in the forests of Bohemia. One day King Polixenes' son, Florizel, sees her and falls in love with her.

WRONGED PEOPLE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM DOING WRONG THEMSELVES: Polixenes and his servant Camillo (who was once Leontes' servant) attend, in disguise, the betrothal of Florizel and Perdita. Polixenes tears off his disguise and orders his son never to see this lowly shepherdess again.

SICILIA IS NOW A SANCTUARY: Florizel and Perdita escape to Sicilia. Florizel is embraced by the suffering Leontes, who has mourned his actions for the last 16 years. Florizel soothes Leontes' grief and remorse by telling him he's on a mission from his father to bury the hatchet.

THE BEST-LAID PLANS... Florizel's cover is blown when his furious father arrives, along with Camillo, who longs to see his homeland again.

NATURE MAY SOLVE IT ALL: The story unravels itself. We find that Perdita is in truth Leontes' long-lost infant daughter; that Hermione is not dead, but safely maintained by her loyal servant Paulina all these years; and that Leontes can now have both wife and daughter back again. Sometimes, just sometimes, life is indeed a miracle.