THE WINTER'S TALE

by William Shakespeare

Adapted by John Dilworth Newman

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STORY OF THE PLAY

King Leontes of Sicilia tries unsuccessfully to postpone the departure of his best friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia. When Leontes asks his wife Hermione to ask Polixenes to stay, Polixenes honors her request, which makes Leontes first suspicious and then insanely jealous. Leontes enlists his counselor Camillo to surreptitiously poison Polixenes but Camillo warns the visiting King and flees with him to his native Bohemia.

With Polixenes' flight, Leontes believes his worst suspicions are confirmed and he publicly accuses Hermione of adultery. Hermione is cast into prison, where she gives birth to a daughter, and the Courtiers try in vain to plead her innocence before the King. In order to satisfy the Court, Leontes convenes a trial for Hermione and dispatches messengers to the Oracle at Delphi. Leontes give the infant Princess, whom he considers illegitimate, to the Courtier Antigonus, charging him to abandon the child in the wilds.

In the trial, Leontes confronts his haggard wife, refuting all her claims of innocence. In order to settle the matter, a sealed message from the Oracle of Delphi is read, which exonerates Hermione and accuses Leontes of being a jealous tyrant, warning that he will live without an heir if that which is lost is not found. Leontes defiantly declares that there is no truth in the Oracle. Immediately word comes that Leontes' only son is dead. Shortly thereafter, his physician Paulina brings word that Hermione has died of grief. Leontes realizes his error and resigns himself to despair and futile repentance.

Meanwhile, on the shores of Bohemia, Antigonus abandons the infant Princess, leaving treasure for her keep. Antigonus is pursued and eaten by a bear while the Princess is discovered and adopted by a sympathetic shepherdess and her son.

The story moves forward sixteen years. The lost Princess, Perdita, is grown and has become the queen of her village's sheep-shearing festival. She has been secretly courted by Prince Florizell, King Polixenes' son.

Polixenes and Camillo, having heard reports of this secret courtship, spy on the couple. Florizell almost marries Perdita but Polixenes objects and threatens Florizell with disinheritance and Perdita with physical harm if the lovers ever see each other again. Once the King is gone, Camillo emerges from his disguise and advises the young lovers to flee to Sicillia.

Back in Bohemia, Leontes, still grieving the death of Hermione, receives Florizell and Perdita with open arms. He learns that Polixenes is on his way to Bohemia in pursuit of them. When the two Kings meet, they realize that Perdita is Leontes lost daughter and the fathers gladly give their blessing to the couple's engagement. Afterwards, the reunited families gather at Paulina's house where Paulina reveals a statue of Queen Hermione, which seems remarkably lifelike. With Leontes' blessing, Paulina enacts a magic which promises an impossible restoration and redemption.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:
(13 Men, 13 Women plus Musicians and a Bear.)

LEONTES: King of Sicilia.
HERMIONE: Queen of Sicilia.
MAMILLIUS: Young Prince of Sicilia.
PERDITA: Lost Princess of Sicilia.
POLIXENES: King of Bohemia.
PAULINA: Physician to Leontes.
FLORIZELL: Prince of Bohemia.
EMILIA: Lady - in - Waiting to Hermione.
CAMILLO: Counselor to Leontes.
FIRST LADY: Lady of Sicilia.
FIRST LORD: of Sicilia.
ANTIGONUS: A Sicilian Courtier.
SECOND LADY: Lady of Sicilia.
SECOND LORD: A Lord of Sicilia.
*CLEOMENES: A messenger of Sicilia.
*DION: A messenger of Sicilia.
*ARCHIDAMAS: A messenger of Bohemia.
OFFICER: Of Sicilia.
JAILER: Of Sicilia.
OLD SHEPHERDESS: Of Bohemia.
MARINER: Voyaging from Sicilia.
DORCAS: A shepherdess of Bohemia.
CLOWNE: A shepherd of Bohemia.
MOPSA: A shepherdess of Bohemia.
AUTOLYCUS: A merchant of Bohemia.
*TIME CHORUS: One or several players.

*Written as a male role in Shakespeare's original script.

SCENE SYNOPSIS

ACT I
1 The Court of Sicilia
2 The Same

ACT II
1 The Bedchamber of Leontes and Hermione
2 Before a Prison Gate
3 Leontes' Throne Room

ACT III
1 On the Road to Sicilia
2 The Court of Sicilia
3 On a Ship and on the Coast of Bohemia

ACT IV
1 Bohemia and Sicilia, Sixteen Years Later
2 In the Bohemian Palace
3 In a Bohemian Village

ACT V
1 Leontes' Throne room
2 The Court of Sicilia
3 The Gallery of Paulina

RUNNING TIME: Approximately 90 minutes.

ABOUT THIS ADAPTATION

This adaptation was originally created for secondary school students to perform.

My primary goal in this adaptation was to clarify and simplify the plot and dialogue so that the story and language would be readily comprehensible to a modern audience of various ages. I have preserved the feel of the language but modified the vocabulary by updating some of the most archaic terms and phrases. The blank verse pattern, where it appears in the original text, has generally been preserved in the adaptation.

For practical and artistic reasons, I maximized the number of female roles. Cleomenes, Dion, and Archidamas are messengers and have been written as female. The old shepherd of Bohemia is now female and her maternal relationship to Clowne can work very effectively. The minor female roles have been expanded in some places, especially in Act 5, Scene 2 where they participate in the description of the reunion between the Kings and the lost Princess.

I have written in "freeze frame" moments, mostly in the first act, which allow the audience to get familiar with the identities of the characters and to view the relationships of the characters through telling tableaus.

The most major plot change I have made in the script comes in the fourth act, where I have pared down the role of the merchant/thief Autolycus. Many scholars hail this comic character as a masterpiece, and although he can be brilliant with the right actor in the role, his monologues and shenanigans have only "worked" in one of the seven productions of the play which I have seen. Autolycus' subplot is almost a play in and of itself and by eliminating his lengthy scenes and by delegating his plot functions to other characters, I was able to eliminate more than thirty minutes from the often tedious second half. Adaptation is the art of choices and it is always a matter of gain and loss. In the case of this adaptation, I believe the script gained focus, clarity, and brevity by paring down Autolycus.

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