

THE WINTER'S TALE

Character Notes

LEONTES

Ruler of Sicilia, and married to Hermione. He is fiercely jealous, and becomes convinced that his childhood friend, Polixenes, is having an affair with Hermione. He orders Camillo to murder Polixenes and puts his wife on trial for adultery. He also orders Antigonus to murder Hermione's newborn daughter, whom he assumes is Polixenes' child. (Antigonus refuses to kill the girl and abandons her on a rocky island before being killed by a bear) Leontes' paranoia ultimately pulls his family apart. First his young son Mamillius dies, and then his wife.

MAMILLIUS

Leontes and Hermione's son. When his father imprisons his mother on allegations of adultery he is overcome with grief and dies.

CAMILLO

This lord of Sicilia is ordered by Leontes to poison Polixenes. He refuses and is forced to flee to Sicily where he joins Polixenes' service.

ANTIGONUS

This lord of Sicilia is a loyal defender of Hermione. He is trusted with the unfortunate task of abandoning Leontes' baby daughter Perdita on the Bohemian coast where she is found, and raised, by a shepherd. He is killed by a bear.

PERDITA

Leontes and Hermione's daughter. Her paranoid father is convinced she is Polixenes' child and orders Antigonus to murder her. Instead, he takes her on a ship which is ship-wrecked on the coast of Bohemia. He leaves her there with proof of her royal parentage and money. She is found by an Old Shepherd and his son. They are too poorly educated to work out her royal lineage and the Old Shepherd is content to raise her as his own daughter. Nonetheless the gold hidden with Perdita buys him a new, comfortable life-style. Perdita's name means "lost". As a young lady, Perdita falls madly in love with Florizel and the pair elope together because Florizel knows that his father will not allow his marriage to a commoner.

POLIXENES

Ruler of Bohemia. His boyhood friend, Leontes, is wrongly convinced Polixenes is having an affair with Hermione. Polixenes flees from Sicilia to save his own life.

FLORIZEL

Polixenes' only son. He meets a beautiful shepherdess and falls madly in love with her, unaware that she is the lost daughter of Leontes and the Princess of Sicilia. They elope together against Polixenes' wishes.

OLD SHEPHERD

He finds the baby Perdita on the Bohemian coast and raises her as his own daughter. Perdita could not ask for a better surrogate than this old, caring and honourable man.

BOY

The Old Shepherd's son. This clumsy character is the clown of the play.

AUTOLYCUS

A rogue and a thief. He is the bane of the Shepherd's life, pilfering from him and his family. He is somewhat redeemed at the end by assisting in Perdita and Florizel's escape.

HERMIONE

Queen of Sicilia and wife of Leontes, accused of infidelity by her husband. Beautiful and honourable, she is so distraught by Leontes' accusation that she dies of grief. She is restored to life at the play's close.

PAULINA

This noblewoman of Sicily is convinced of Hermione's virtue and innocence, condemning Leontes unrelentingly after the Queen's death. She is also responsible for Hermione's resurrection.

EMILIA

Hermione's loyal lady-in-waiting.