## William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (Adapted by Barbara Cobb from *Tales from Shakespeare*, Charles and Mary Lamb)

LEONTES, king of Sicily, and his queen, the beautiful and virtuous Hermione, once lived in the greatest harmony together. So happy was Leontes in the love of this excellent lady, that he had no other wishes, except that he sometimes desired to see again, and to introduce to his queen, his old companion and school-fellow, Polixenes, king of Bohemia. Leontes and Polixenes had been best friends during their years at school, but being called to reign over their respective kingdoms, they had not had the chance to visit for many years, though they frequently interchanged letters and gifts by means of ambassadors.

At length, after repeated invitations from Leontes, Polixenes agreed to come from Bohemia to Sicily, to pay his friend Leontes a visit.

At first this visit gave nothing but joy to Leontes. They talked over old times; their schooldays and their youthful pranks were remembered, and recounted to Hermione, Leontes' fair queen, who always took a cheerful part in these conversations.

When, after a long stay, Polixenes was preparing to depart, Leontes begged Polixenes to stay longer, to no avail. Leontes then urged Hermione to convince Polixenes to prolong his visit, knowing that a woman's gentle persuasions are always hard to ignore.

And, because of those very gentle persuasions, now began this good queen's sorrow; for Polixenes, refusing to stay at the request of Leontes, was won over by Hermione. Leontes knew the indisputable integrity of his friend Polixenes, as well as that of his virtuous queen, but, for reasons beyond anyone's comprehension, Leontes was seized by an irrational and ungovernable jealousy. Every attention Hermione showed to Polixenes was misinterpreted by Leontes as flirtation, and every example of appropriate hostess' attention to Polixenes' needs as a guest did nothing but increase Leontes' unwarranted jealousy; and Leontes was transformed from a loving and a true friend, and the best and fondest of husbands, into a savage and inhuman monster.

Leontes sent for Camillo, one of the lords of Leontes' court, and commanded Camillo to poison Polixenes.

Camillo was a good man; and he, well knowing that the jealousy of Leontes had not the slightest foundation in truth, instead of poisoning Polixenes, acquainted Polixenes with Leontes' orders, and then agreed to escape with Polixenes out of the Sicilian dominions; and Polixenes, with the assistance of Camillo, arrived safe in his own kingdom of Bohemia, where Camillo lived from that time as part of Polixenes' royal court, and became the chief friend and favorite lord of Polixenes' kingdom.

The flight of Polixenes enraged the jealous Leontes still more; Leontes went to the queen's apartment, where good Hermione was sitting with her youthful son Mamillius, who was just beginning to tell one of his best winter's tales to amuse his mother. The king entered, accused Hermione of terrible crimes, and taking Mamillius away from his mother, sent Hermione to prison.

Mamillius, a youth just between childhood and manhood, loved his mother tenderly; and when he saw her so dishonored, and dragged off unceremoniously to prison, he took it deeply to heart, and drooped and pined away by slow degrees, losing his appetite and his sleep, till it was thought – till it was known -- his grief would kill him.

The king, when he had sent his queen to prison, commanded Cleomenes and Dion, two Sicilian lords, to go to Delphi, there to inquire of the oracle at the temple of Apollo, if his queen had been unfaithful to Leontes. When Hermione had been a short time in prison, she gave birth

to a beautiful daughter; and the poor lady received much comfort from the sight of her pretty baby, telling her: "My poor little prisoner, I am as innocent as you are. What a comfort you are to me in my sorrow."

Hermione had a kind and devoted friend, the noble-spirited Paulina, who was the wife of Antigonus, a Sicilian lord. Paulina went to the prison where Hermione and her baby were confined, but was turned away when she requested to see her dear friend. Paulina was allowed to speak with Emilia, Hermione's lady-in-waiting, and Paulina told Emilia, "Tell the good queen, if her majesty will trust me with her little babe, I will carry the baby to the king, her father; we do not know how he may soften at the sight of his innocent child." "May you be forever blessed," said Emilia, "for your kindness to our gracious queen!" (Everyone else was too afraid of the irrational Leontes to venture into his presence voluntarily.) Emilia then went to Hermione, who joyfully put her baby in the care of Paulina.

Paulina took the new-born infant and very bravely forced her way into the king's presence, notwithstanding Paulina's own husband's pleas that she not test the king's anger. She laid the babe at the king's feet, and Paulina made a noble speech to the king in defense of Hermione, and reproached him severely for his inhumanity, and implored him to have mercy on his innocent wife and child. But Paulina's spirited remonstrances only aggravated Leontes' fury, and he ordered Paulina to be removed from his presence.

Paulina was dragged away, and the baby was left at her father's feet. Any human father would have taken pity on the baby's helpless innocence. Leontes behaved like no human, though, for no sooner was Paulina gone than the merciless king ordered Antigonus, Paulina's husband, to take the child and carry it out to sea, and leave it upon some desert shore to perish.

Antigonus, unlike the good Camillo, obeyed the orders of Leontes: he carried the child to a waiting ship and put out to sea, intending to sail up the Adriatic Sea and to leave the baby on the most distant desert coast he could find.

So firmly was the king persuaded of the guilt of Hermione that he did not wait for the return of Cleomenes and Dion, whom he had sent to consult the oracle of Apollo at Delphi: Leontes had Hermione brought to a public trial before all the lords and nobles of his court. When all the great lords, and all the high judges, and all the nobility of the land were assembled together to try Hermione, and that unhappy queen was standing as a prisoner before them all to receive her already-determined-by-Leontes sentence, Cleomenes and Dion arrived and presented to the king the answer of the oracle. All those assembled breathed a sigh of relief, hopeful that truth would prevail. Leontes commanded the seal to be broken, and the words of the oracle to be read aloud, and these were the words: "Hermione is innocent, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found."

Everyone gasped, and cheered. Everyone except Leontes: the king immediately dismissed the words of the oracle as falsehood, lies invented by the queen's friends. At that very moment, while Leontes was still speaking, a man entered and announced that the prince Mamillius, so struck with grief at his mother's unjust sentence, had died of a broken heart.

Hermione, at this news, fainted. Leontes ordered Paulina to take her away. Paulina did so, but soon returned to tell the king that Hermione was dead.

When Leontes heard this news, he quite suddenly repented of his cruelty to her, and quite suddenly knew that the words of the oracle – which are always true – were in fact true, and that "if that which was lost is not found," which he concluded must be his young daughter, he would

live in misery; and he gave himself up to remorse, and spent many years – about sixteen, in fact - in mournful prayer and repentant grief.

Meanwhile, the ship that carried Paulina's husband Antigonus and the infant princess was driven by a storm to the coast of Bohemia, the very kingdom of the good king Polixenes. Here Antigonus landed by himself, and here he left the little baby, with prayers for her survival, despite impossible odds.

Antigonus never returned to Sicily to tell Leontes where he had left Leontes' daughter. He never made it back to the ship, for even as he placed the baby on the ground, a bear approached and tore him to pieces. The slaughter was related to us by a shepherd, whose own father had at the same time as the grisly assault found the poor deserted baby. The shepherd had carried the baby home, and brought up Perdita, as she had been named, as his own child, and she knew not she was any other than a shepherd's daughter. The shepherd and his son hid away the rich swaddling clothes and gold coins that had been found with the child, and spent only the very least of this wealth, saving it, knowing that, someday, it might be important to this little lost child.

The little Perdita grew into a lovely maiden, and though she had no better nurture than that of a shepherd's daughter – or maybe because of that natural care -- her natural graces shone forth so brightly that everyone found her the nonpareil of women in all that land.

Back to Polixenes, the king of Bohemia, this very land where Perdita had been abandoned. Polixenes had a son whose name was Florizel. This young prince enjoyed sport hunting on royal lands near the shepherd's dwelling, and one day he spotted the beautiful Perdita and instantly fell in love with her. In the disguise of a shepherd named Doricles, Florizel became a constant visitor at the old shepherd's house. Florizel's frequent absences from court alarmed Polixenes; and setting people to watch his son, Polixenes discovered Florizel's love for the fair shepherd woman.

Polixenes called for Camillo, who had preserved his life from the fury of Leontes, and desired that Camillo accompany him to spy on Florizel.

Polixenes and Camillo, both disguised as shepherds, arrived at the old shepherd's dwelling during a sheep-shearing festival, and though they were strangers, they were invited to join in the festivities, since all are always welcome at the revels of the shepherds.

Mirth and jollity were ubiquitous. Great preparations had been made for the rustic feast, and elegant tables had been spread. Lads and lasses were dancing on the green, and young men were buying hair ribbons, gloves, and other toys, from a wandering peddler named Autolycus.

While this busy scene was going forward, Florizel and Perdita whispered and danced together, more pleased with each other's company, than any of the other amusements around them.

King Polixenes in his disguise advanced near enough to hear the conversation of Florizel and Perdita. The simple yet elegant manner in which Perdita conversed with his son surprised Polixenes: he said to Camillo, "This is the prettiest low-born lass I ever saw; nothing she does or says but looks like something greater than herself, too noble for this place."

Camillo replied, "Indeed she is the very queen of curds and cream."

"Pray, my good friend," said the disguised king to the old shepherd, Perdita's father,"What fair swain is that talking with your daughter?" "They call him Doricles," replied the shepherd. "He says he loves my daughter; and, to speak truth, there is not a kiss to choose which loves the other best. If young Doricles can get her, she shall bring him more that he even dreams of."

The disguised Polixenes then addressed his son, who still did not recognize him. "How now, young man!" said he, "your heart seems full of something that takes off your mind from feasting.

When I was young, I used to load my love with presents; but you have let the peddler go, and have bought your lass no toys."

The young prince replied, "Old sir, she prizes not such trifles; the gifts which Perdita expects from me are locked up in my heart." Then turning to Perdita, he said, "O hear me, Perdita, before this ancient gentleman, who it seems was once himself a lover, he shall hear what I profess." Florizel then called upon the old stranger to be a witness to a solemn promise of marriage which he made to Perdita, saying to Polixenes: "I pray you, mark our contract."

The king, throwing off his disguise, exploded at Florizel, "Mark your divorce, young sir." Polixenes then reproached Florizel for daring to propose marriage to this low-born maiden, calling Perdita a "shepherd's brat," and a "sheep-hook," and other disrespectful names, and threatening, if ever Florizel was caught with her again, Polixenes would put Perdita, and the old shepherd her father, to a cruel death.

The king then left them in great wrath, and ordered Camillo to drag the young prince Florizel back to court.

When Polixenes had departed, Perdita said to the man she had known as Doricles, but now knew was Prince Florizel, "Though we are all undone, I was not much afraid; and once or twice I was about to speak, and tell him plainly that the selfsame sun which shines upon his palace hides not his face from our cottage, but looks on both alike." Then sorrowfully she said: "But now I am awakened from this dream, I will queen it no further. Leave me, sir; I will go milk my ewes and weep."

The kind-hearted Camillo was charmed with the spirit and propriety of Perdita's response, and, perceiving that the young prince was too deeply in love to give up Perdita even at the command of his royal father, Camillo thought of a way to befriend the lovers and at the same time to find a way to see his beloved Sicily again.

Camillo had long known that Leontes, that old, sad, king of Sicily, was become a true penitent. He therefore proposed to Florizel and Perdita that they should accompany him to the Sicilian court, where King Leontes would protect them till, through Camillo's mediation, Florizel could obtain pardon and consent to their marriage from Polixenes.

To this proposal they joyfully agreed. After a prosperous voyage, Florizel and Perdita and Camillo, arrived at the court of Leontes. Leontes, who still mourned his dead Hermione and his lost child, received Camillo with great kindness, especially because of the terrible request that Leontes had made of him so many years ago. Leontes gave a cordial welcome to Prince Florizel, but Perdita, whom Florizel introduced as his princess, seemed to engross all of Leontes' attention. Leontes, perceiving a resemblance between sweet Perdita and his dead queen Hermione, broke out into new grief, and he wept again, thinking that such a lovely creature might his own daughter have been, if he had not so cruelly destroyed her. "And then, too," said he to Florizel, "I lost the society and friendship of my dearest friend, your noble father, whom I miss with all my heart."

At this moment, Polixenes and Perdita's shepherd family arrived. The old shepherd had heard the story of King Leontes' lost child, and, in comparing the time when he found the little Perdita, the manner of the baby's abandonment, the jewels and other tokens that suggested high birth, it was impossible for him to conclude anything but that Perdita and the king's lost daughter were the same person. He had gone to his own King Polixenes with this news, and Polixenes, figuring that Camillo had taken Florizel and Perdita to Sicily, had set sail himself, with the shepherd as his guests.

Florizel and Perdita, Camillo and the faithful Paulina, were present when the old shepherd related to Leontes the manner in which he had found the child, and also the circumstance of Paulina's husband Antigonus' death, his son having seen the bear seize upon him. He showed the rich mantle or scarf in which Hermione had wrapped the child so many years ago, and he produced a jewel that Hermione had tied about the baby's neck, and he gave to Leontes a paper which Paulina knew to be the writing of her husband. It could not be doubted that Perdita was Leontes' own daughter: but oh! the noble struggles of Paulina, between sorrow for her husband's death, and joy that the oracle was fulfilled in the king's heir, his long-lost daughter, being found. When Leontes heard that Perdita was his daughter, he, too, struggled between joy and sorrow, and knew not which emotion should fill his heart.

Paulina interrupted this joyful yet distressful scene, saying to Leontes that she had a statue newly finished by a renowned Italian master which was such a perfect resemblance of the queen, that would his majesty be pleased to go to her house and look upon it, he would be almost ready to think it was Hermione herself. Thither then they all went, the king anxious to see the semblance of his Hermione, and Perdita longing to behold what the mother she had never known did look like.

When Paulina drew back the curtain which concealed this famous statue, so perfectly did it resemble Hermione, that all the king's sorrow was renewed at the sight: for a long time he had no power to speak or move.

"I like your silence, my liege," said Paulina, "it the more shows your wonder. Is not this statue very like your queen?"

At length the king said, "O, thus she stood, even with such majesty, when I first wooed her. But yet, Paulina, Hermione was not so aged as this statue looks." Paulina replied, "So much the more the carver's excellence, who has made the statue as Hermione would have looked had she been living now. But let me draw the curtain, sire, lest presently you think it moves."

The king then said, "Do not draw the curtain. See, Camillo, would you not think it breathed? Her eye seems to have motion in it."

"I must draw the curtain, my liege," said Paulina. "You are so transported, you will persuade yourself the statue lives."

"O, sweet Paulina," said Leontes, "make me think so! Still methinks there is an air comes from her. What fine chisel could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me, for I will kiss her."

"Good my lord, forbear!" said Paulina. "The ruddiness upon her lip is still wet from the painter's stroke; you will stain your lip with oil. Shall I draw the curtain?"

"No," said Leontes.

Perdita, who all this time had been kneeling, and beholding in silent admiration the statue of her matchless mother, said now, "And so long could I stay here, looking upon my dear mother."

"Either forbear this transport," said Paulina to Leontes, "and let me draw the curtain; or prepare yourself for more amazement. I can make the statue move indeed; ay, and descend from off the pedestal, and take you by the hand. But then you will think, which I protest I am not, that I am assisted by some wicked powers."

"What you can make her do," said the astonished king, "I am content to hear; for it is as easy to make her speak as move."

Paulina then ordered some slow and solemn music, and to the amazement of all the beholders, the statue came down from off the pedestal, and took Leontes by the hands. The statue then began to speak, praying for blessings on her husband, and on her child, the newly-found Perdita: for the statue was no statue, but Hermione herself, the real, the living queen. Hermione had lived

these many years, never choosing that Leontes should know she was living, till she had heard Perdita was found, for though she had long forgiven the injuries which Leontes had done to herself, she could not doubt the truth of the oracle, and all could not be restored until "what was lost" was "found."

His dead queen thus restored to life, his lost daughter found, the long sorrowing Leontes could scarcely support the excess of his own happiness. His faith was restored, and the good sun shone on Leontes' kingdom once more.

Nothing but congratulations and affectionate speeches were heard on all sides. Now the delighted parents thanked Prince Florizel for loving their daughter; and now they blessed the good old shepherd for preserving their child. Greatly did Camillo and Paulina rejoice that they had lived to see so good an end of all their faithful services. Polixenes gave his blessing for his son's marriage with the beautiful Perdita, the one once lost, but now found. And Leontes and Polixenes together gave their blessing to another marriage, this one of the true and noble Camillo and the faithful and clever Paulina. And they all lived happily ever after.