

The Winter's Tale abbreviated

Act 3, Scene 2

Honor

Situation: Hermione has now been called before the court to defend herself. Leontes has directed Antigonus to “bear this female bastard to some remote and desert place quite out of our dominions, and that there thou leave it without more mercy.” He has said “I’ll not rear another’s issue.”

OFFICER: Silence.

LEONTES: Read the indictment.

OFFICER READS: Hermione, queen the worthy Leontes, King of Sicilia, thou art here accused and arraigned of high treason, in committing adultery with Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and conspiring with Camillo to take away the life of our sovereign lord the King, thy royal husband.

HERMIONE: Since what I am to say must be but that which contradicts my accusation, and the testimony on my part no other but what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me to say “Not guilty.”

Hermione to the Court

If powers divine behold our human
Actions, I doubt not that innocence can
Make false accusers blush and tyranny
Tremble at suffering endured. You, my
Lord, know my past life’s been true, and know me
For my marked self-restraint; as chaste as I
Am now unhappy. This trial is greater
Than drama, set to charm each spectator.
Behold me, a queen, the mother of a
Promising prince, but standing before what
Is a show, prating on with this to say:
I prize life much as I value grief. But
Honor ‘tis the derivative I send
To my children, and that’s what I defend.