

Hermione's Ballad

'Tongue-tied? Speak you!' My king Leontes said,
Silent, until prompted, I held my peace
Urged to persuade my husband's friend to stay
I spoke to please my lord, I did not cease.

Senseless jealousy seized upon his heart
'Too hot, too hot!' My king Leontes cried,
'To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods'
Myself accused: hands too close, smiles too wide.

My husband turned, my two children seized
My eldest son languished for want of me
My newborn daughter, delivered in prison,
Accused as a child of shame, sent to sea.

Accused before the royal tribunal
Of betrayal and infidelity.
My chastity and honor he dismissed.
Why bother? What use to say "Not guilty"?



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The oracle, the court, and Paulina
All knew the Truth. Still he refused to see
My honor and chastity true indeed.
Look for no less than death was his decree.

Retreating from the scene, my death, I staged.
Silenced, hopeless, before the loss of all.
Silent, sixteen long years, I left the court.
My hardened heart still beat for one hope small.

Still, strong, silent, I waited statuesque
Leontes, begging pardon; I refused to speak
And then one day, Perdita, returned to me
To pay homage and my blessing to seek.

For her, I preserved myself those long years
My daughter returned, I returned as well.
Then, I spoke, invoking the god's graces.
As her mother, my story I did tell.



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