

The Life and Death of King John

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SCENE I. KING JOHN'S palace.

Enter KING JOHN, QUEEN ELINOR, PEMBROKE, ESSEX, SALISBURY, and others, with CHATILLON

KING JOHN

Now, say, Chatillon, what would France with us?

CHATILLON

Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France
In my behavior to the majesty,
The borrow'd majesty, of England here.

QUEEN ELINOR

A strange beginning: 'borrow'd majesty!'

KING JOHN

Silence, good mother; hear the embassy.

CHATILLON

Philip of France, in right and true behalf
Of thy deceased brother Geffrey's son,
Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim
To this fair island and the territories,
To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,
Desiring thee to lay aside the sword
Which sways usurpingly these several titles,
And put these same into young Arthur's hand,
Thy nephew and right royal sovereign.

KING JOHN

What follows if we disallow of this?

CHATILLON

The proud control of fierce and bloody war,
To enforce these rights so forcibly withheld.

KING JOHN

Here have we war for war and blood for blood,
Controlment for controlment: so answer France.

CHATILLON

Then take my king's defiance from my mouth,
The farthest limit of my embassy.

KING JOHN

Bear mine to him, and so depart in peace:
Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France;
For ere thou canst report I will be there,
The thunder of my cannon shall be heard:
So hence! Be thou the trumpet of our wrath
And sullen presage of your own decay.
An honourable conduct let him have:
Pembroke, look to 't. Farewell, Chatillon.

Exeunt CHATILLON and PEMBROKE

QUEEN ELINOR

What now, my son! have I not ever said
How that ambitious Constance would not cease
Till she had kindled France and all the world,
Upon the right and party of her son?
This might have been prevented and made whole
With very easy arguments of love,
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.

KING JOHN

Our strong possession and our right for us.

QUEEN ELINOR

Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me:
So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
Which none but heaven and you and I shall hear.

Enter a Sheriff

ESSEX

My liege, here is the strangest controversy
Come from country to be judged by you,
That e'er I heard: shall I produce the men?

KING JOHN

Let them approach.
Our abbeyes and our priories shall pay
This expedition's charge.

Enter ROBERT and the BASTARD

What men are you?

BASTARD

Your faithful subject I, a gentleman
Born in Northamptonshire and eldest son,
As I suppose, to Robert Faulconbridge,
A soldier, by the honour-giving hand
Of Coeur-de-lion knighted in the field.

KING JOHN

What art thou?

ROBERT

The son and heir to that same Faulconbridge.

KING JOHN

Is that the elder, and art thou the heir?
You came not of one mother then, it seems.

BASTARD

Most certain of one mother, mighty king;
That is well known; and, as I think, one father:
But for the certain knowledge of that truth
I put you o'er to heaven and to my mother:
Of that I doubt, as all men's children may.

QUEEN ELINOR

Out on thee, rude man! thou dost shame thy mother
And wound her honour with this diffidence.

BASTARD

I, madam? no, I have no reason for it;
That is my brother's plea and none of mine;
The which if he can prove, a' pops me out
At least from fair five hundred pound a year:
Heaven guard my mother's honour and my land!

KING JOHN

A good blunt fellow. Why, being younger born,
Doth he lay claim to thine inheritance?

BASTARD

I know not why, except to get the land.
But once he slander'd me with bastardy:
But whether I be as true begot or no,
That still I lay upon my mother's head,
But that I am as well begot, my liege,--
Fair fall the bones that took the pains for me!--
Compare our faces and be judge yourself.
If old sir Robert did beget us both
And were our father and this son like him,
O old sir Robert, father, on my knee
I give heaven thanks I was not like to thee!

KING JOHN

Why, what a madcap hath heaven lent us here!

QUEEN ELINOR

He hath a trick of Coeur-de-lion's face;
The accent of his tongue affecteth him.
Do you not read some tokens of my son
In the large composition of this man?

KING JOHN

Mine eye hath well examined his parts
And finds them perfect Richard. Sirrah, speak,
What doth move you to claim your brother's land?

BASTARD

Because he hath a half-face, like my father.
With half that face would he have all my land:
A half-faced groat five hundred pound a year!

ROBERT

My gracious liege, when that my father lived,
Your brother did employ my father much,--

BASTARD

Well, sir, by this you cannot get my land:
Your tale must be how he employ'd my mother.

ROBERT

And once dispatch'd him in an embassy
To Germany, there with the emperor
To treat of high affairs touching that time.
The advantage of his absence took the king
And in the mean time sojourn'd at my father's;
Where how he did prevail I shame to speak,

But truth is truth: large lengths of seas and shores
Between my father and my mother lay,
As I have heard my father speak himself,
When this same lusty gentleman was got.
Upon his death-bed he by will bequeath'd
His lands to me, and took it on his death
That this my mother's son was none of his;
And if he were, he came into the world
Full fourteen weeks before the course of time.
Then, good my liege, let me have what is mine,
My father's land, as was my father's will.

KING JOHN

Sirrah, your brother is legitimate;
Your father's wife did after wedlock bear him,
And if she did play false, the fault was hers;
Which fault lies on the hazards of all husbands
That marry wives. Tell me, how if my brother,
Who, as you say, took pains to get this son,
Had of your father claim'd this son for his?
In sooth, good friend, your father might have kept
This calf bred from his cow from all the world;
In sooth he might; then, if he were my brother's,
My brother might not claim him; nor your father,
Being none of his, refuse him: this concludes;
My mother's son did get your father's heir;
Your father's heir must have your father's land.

ROBERT

Shall then my father's will be of no force
To dispossess that child which is not his?

BASTARD

Of no more force to dispossess me, sir,
Than was his will to get me, as I think.

QUEEN ELINOR

Whether hadst thou rather be a Faulconbridge
And like thy brother, to enjoy thy land,
Or the reputed son of Coeur-de-lion,
Lord of thy presence and no land beside?

BASTARD

Madam, an if my brother had my shape,
And I had his, sir Robert's his, like him;
And if my legs were two such riding-rods,
My arms such eel-skins stuff'd, my face so thin
That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose

Lest men should say 'Look, where three-farthings goes!'
And, to his shape, were heir to all this land,
Would I might never stir from off this place,
I would give it every foot to have this face;
I would not be sir Nob in any case.

QUEEN ELINOR

I like thee well: wilt thou forsake thy fortune,
Bequeath thy land to him and follow me?
I am a soldier and now bound to France.

BASTARD

Brother, take you my land, I'll take my chance.
Your face hath got five hundred pound a year,
Yet sell your face for five pence and 'tis dear.
Madam, I'll follow you unto the death.

QUEEN ELINOR

Nay, I would have you go before me thither.

BASTARD

Our country manners give our betters way.

KING JOHN

What is thy name?

BASTARD

Philip, my liege, so is my name begun,
Philip, good old sir Robert's wife's eldest son.

KING JOHN

From henceforth bear his name whose form thou bear'st:
Kneel thou down Philip, but rise more great,
Arise sir Richard and Plantagenet.

BASTARD

Brother by the mother's side, give me your hand:
My father gave me honour, yours gave land.
Now blessed by the hour, by night or day,
When I was got, sir Robert was away!

QUEEN ELINOR

The very spirit of Plantagenet!
I am thy grandam, Richard; call me so.

BASTARD

Madam, by chance but not by truth; what though?
Something about, a little from the right,
In at the window, or else o'er the hatch:
Who dares not stir by day must walk by night,
And have is have, however men do catch:
Near or far off, well won is still well shot,
And I am I, howe'er I was begot.

KING JOHN

Go, Faulconbridge: now hast thou thy desire;
A landless knight makes thee a landed squire.
Come, madam, and come, Richard, we must speed
For France, for France, for it is more than need.

BASTARD

Brother, adieu: good fortune come to thee!
For thou wast got i' the way of honesty.

Exeunt all but BASTARD

A foot of honour better than I was;
But many a many foot of land the worse.
Well, now can I make any Joan a lady.
'Good den, sir Richard!'--'God-a-mercy, fellow!'--
And if his name be George, I'll call him Peter;
For new-made honour doth forget men's names;
'Tis too respective and too sociable
For your conversion. Now your traveller,
He and his toothpick at my worship's mess,
And when my knightly stomach is sufficed,
Why then I suck my teeth and catechise
My picked man of countries: 'My dear sir,'
Thus, leaning on mine elbow, I begin,
'I shall beseech you'--that is question now;
And then comes answer like an Absey book:
'O sir,' says answer, 'at your best command;
At your employment; at your service, sir;'
'No, sir,' says question, 'I, sweet sir, at yours:'
And so, ere answer knows what question would,
Saving in dialogue of compliment,
And talking of the Alps and Apennines,
The Pyrenean and the river Po,
It draws toward supper in conclusion so.
But this is worshipful society
And fits the mounting spirit like myself,
For he is but a bastard to the time
That doth not smack of observation;
And so am I, whether I smack or no;
And not alone in habit and device,

Exterior form, outward accoutrement,
But from the inward motion to deliver
Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth:
Which, though I will not practise to deceive,
Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn;
For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.
But who comes in such haste in riding-robres?
What woman-post is this? hath she no husband
That will take pains to blow a horn before her?

Enter LADY FAULCONBRIDGE and GURNEY

O me! it is my mother. How now, good lady!
What brings you here to court so hastily?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Where is that slave, thy brother? where is he,
That holds in chase mine honour up and down?

BASTARD

My brother Robert? old sir Robert's son?
Colbrand the giant, that same mighty man?
Is it sir Robert's son that you seek so?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Sir Robert's son! Ay, thou unreverend boy,
Sir Robert's son: why scorn'st thou at sir Robert?
He is sir Robert's son, and so art thou.

BASTARD

James Gurney, wilt thou give us leave awhile?

GURNEY

Good leave, good Philip.

BASTARD

Philip! sparrow: James,
There's toys abroad: anon I'll tell thee more.

Exit GURNEY

Madam, I was not old sir Robert's son:
Sir Robert might have eat his part in me
Upon Good-Friday and ne'er broke his fast:
Sir Robert could do well: marry, to confess,
Could he get me? Sir Robert could not do it:
We know his handiwork: therefore, good mother,

To whom am I beholding for these limbs?
Sir Robert never help to make this leg.

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Hast thou conspired with thy brother too,
That for thine own gain shouldst defend mine honour?
What means this scorn, thou most untoward knave?

BASTARD

Knight, knight, good mother, Basilisco-like.
What! I am dubb'd! I have it on my shoulder.
But, mother, I am not sir Robert's son;
I have disclaim'd sir Robert and my land;
Legitimation, name and all is gone:
Then, good my mother, let me know my father;
Some proper man, I hope: who was it, mother?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Hast thou denied thyself a Faulconbridge?

BASTARD

As faithfully as I deny the devil.

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

King Richard Coeur-de-lion was thy father:
By long and vehement suit I was seduced
To make room for him in my husband's bed:
Heaven lay not my transgression to my charge!
Thou art the issue of my dear offence,
Which was so strongly urged past my defence.

BASTARD

Now, by this light, were I to get again,
Madam, I would not wish a better father.
Some sins do bear their privilege on earth,
And so doth yours; your fault was not your folly:
Needs must you lay your heart at his dispose,
Subjected tribute to commanding love,
Against whose fury and unmatched force
The aweless lion could not wage the fight,
Nor keep his princely heart from Richard's hand.
He that perforce robs lions of their hearts
May easily win a woman's. Ay, my mother,
With all my heart I thank thee for my father!
Who lives and dares but say thou didst not well
When I was got, I'll send his soul to hell.
Come, lady, I will show thee to my kin;

And they shall say, when Richard me begot,
If thou hadst said him nay, it had been sin:
Who says it was, he lies; I say 'twas not.

Exeunt

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