

# The Life and Death of King John

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## SCENE I. The French King's pavilion.

*Enter CONSTANCE, ARTHUR, and SALISBURY*

### CONSTANCE

Gone to be married! gone to swear a peace!  
False blood to false blood join'd! gone to be friends!  
Shall Lewis have Blanch, and Blanch those provinces?  
It is not so; thou hast misspoke, misheard:  
Be well advised, tell o'er thy tale again:  
It cannot be; thou dost but say 'tis so:  
I trust I may not trust thee; for thy word  
Is but the vain breath of a common man:  
Believe me, I do not believe thee, man;  
I have a king's oath to the contrary.  
Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me,  
For I am sick and capable of fears,  
Oppress'd with wrongs and therefore full of fears,  
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,  
A woman, naturally born to fears;  
And though thou now confess thou didst but jest,  
With my vex'd spirits I cannot take a truce,  
But they will quake and tremble all this day.  
What dost thou mean by shaking of thy head?  
Why dost thou look so sadly on my son?  
What means that hand upon that breast of thine?  
Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum,  
Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds?  
Be these sad signs confirmers of thy words?  
Then speak again; not all thy former tale,  
But this one word, whether thy tale be true.

### SALISBURY

As true as I believe you think them false  
That give you cause to prove my saying true.

### CONSTANCE

O, if thou teach me to believe this sorrow,  
Teach thou this sorrow how to make me die,  
And let belief and life encounter so  
As doth the fury of two desperate men  
Which in the very meeting fall and die.  
Lewis marry Blanch! O boy, then where art thou?  
France friend with England, what becomes of me?

Fellow, be gone: I cannot brook thy sight:  
This news hath made thee a most ugly man.

### **SALISBURY**

What other harm have I, good lady, done,  
But spoke the harm that is by others done?

### **CONSTANCE**

Which harm within itself so heinous is  
As it makes harmful all that speak of it.

### **ARTHUR**

I do beseech you, madam, be content.

### **CONSTANCE**

If thou, that bid'st me be content, wert grim,  
Ugly and slanderous to thy mother's womb,  
Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains,  
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,  
Patch'd with foul moles and eye-offending marks,  
I would not care, I then would be content,  
For then I should not love thee, no, nor thou  
Become thy great birth nor deserve a crown.  
But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,  
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great:  
Of Nature's gifts thou mayst with lilies boast,  
And with the half-blown rose. But Fortune, O,  
She is corrupted, changed and won from thee;  
She adulterates hourly with thine uncle John,  
And with her golden hand hath pluck'd on France  
To tread down fair respect of sovereignty,  
And made his majesty the bawd to theirs.  
France is a bawd to Fortune and King John,  
That strumpet Fortune, that usurping John!  
Tell me, thou fellow, is not France forsworn?  
Envenom him with words, or get thee gone  
And leave those woes alone which I alone  
Am bound to under-bear.

### **SALISBURY**

Pardon me, madam,  
I may not go without you to the kings.

### **CONSTANCE**

Thou mayst, thou shalt; I will not go with thee:  
I will instruct my sorrows to be proud;  
For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.

To me and to the state of my great grief  
Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great  
That no supporter but the huge firm earth  
Can hold it up: here I and sorrows sit;  
Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it.

*Seats herself on the ground*

*Enter KING JOHN, KING PHILLIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, QUEEN ELINOR, the BASTARD, AUSTRIA, and Attendants*

## **KING PHILIP**

'Tis true, fair daughter; and this blessed day  
Ever in France shall be kept festival:  
To solemnize this day the glorious sun  
Stays in his course and plays the alchemist,  
Turning with splendor of his precious eye  
The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold:  
The yearly course that brings this day about  
Shall never see it but a holiday.

## **CONSTANCE**

A wicked day, and not a holy day!

*Rising*

What hath this day deserved? what hath it done,  
That it in golden letters should be set  
Among the high tides in the calendar?  
Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,  
This day of shame, oppression, perjury.  
Or, if it must stand still, let wives with child  
Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,  
Lest that their hopes prodigiously be cross'd:  
But on this day let seamen fear no wreck;  
No bargains break that are not this day made:  
This day, all things begun come to ill end,  
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change!

## **KING PHILIP**

By heaven, lady, you shall have no cause  
To curse the fair proceedings of this day:  
Have I not pawn'd to you my majesty?

## **CONSTANCE**

You have beguiled me with a counterfeit  
Resembling majesty, which, being touch'd and tried,  
Proves valueless: you are forsworn, forsworn;  
You came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood,

But now in arms you strengthen it with yours:  
The grappling vigour and rough frown of war  
Is cold in amity and painted peace,  
And our oppression hath made up this league.  
Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings!  
A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!  
Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
Wear out the day in peace; but, ere sunset,  
Set armed discord 'twixt these perjured kings!  
Hear me, O, hear me!

## **AUSTRIA**

Lady Constance, peace!

## **CONSTANCE**

War! war! no peace! peace is to me a war  
O Lymoges! O Austria! thou dost shame  
That bloody spoil: thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward!  
Thou little valiant, great in villany!  
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!  
Thou Fortune's champion that dost never fight  
But when her humorous ladyship is by  
To teach thee safety! thou art perjured too,  
And soothest up greatness. What a fool art thou,  
A ramping fool, to brag and stamp and swear  
Upon my party! Thou cold-blooded slave,  
Hast thou not spoke like thunder on my side,  
Been sworn my soldier, bidding me depend  
Upon thy stars, thy fortune and thy strength,  
And dost thou now fall over to my foes?  
Thou wear a lion's hide! doff it for shame,  
And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

## **AUSTRIA**

O, that a man should speak those words to me!

## **BASTARD**

And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

## **AUSTRIA**

Thou darest not say so, villain, for thy life.

## **BASTARD**

And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

## **KING JOHN**

We like not this; thou dost forget thyself.

*Enter CARDINAL PANDULPH*

**KING PHILIP**

Here comes the holy legate of the pope.

**CARDINAL PANDULPH**

Hail, you anointed deputies of heaven!  
To thee, King John, my holy errand is.  
I Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal,  
And from Pope Innocent the legate here,  
Do in his name religiously demand  
Why thou against the church, our holy mother,  
So wilfully dost spurn; and force perforce  
Keep Stephen Langton, chosen archbishop  
Of Canterbury, from that holy see?  
This, in our foresaid holy father's name,  
Pope Innocent, I do demand of thee.

**KING JOHN**

What earthy name to interrogatories  
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?  
Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name  
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,  
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.  
Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England  
Add thus much more, that no Italian priest  
Shall tithes or toll in our dominions;  
But as we, under heaven, are supreme head,  
So under Him that great supremacy,  
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,  
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:  
So tell the pope, all reverence set apart  
To him and his usurp'd authority.

**KING PHILIP**

Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

**KING JOHN**

Though you and all the kings of Christendom  
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,  
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;  
And by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,  
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,  
Who in that sale sells pardon from himself,  
Though you and all the rest so grossly led  
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish,

Yet I alone, alone do me oppose  
Against the pope and count his friends my foes.

### **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

Then, by the lawful power that I have,  
Thou shalt stand cursed and excommunicate.  
And blessed shall he be that doth revolt  
From his allegiance to an heretic;  
And meritorious shall that hand be call'd,  
Canonized and worshipped as a saint,  
That takes away by any secret course  
Thy hateful life.

### **CONSTANCE**

O, lawful let it be  
That I have room with Rome to curse awhile!  
Good father cardinal, cry thou amen  
To my keen curses; for without my wrong  
There is no tongue hath power to curse him right.

### **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

There's law and warrant, lady, for my curse.

### **CONSTANCE**

And for mine too: when law can do no right,  
Let it be lawful that law bar no wrong:  
Law cannot give my child his kingdom here,  
For he that holds his kingdom holds the law;  
Therefore, since law itself is perfect wrong,  
How can the law forbid my tongue to curse?

### **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

Philip of France, on peril of a curse,  
Let go the hand of that arch-heretic;  
And raise the power of France upon his head,  
Unless he do submit himself to Rome.

### **QUEEN ELINOR**

Look'st thou pale, France? do not let go thy hand.

### **CONSTANCE**

Look to that, devil; lest that France repent,  
And by disjoining hands, hell lose a soul.

### **AUSTRIA**

King Philip, listen to the cardinal.

**BASTARD**

And hang a calf's-skin on his recreant limbs.

**AUSTRIA**

Well, ruffian, I must pocket up these wrongs, Because--

**BASTARD**

Your breeches best may carry them.

**KING JOHN**

Philip, what say'st thou to the cardinal?

**CONSTANCE**

What should he say, but as the cardinal?

**LEWIS**

Bethink you, father; for the difference  
Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,  
Or the light loss of England for a friend:  
Forego the easier.

**BLANCH**

That's the curse of Rome.

**CONSTANCE**

O Lewis, stand fast! the devil tempts thee here  
In likeness of a new untrimmed bride.

**BLANCH**

The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith,  
But from her need.

**CONSTANCE**

O, if thou grant my need,  
Which only lives but by the death of faith,  
That need must needs infer this principle,  
That faith would live again by death of need.  
O then, tread down my need, and faith mounts up;  
Keep my need up, and faith is trodden down!

**KING JOHN**

The king is moved, and answers not to this.

**CONSTANCE**

O, be removed from him, and answer well!

**AUSTRIA**

Do so, King Philip; hang no more in doubt.

**BASTARD**

Hang nothing but a calf's-skin, most sweet lout.

**KING PHILIP**

I am perplex'd, and know not what to say.

**CARDINAL PANDULPH**

What canst thou say but will perplex thee more,  
If thou stand excommunicate and cursed?

**KING PHILIP**

Good reverend father, make my person yours,  
And tell me how you would bestow yourself.  
This royal hand and mine are newly knit,  
And the conjunction of our inward souls  
Married in league, coupled and linked together  
With all religious strength of sacred vows;  
The latest breath that gave the sound of words  
Was deep-sworn faith, peace, amity, true love  
Between our kingdoms and our royal selves,  
And even before this truce, but new before,  
No longer than we well could wash our hands  
To clap this royal bargain up of peace,  
Heaven knows, they were besmear'd and over-stain'd  
With slaughter's pencil, where revenge did paint  
The fearful difference of incensed kings:  
And shall these hands, so lately purged of blood,  
So newly join'd in love, so strong in both,  
Unyoke this seizure and this kind regret?  
Play fast and loose with faith? so jest with heaven,  
Make such unconstant children of ourselves,  
As now again to snatch our palm from palm,  
Unswear faith sworn, and on the marriage-bed  
Of smiling peace to march a bloody host,  
And make a riot on the gentle brow  
Of true sincerity? O, holy sir,  
My reverend father, let it not be so!  
Out of your grace, devise, ordain, impose  
Some gentle order; and then we shall be blest



To do your pleasure and continue friends.

## **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

All form is formless, order orderless,  
Save what is opposite to England's love.  
Therefore to arms! be champion of our church,  
Or let the church, our mother, breathe her curse,  
A mother's curse, on her revolting son.  
France, thou mayst hold a serpent by the tongue,  
A chafed lion by the mortal paw,  
A fasting tiger safer by the tooth,  
Than keep in peace that hand which thou dost hold.

## **KING PHILIP**

I may disjoin my hand, but not my faith.

## **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

So makest thou faith an enemy to faith;  
And like a civil war set'st oath to oath,  
Thy tongue against thy tongue. O, let thy vow  
First made to heaven, first be to heaven perform'd,  
That is, to be the champion of our church!  
What since thou sworest is sworn against thyself  
And may not be performed by thyself,  
For that which thou hast sworn to do amiss  
Is not amiss when it is truly done,  
And being not done, where doing tends to ill,  
The truth is then most done not doing it:  
The better act of purposes mistook  
Is to mistake again; though indirect,  
Yet indirection thereby grows direct,  
And falsehood falsehood cures, as fire cools fire  
Within the scorched veins of one new-burn'd.  
It is religion that doth make vows kept;  
But thou hast sworn against religion,  
By what thou swear'st against the thing thou swear'st,  
And makest an oath the surety for thy truth  
Against an oath: the truth thou art unsure  
To swear, swears only not to be forsworn;  
Else what a mockery should it be to swear!  
But thou dost swear only to be forsworn;  
And most forsworn, to keep what thou dost swear.  
Therefore thy later vows against thy first  
Is in thyself rebellion to thyself;  
And better conquest never canst thou make  
Than arm thy constant and thy nobler parts  
Against these giddy loose suggestions:  
Upon which better part our prayers come in,  
If thou vouchsafe them. But if not, then know  
The peril of our curses light on thee

So heavy as thou shalt not shake them off,  
But in despair die under their black weight.

## **AUSTRIA**

Rebellion, flat rebellion!

## **BASTARD**

Will't not be?  
Will not a calfs-skin stop that mouth of thine?

## **LEWIS**

Father, to arms!

## **BLANCH**

Upon thy wedding-day?  
Against the blood that thou hast married?  
What, shall our feast be kept with slaughter'd men?  
Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,  
Clamours of hell, be measures to our pomp?  
O husband, hear me! ay, alack, how new  
Is husband in my mouth! even for that name,  
Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce,  
Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms  
Against mine uncle.

## **CONSTANCE**

O, upon my knee,  
Made hard with kneeling, I do pray to thee,  
Thou virtuous Dauphin, alter not the doom  
Forethought by heaven!

## **BLANCH**

Now shall I see thy love: what motive may  
Be stronger with thee than the name of wife?

## **CONSTANCE**

That which upholdeth him that thee upholds,  
His honour: O, thine honour, Lewis, thine honour!

## **LEWIS**

I muse your majesty doth seem so cold,  
When such profound respects do pull you on.

## **CARDINAL PANDULPH**

I will denounce a curse upon his head.

**KING PHILIP**

Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.

**CONSTANCE**

O fair return of banish'd majesty!

**QUEEN ELINOR**

O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

**KING JOHN**

France, thou shalt rue this hour within this hour.

**BASTARD**

Old Time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time,  
Is it as he will? well then, France shall rue.

**BLANCH**

The sun's o'erblast with blood: fair day, adieu!  
Which is the side that I must go withal?  
I am with both: each army hath a hand;  
And in their rage, I having hold of both,  
They swirl asunder and dismember me.  
Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win;  
Uncle, I needs must pray that thou mayst lose;  
Father, I may not wish the fortune thine;  
Grandam, I will not wish thy fortunes thrive:  
Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose  
Assured loss before the match be play'd.

**LEWIS**

Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies.

**BLANCH**

There where my fortune lives, there my life dies.

**KING JOHN**

Cousin, go draw our puissance together.

*Exit BASTARD*

France, I am burn'd up with inflaming wrath;  
A rage whose heat hath this condition,

That nothing can allay, nothing but blood,  
The blood, and dearest-valued blood, of France.

**KING PHILIP**

Thy rage sham burn thee up, and thou shalt turn  
To ashes, ere our blood shall quench that fire:  
Look to thyself, thou art in jeopardy.

**KING JOHN**

No more than he that threats. To arms let's hie!

*Exeunt*

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