

King John



William Shakespeare

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Act I

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, Poictiers, 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 abbeys 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 goat 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.