

King John

3.1

[Flourish.] Enter King John and King Philip [hand in hand]; Louis the Dauphin and Lady Blanche, [married]; Queen Eleanor, the Bastard, and the Duke of Austria

KING PHILIP *(to Blanche)*

'Tis true, fair daughter, and this blesseÁd 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 splendour 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 holy day.

5

CONSTANCE *(rising)*

A wicked day, and not a holy day!
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 burdens may not fall this day,
Lest that their hopes prodigiously be crossed;
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.

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KING PHILIP

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

CONSTANCE

You have beguiled me with a counterfeit
Resembling majesty, which being touched and tried
Proves valueless. You are forsworn, forsworn.
You came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood,

25

But now in arms you strengthen it with yours.
The grappling vigour and rough frown of war 30
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, God!
Let not the hours of this ungodly day 35
Wear out the day in peace, but ere sun set
Set armeAd 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 Limoges, O Austria, thou dost shame 40
That bloody spoil. Thou slave, thou wretch, thou
coward!
Thou little valiant, great in villainy;
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side;
Thou Fortune's champion, that dost never fight
But when her humorous ladyship is by 45
To teach thee safety. Thou art perjured too,
And sooth'st 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, 50
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. 55

AUSTRIA

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

BASTARD

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

AUSTRIA

Thou dar'st not say so, villain, for thy life.

BASTARD

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

KING JOHN (*to the Bastard*)

We like not this. Thou dost forget thyself. 60

Enter Cardinal Pandolf

KING PHILIP

Here comes the holy legate of the Pope.

PANDOLF

Hail, you anointed deputies of God.±±
To thee, King John, my holy errand is.
I Pandolf, 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.

65

70

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 tithe or toll in our dominions;
But as we, under God, are supreme head,
So, under him, that great supremacy
Where we do reign we will alone uphold
Without th'assistance of a mortal hand.
So tell the Pope, all reverence set apart
To him and his usurped authority.

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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

90

This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish; 95
Yet I alone, alone do me oppose
Against the Pope, and count his friends my foes.

PANDOLF

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

CONSTANCE O lawful let it be 105
 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.

PANDOLF

There's law and warrant, lady, for my curse. 110

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?

PANDOLF

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 ELEANOR

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

CONSTANCE *[to King John]*

Look to it, 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. 125

AUSTRIA

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

BASTARD Your breeches best may carry them.

KING JOHN

Philip, what sayst thou to the Cardinal?

CONSTANCE

What should he say, but as the Cardinal?

LOUIS THE DAUPHIN

Bethink you, Father, for the difference

130

Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,

Or the light loss of England for a friend.

Forgo the easier.

BLANCHE That's the curse of Rome.

CONSTANCE

O Louis, stand fast; the devil tempts thee here

In likeness of a new untrimmeÁd bride.

135

BLANCHE

The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith,

But from her need.

CONSTANCE [*to King Philip*] 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.

140

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 (*to King Philip*)

O, be removed from him, and answer well.

AUSTRIA

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

145

BASTARD

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

KING PHILIP

I am perplexed, and know not what to say.

PANDOLF

What canst thou say but will perplex thee more,

If thou stand excommunicate and cursed?

KING PHILIP

Good Reverend Father, make my person yours,

150

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; 155
 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 160
 To clap this royal bargain up of peace,
 God knows, they were besmeared and over-stained
 With slaughter's pencil, where Revenge did paint
 The fearful difference of incenseÁd kings;
 And shall these hands, so lately purged of blood, 165
 So newly joined 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, 170
 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. 175
 Out of your grace, devise, ordain, impose
 Some gentle order, and then we shall be blessed
 To do your pleasure and continue friends.

PANDOLF

All form is formless, order orderless,
 Save what is opposite to England's love. 180
 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 crazeÁd lion by the mortal paw, 185
 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.

PANDOLF

So mak'st thou faith an enemy to faith,
 And like a civil war, sett'st oath to oath, 190
 Thy tongue against thy tongue. O, let thy vow,
 First made to heaven, first be to heaven performed;
 That is, to be the champion of our Church.
 What since thou swor'st is sworn against thyself,
 And may not be performeÁd by thyself; 195
 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 200
 Is to mistake again; though indirect,
 Yet indirection thereby grows direct,
 And falsehood falsehood cures, as fire cools fire
 Within the scorcheÁd veins of one new burned.
 It is religion that doth make vows kept; 205
 But thou hast sworn against religion;
 By what thou swear'st, against the thing thou
 swear'st;
 And mak'st an oath the surety for thy troth:
 Against an oath, the truth. Thou art unsure
 To swear: swear'st only not to be forsworn±± 210
 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, 215
 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 220
 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

Wilt not be?

Will not a calf's-skin stop that mouth of thine? 225

LOUIS THE DAUPHIN

Father, to arms!

BLANCHE Upon thy wedding day?

Against the blood that thou hast married?

What, shall our feast be kept with slaughtered men?

Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,

Clamours of hell, be measures to our pomp? 230

She kneels

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 (*kneeling*) O, upon my knee 235

Made hard with kneeling, I do pray to thee,

Thou virtuous Dauphin, alter not the doom

Forethought by heaven.

BLANCHE (*to Louis the Dauphin*)

Now shall I see thy love: what motive may

Be stronger with thee than the name of wife? 240

CONSTANCE

That which upholdeth him that thee upholds:

His honour.±±O thine honour, Louis, thine honour!

LOUIS THE DAUPHIN (*to King Philip*)

I muse your majesty doth seem so cold

When such profound respects do pull you on.

PANDOLF

I will denounce a curse upon his head. 245

KING PHILIP

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

[He takes his hand from King John's hand. Blanche and Constance rise]

CONSTANCE

O, fair return of banished majesty!

QUEEN ELEANOR

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, 250

Is it as he will?±±Well then, France shall rue.

BLANCHE

The sun's o'ercast 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, 255
They whirl 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 wishes thrive. 260
Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose,
AssureÁd loss before the match be played.

LOUIS THE DAUPHIN

Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies.

BLANCHE

There where my fortune lives, there my life dies.

KING JOHN *(to the Bastard)*

Cousin, go draw our puissance together.±± 265
[Exit the Bastard]

France, I am burned 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 shall burn thee up, and thou shalt turn 270
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 [severally]