

King John

2.2

Enter Lady Constance, Arthur Duke of Brittain, and the Earl of Salisbury

CONSTANCE (to Salisbury)

Gone to be married? Gone to swear a peace?
False blood to false blood joined! Gone to be friends?
Shall Louis have Blanche, and Blanche those
provinces?

It is not so, thou hast misspoke, misheard.

Be well advised, tell o'er thy tale again. 5

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. 10

Thou shalt be punished for thus frightening me;

For I am sick and capable of fears;

Oppressed with wrongs, and therefore full of fears;

A widow husbandless, subject to fears;

A woman naturally born to fears; 15

And though thou now confess thou didst but jest,

With my vexed 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? 20

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, 25

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; 30

And let belief and life encounter so
As doth the fury of two desperate men
Which in the very meeting fall and die.
Louis marry Blanche! (*To Arthur*) O boy, then where
art thou?

France friend with England!±±What becomes of me? 35
(*To Salisbury*) 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 40
As it makes harmful all that speak of it.

ARTHUR

I do beseech you, madam, be content.

CONSTANCE

If thou that bidd'st me be content wert grim,
Ugly and sland'rous to thy mother's womb,
Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains, 45
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,
Patched 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. 50
But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune joined 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; 55

Sh'adulterates hourly with thine uncle John,
And with her golden hand hath plucked 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, 60
That strumpet Fortune, that usurping John.

(*To Salisbury*) 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 underbear.

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

65

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.

[She sits upon the ground]

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.

70

[Exeunt Salisbury and Arthur]