

JOAN. God told me, gentle Dauphin: Who appointed you from the beginning of time, through your father and your grandfather and all the line of kings, to be viceroy of His kingdom.

*The ARCHBISHOP and LA TREMOUILLE exchange a look of annoyance.*

ARCHBISHOP. Sir. The girl's answers are interesting: they show a remarkable good sense. But in a matter as delicate as this you cannot surround yourself with precautions too strict or thorough. A commission of learned theologians must question and examine her very closely. We will then discuss their report in Council, and decide if it is timely for you to give this girl a longer hearing. There's no need for her to importune you any further today. First of all I shall interrogate her myself. Come here, my daughter.

CHARLES. Not at all. *(He stops JOAN.)* Stay where you are. *(He turns to the ARCHBISHOP, taking JOAN'S hand to give himself courage.)* I was the one she recognised. I was the one she spoke to. I wish you to leave me alone with her: all of you.

ARCHBISHOP. This blunt dismissal, sir: it is quite extraordinary, it is improper! Apart from all else, you should at least think of your own security . . .

CHARLES *(fearful for a moment, but he looks at JOAN and pulls himself together)*. I am the only judge of that. *(He recites:)* Through my father, my grandfather, and all the line of kings . . . *(He winks at JOAN.)* Isn't that right? *(He turns to the others, imperturbable.)* Leave us, my lords, when the king commands it.

*They ALL bow, and go.*

CHARLES *keeps his regal pose for a moment, and then explodes with laughter.*

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They've gone, they've gone! Did I do that, or did you? It's the first time in my life I have ever made myself obeyed. *(He looks at her, suddenly anxious.)* I hope there is nothing in what the Archbishop was trying to suggest. You haven't come here to kill me? There isn't a knife hidden about you somewhere?

*He looks at her, and she smiles gravely.*

No. You reassure me. I had forgotten, among all these pirates in my court, how reassuring a smile could be. Are there many of you in my kingdom with such honest faces?

JOAN *(still smiling gravely)*. Yes, sir, very many.

CHARLES. But I never see you. Only ruffians, hypocrites, and whores: my entourage. Though of course there's my little queen, who has a certain amount of charm but not many brains. *(He goes back to his throne, his feet on the rail, and sighs)*. Well, there you are. I suppose now you have to start boring me. You're going to tell me to become a great king.

JOAN *(gently)*. Yes, Charles.

CHARLES. Don't let's bother. We shall have to stay shut up here together for an hour at least, to impress them. If you talk to me about God and the kingdom of France for an hour, I shall never last out. I propose instead we talk about something quite different. Do you play cards?

JOAN *(opening her eyes wide)*. I don't know what it is.

CHARLES. It's an amusing game they invented for Papa, to distract him during his illness. You'll see, I shall teach you. I've played so often now I've got tired of it, but I think you may like it if you've never played before. *(He goes to rummage about in a chest.)* I hope they haven't stolen them from me. They steal everything

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here. And a pack of cards, you know, costs a lot of money. Only the royal princes have them. Mine were left to me by my father. I shall never have enough money to buy myself another pack. If those devils have stolen them . . . No, here they are. (*He returns with the cards.*) You knew Papa was mad, did you? Sometimes I hope I'm really his son, so that I can be sure I'm the true king; and then, at other times I hope I'm a bastard, so that I don't have to dread going mad before I'm thirty.

JOAN (*gently*). And which of the two would you prefer, Charles?

CHARLES (*turning in surprise*). Good heavens, are you calling me Charles? This is turning out to be a most surprising day. I believe I'm not going to be bored, for once; it's marvellous.

JOAN. Not now, Charles, or ever again.

CHARLES. Extraordinary.—Which of the two would I prefer? Well, I suppose on the days when I have some courage I would rather take the risk of going mad, and be the true king; and on the days when I haven't I would rather let everything go, and retire on my twopence-ha'penny to somewhere abroad, and live in peace. Have you met Agnes?

JOAN. No.

CHARLES (*shuffling the cards*). No, of course you haven't. Retiring wouldn't do for her. And I couldn't afford her then. She is always wanting me to buy her things.

JOAN (*suddenly grave*). And today: are you feeling brave today, Charles?

CHARLES. Today? (*He ponders a moment.*) Yes, it seems to me I feel fairly brave. Not very, but fairly. Well, you saw how I packed off the Archbishop.

JOAN. How would you like to be brave all the time, from today onwards?

CHARLES (*leaning forward, interested*). Do you mean you know the secret?

JOAN. Yes.

CHARLES. Are you some sort of a witch? You needn't be afraid to tell me; it isn't something I object to. I promise you I won't repeat it. Those executions horrify me. I was taken once to see them burn a heretic. I was sick all night.

JOAN (*smiling*). No, I'm not a witch, Charles. But I know the secret.

CHARLES. Would you sell it to me, without letting the others know about it? I'm not very well off, but I could make you a draft on the Treasury.

JOAN. I will give it to you, Charles.

CHARLES (*suspiciously*). For nothing?

JOAN. Yes.

CHARLES. Then I'm not interested. A secret is either no good, or far beyond my means. Disinterested people are too rare, at any price. (*He shuffles the cards.*) I've taken to behaving like a fool, so that I shall be left in peace, but I know more than you think I know. I'm not so easily gulled.

JOAN. You know too much.

CHARLES. Too much? You can never know too much.

JOAN. Sometimes; it is possible.

CHARLES. I have to defend myself. You would soon see, if you were here in my position! If you were alone, among a lot of brutes whose one idea is to stab you

when you are least expecting it, and if you've been born a weak sort of fellow, as I was, you would soon realise the only way to steer safely through it is by being more clever than they are. And I am; much more clever. Which is why I more or less hang on to my throne.

JOAN (*puts her hand on his arm*). I shall be with you now, defending you.

CHARLES. Do you think you will?

JOAN. And I'm strong. I'm not afraid of anything.

CHARLES (*sighing*). You're very lucky! (*He deals the cards*.) Sit down on the cushion; I'm going to teach you to play cards.

JOAN (*smiling, sitting close to the throne*). All right. And then I'll teach you something.

CHARLES. What?

JOAN. Not to be afraid. And not to know too much.

CHARLES. Now pay attention. You see the cards, and these pictures on them? There's something of everything here: knaves, queens, kings: the same as in the world: and here are the commoners: spades, hearts, clubs, diamonds. Those are the troops. There are plenty of them, you can lose as many as you like. You deal the cards without looking at them, and fate either gives you a good hand, or a bad hand, and then the battle begins. The higher cards can capture the lower cards. Which do you think is the strongest?

JOAN. The king is.

CHARLES. Well, he is almost the strongest, but there's one stronger still. This card here, for instance, the single heart. Do you know what it's called?

JOAN. God, of course: because He's the only one who commands kings.

CHARLES (*annoyed*). No, it isn't at all. For goodness sake let God alone for five minutes. For the time being we're playing cards. It's called the ace.

JOAN. Then the game of cards is ridiculous. What can be stronger than a king, except God?

CHARLES. The ace, in fact. The ace, or God if you like; but there's one in each camp. You see: ace of hearts, ace of spades, ace of clubs, ace of diamonds. One for each of them. You're not so intelligent as I thought you were. Do you think the English don't say their prayers, as well as us? And, what's more, to a God who protects them, and gives them victories over us. And my cousin, the Duke of Burgundy, he has a God for Burgundy, in just the same way: a smallish one, maybe, but a bold one, a cunning one, who gets my cousin out of difficulties very well. God is with everybody, my girl. He marks the points, and keeps the score. But, in the long run, He plumps for the people who have the most money and the biggest armies. So why do you imagine He should be with France, now that France has got nothing at all?

JOAN. Perhaps for that reason: because she has nothing at all, Charles.

CHARLES (*shrugging his shoulders*). You don't know Him!

JOAN. I do. God isn't with the strongest; He is with the bravest. There's the difference. God hasn't any love for cowards.

CHARLES. Then He doesn't love me. And if He doesn't love me, why do you expect me to love Him? All He had to do was to give me some courage. I don't ask for anything better.

JOAN (*severely*). Do you think He's your nurse, with no one else to think about but you? Why can't you make the best of what you have got; I know He has made you weak in the legs. . . .

CHARLES. You've noticed that? He ought to have managed better than that. Particularly with the present fashions. It's because of my legs that Agnes can't bring herself to love me. If He had only an eye for proportion, and hadn't given me my big knees as well. . . .

JOAN. Well, I grant you that. He didn't go to much trouble over your knees. But there was something else that more concerned Him; His eye was on your head and your heart, Charles, where you most resemble Him. And there it is He makes you free, to be whatever you will. You can use them to play cards, or to outmanœuvre the Archbishop for a time, though in the end you have to pay for it; or else you can use them to make the house of Valois glorious again, and remake the kingdom. Your little queen gave you a son, Charles. What are you going to leave the boy when you die? This wretched scrap of France, nibbled by the English? If so, when he grows up, the boy will be able to say, as you did just now, that God hasn't any interest in him. You are God, Charles, to your little son; and you have to take care of him.

CHARLES (*groans*). But I keep telling you, everything frightens me.

JOAN (*coming nearer to him*). You shall have the secret now, Charles. But don't give me away when I tell you first that everything frightens me, too. Do you know why M. de la Tremouille isn't afraid of anything?

CHARLES. Because he is strong.

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JOAN. No. Because he is stupid. He never imagines anything. Wild boars, and bulls, and barrel-headed oxen are never afraid of anything, either. And I tell you this: it has been even more complicated for me to get to you than it will be for you to get to Orleans and refashion your kingdom. I had to explain to my father, and that was a bad enough beginning. He wouldn't believe I wanted anything, except to go dragging off after the soldiers; and so he beat me, and, my goodness, the English don't hit any harder than he does. And then I had to make my mother cry; there was nothing worse than that; and then to convince Beaudricourt, who didn't want to think of anything except adding one more to his list of sins. Don't think I haven't been afraid. I was afraid all the time, from the very beginning.

CHARLES. Then how have you done it?

JOAN. Just as I should have done without the fear. That's all the difficulty there is, Charles. Try it once, and see. You say: one thing is obvious, I'm frightened, which is nobody's business but mine, and now on I go. And on you go. And if you see something ahead which nothing can overcome. . . .

CHARLES. Like Tremouille enjoying one of his rages—

JOAN. Yes, if you like. Or the unshakable English facing Orleans in their fortress built like rocks. You say: Here it is—they outnumber us, their walls are as thick as the length of a giant's arm, their cannons out-thunder thunder, their arrows out-rain the rain. So be it. I'm frightened. Now I've realised how frightening it is, on we go.—And the English are so astonished, they begin to be frightened themselves, and you get through! You get through because you think deeper, imagine more, and get your fear over first. That's the secret of it.

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CHARLES. But is it always so successful?

JOAN. Always. As long as you turn and face what frightens you. But the first step has to be yours; He waits for that.

CHARLES (*after a pause*). You think we could try your secret?

JOAN. We have to try it.

CHARLES (*suddenly frightened by his temerity*). Tomorrow, perhaps. By tomorrow I shall have had time to prepare for it.

JOAN. No, Charles; now; you're ready now.

CHARLES. Do you mean that I'm ready to call the Archbishop and La Tremouille? That I'm ready to tell them that I've given you command of the army, and then sit calmly back and watch their faces?

JOAN. Absolutely ready.

CHARLES. I'm scared out of my life.

JOAN. Then the worst is over. One thing is essential: you mustn't be still frightened after you've called them. Are you sure you are as frightened as you possibly can be?

CHARLES (*his hand on his belly*). Oh yes, I agree with you.

JOAN. Wonderful! That's an enormous advantage. When they start to be frightened, you will have got over it already. The whole scheme is to be afraid first, before the battle begins. You'll soon see. I'll call them. (*She calls offstage*.) My Lord Archbishop, M. de la Tremouille! M. le Dauphin wishes to speak to you.

CHARLES (*taken by panic*). Oh dear, I'm so frightened! Goodness, goodness, I'm so frightened.

JOAN. That's it, that's right Charles; more frightened still!

CHARLES (*his teeth chattering*). I can't be more frightened: it's impossible!

JOAN. Then we have the victory! God has joined you; He says "Charles is afraid, but still he calls them." In eight hours we shall hold Orleans!

(*Enter the ARCHBISHOP and LA TREMOUILLE, surprised.*)

ARCHBISHOP. You called us, your Highness?

CHARLES (*suddenly, after a last look at JOAN*). Yes: I've come to a decision, my lord, and it also concerns you, M. de la Tremouille. I am giving the command of my royal army to this Maid here. (*He suddenly shouts.*) If you don't agree, M. de la Tremouille, I must ask you to surrender your sword to me. You are under arrest!

(*LA TREMOUILLE and the ARCHBISHOP stand petrified.*)

JOAN (*clapping her hands*). Well done! Now you know how simple it is! Do you see their faces, Charles? Look at them: do look at them! Who is frightened now, Charles?

*She bursts out laughing; CHARLES begins to laugh as well: they rock with laughter, unable to stop; and the ARCHBISHOP and LA TREMOUILLE seem turned to stone.*

(*JOAN drops suddenly on to her knees, crying*) Thank you, God!

CHARLES (*also kneeling*). On your knees, M. de la Tremouille, on to your knees! And give us your blessing, Archbishop: no hesitating: give us your blessing! Now that we've all been thoroughly frightened, we must make straight for Orleans!

LA TREMOUILLE *is on his knees, stupefied by the blow.*

*The ARCHBISHOP, bewildered, mechanically gives his blessing.*