



VERY LITTLE IS KNOWN
ABOUT OUR KING JOHN
HE RULED THIRTY YEARS
BUT NO BATTLE HE WON.
HE CONQUERED NO LAND
HE STAYED IN HIS OWN
NO WARS AND NO BLOODSHED
NO GLORY. POOR JOHN.

The King's Fester.



by **andré orbéliani**

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KING JOHN'S JESTER.

by
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Once upon a time, in a far away country
King John was ruling over his happy subjects.
People were praising their mighty ruler
Who was wise, merciful but sturdy.

It so happened, one unfortunate morning
As the King was riding in his gilded carriage
That an axle broke without warning
And the carriage fell over.

King John was unhurt, but angry
His Royal Person was dishonoured.
Some onlookers burst laughing.
All the guilty will be severely punished.

In this mishap nobody was guilty,
No one approached the Royal carriage
Nobody had tempered with the axle;
Surely the mishap was a deed of witchcraft.

King John wanted to behead the coachman,
The grooms, and the laughing onlookers
But suddenly a minstrel stepped forward
And sang a ballad about King John's mercy.

This minstrel was a flimsy fellow
Thin and small in his appearance
But he sang with a voice of a giant
And it seemed to King John very funny.

King John burst laughing,
"Hell with you all," said the Ruler
Today I will behead no one,
But this dumb little fellow."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," said the minstrel
"I will be singing today with the Angels
Before the Almighty King of Heavens:
I will praise King John's mercy.

"I don't want you to sing about me
In the presence of the Almighty.
He may think I am an ogre or something.
I have changed my mind, I will not behead you."

"I will take you into my palace,
And you will be my jester
And I will spank you on the occasion
When you fail to amuse me."

"Gracious Majesty," said the minstrel,
"I will do everything in my power
To make your Majesty hilarious,
As by laughing you display mercy."

"I am a merciful king, everybody knows that
and all my subjects love me.
I don't need your jokes for my glory.
But beware of the spanking."

So the minstrel became a jester.
And that starts our story.

...ooOoo...

The little Jester was cautious
He did not make fun of people.
He avoided unsuitable jesting
And he kept his own little honour.

The Jester ate with the servants
And drank beer in the taverns,
And all the gossip and tattle
He memorized it forever.

He knew how to distinguish
The true and the important
From so much useless rubbish
And then he came out with a story.

And he put the story into music
And he sang it before his master.
And before all the court assembled
And the King praised the little Jester.

The courtiers were not all happy
About the Jester's ballads
Everybody had something in hiding
Everyone feared indiscretion.

King John had a confident
A bodyguard he trusted absolutely
This man was a husky giant,
The feared and hated Black Knight.

About that frightening soldier
An eulogy sang the Jester.
He praised the Knight's high-mindness
Towards an enemy when he met him.

The Black Knight found the Duke of Oxfram
Sick and disabled lost in a forest.
He did not slay this perfidious coward
But carried the Duke to his castle.

Everyone at the court was frightened
Expecting King John's resentment,
As they knew that the Duke of Oxfram
Was the most hateful of King John's foeman.

Looking onto the Black Knight's confusion
King John burst laughing.
He said that his faithful servant
Acted on his own King John's orders.

And all the noblemen present
And all the fair ladies in the palace
And all the people in the country
Praised their Sovereign's high-mindness.

...oooOoo...

The white Prince was rich and handsome,
His castle built of white marble,
His thoroughbred steed was snow white
And he was a squire to ladies.

The White Prince believed in goodness
He loved to be complimented.
He was generous and friendly.
Sycophany was his surrounding.

Many mocked his vanity and manners.
Many extorted his money without compunction.
He was considered simple minded and stupid.
Those whom he obliged despised him also.

But the Jester sang about a benefactor
Who sincerely wanted to help the needy
Who was misunderstood by evil minded people
Who swindled of his money.

Hearing this the Prince became angry
And he boxed on the ear the little Jester
That made King John hilarious
And all the court was laughing
And the Prince went away confounded.

...ooOoo...

The Archbishop was very demanding.
Chastity and fasting was his motto,
Pleasure lead to sin and damnation.
The saintly man lived to his own standards.

The Archbishop was haughty by conviction.
He was God's messenger facing the people.
A lack of respect to his highly person
Would deny the truth of the religion.

But the little Jester heard of a story
And composed a ballade about the Archbishop
Never mentioning the name of His Highness
Or any connection to living persons.

The Jester sang about a noble lady
Who fell in love with a young abbot.
She lost her virtue and entered a convent.
For a life long penitence of her misdoing.

Whereas the handsome little abbot
Remained innocent as an angel
And rose to the top of the clergy
As a saintly man and severe preacher.

Everyone at the court knew the story.
Everyone looking at the Archbishop
Could point at the former little abbot
And the King fell off the throne laughing.

The Saint Archbishop got so angry,
That he would excommunicate the Jester
The King and all the noble laughers,
But he did not dare to formulate a sentence.

And all the noblemen present
And all the fair ladies of the palace
And all the people in the kingdom,
Were chanting the ballad of the Jester.

...ooOoo...

The Chancellor was the highest in the Kingdom.
He provided King John with money.
He took care of the State and the Army
King John trusted him absolutely.

But the Chancellor did not trust the Jester
He feared indiscretion and spying.
So the Jester had to swear on his salvation
That he would never mingle in state business.

This promise was recorded
In the book of the Law of the Kingdom
In the presence of the Supreme Council
So that the Jester was silenced forever.

...ooOoo...

THE BLACK KNIGHT.

It came to pass that the Knight was wounded
In a fight with a King John's favourite.
And it made King John angry,
And the Knight was brought home and abandoned.

Now nobody feared the dishonoured soldier.
His men hated his temper
No one had pity for the bully
Let him die without confession.

The Jester came and took care of the giant,
He dressed his wounds and called a doctor
He prepared his food and his medicine
And he stayed overnight with his patient.

And then sitting at the sick man's bolster
He sang about the high deeds of his patient
Who by virtue of his position
Had to be tough, merciless and cruel.

The Jester knew the secrets of the Black Knight
His generosity to the next of kin of his victims.
He helped them with his own money,
Even at the risk of his own position.

The Jester praised many noble actions
That the Black Knight was concealing
In order to be feared and respected
By the enemies of his master.

And the Black Knight was comforted
About his own damnation;
Could it be that the Almighty
Would listen to the song of the Jester?

So the man who was dying,
Hated and cursed by all the living
Forsaken and despised by his master,
And forgotten by the religion,

This man departed with hope of salvation.

...ooOoo...

THE WHITE PRINCE.

It came to pass that the White Prince lost his fortune
His creditors came to sell his castle.
They took away his gilded carriage
His white steed and all his belongings.

So the White Prince found shelter
In a poor shepherds's cabin
Who was happy to help his former master,
With honour and respect, as was the custom.

Now the Jester knew what was happened
In the White Prince's province
And how he was ruined
And who got all his money.

How a great dearth happened
And how hungry people came begging
And as usual the Prince could not refuse them.
And he opened food centers feeding the needy.

But the hungry were so many,
So miserably sick and destitute
That feeding them the Prince spent a fortune
He made appeal to the rich of the province.

But they refused to make donations
They offered their money to be borrowed
At an interest of usurers,
And the White Prince accepted.

And before the court the Jester was singing
How the White Prince was indebted
Even when the dearth was over,
And how dishonest people got his money.

King John ordered an investigation
Into the spending of the White Prince
And it was found that the little Jester
Told the truth about his feeding the hungry.

King John ordered the Prince to come before him.
And he praised the generous donator
And he appointed him governor of the province
Where he had fed the population.

The Chancellor was given orders
To tax the usurers out of their dishonest income.
So the Prince got all the honour,
And the King got all the money.

And all the noblemen present
And all the fair ladies of the Palace
And all the people of the kingdom
Were praising their Sovereign for his fairness.

...ooOoo...

THE ARCHBISHOP.

And it came to pass that The Archbishop got ailing.
And no one doctor could help him.
And he understood that his time was over
Now he would have to face the Almighty.

His sins that he so proudly rejected
Flooded his mind and his conscience.
Was he right to identify himself with his title?
Was his pride not a personal passion?

The Bishop needed penitence for salvation
But his confessor absolved him without hearing,
The clergy made a saint of him before the faithful
And the saint man suffered hell even before dying.

The Saint Bishop called the little Jester
As he knew the man to be humble
And he wanted to have an opinion
About this concern of the sin of elatness.

And the Jester kneeled before the Saint Bishop
And he kissed the ring on his finger,
And he looked at the Bishop with compassion
And he shed some tears on the bedding.

And the Bishop told the little Jester
His concern at being proud and haughty.

But the Jester said unto the Bishop
That his penitence of pride was accomplished.
As the Bishop in all his splendor.
Asked the advice of a jester.

But the Bishop replied and told the Jester
This penitence was not sufficient
The clergy and the laymen would praise him
And they would expect him to perform marvels,
And that would fill his heart with pleasure.

And the Jester said unto the Bishop,
"Your Grace should mock those who praise you
Try to tell them something foolish,
Show them your real humble nature."

"How can I tell them something foolish?
They believe any word I am saying,
Any nonsense they take for granted,
Much harm to faith can be done being foolish.

"Well," said the Jester, "Tell nothing
Do not answer to praise or worship.
Make them think you are insane or inspired.
Say cock-a-doodle-doo like a rooster."

Hearing this the Bishop got angry.
He cursed the stupid fellow.
He chased him out of his palace
And forbade him access to the churches.

But with time, his sickness progressing
And the fear of damnation increasing,
No help came from praying and fasting.
Did the Lord forsake his unworthy servant?

So one morning, when a priest came for a blessing
He answered with an angry cry of a rooster,
And he proceeded with this cry all day long
And in the evening he peacefully departed.

Now there was a very great confusion
About the sanctity of the Bishop.
The clergy wanted him proclaimed holy.
Popular rumor said "Sordid possession."

King John decided for a modest burial
In the Bishop's native village
Far away from his capital city
The King was against the clergy's pretention.

Right at the burial a miracle happened
Someone was healed - and someone recovered
And the haughty Archbishop was proclaimed holy.
And King John made a sanctuary of his resting chapel.

And all the noblemen present
And all the fair ladies of the Palace
And all the people of the kingdom.
Praised the wisdom of King John, their Sovereign.

...ooOoo...

THE JESTER.

And it came to pass that the Jester vanished
He had been seen near the Chancellor's palace
Begging access to the mighty master,
Arguing with guards and porters.

The King missed his tiny Jester,
He ordered a search throughout the Kingdom
But no one had seen the little fellow;
Maybe people were fearful of speaking.

One day a great conspiracy was discovered.
The Chancellor had betrayed his master,
But he escaped out of the Kingdom
Carrying away much of King John's treasure.

The little Jester was found in a dungeon
Deep in the caves of the Chancellor's castle
He was unhurt but hungry and ailing
And in this state appeared before his Master.

"What happened to you, little Jester?"
Said the King with benevolence.

"How could it happen that this horrible traitor
Took hold of your precious person?"

"Gracious Majesty," answered the Jester
I went myself to the Chancellor's office.
I had discovered the treason beforehand
I tried to talk the Chancellor out of this action.

"You fool!" cried the King in excitement
You discovered the treason before it happened
And you tried to talk the scoundrel out of betrayal
Instead of warning me, your master.

"Gracious Majesty," answered the Jester,
"I have sworn on my soul and salvation
And on the head of my children, if any,
And on the head of my parents, if living."

"That I will never mention state business,
In song or speech or writing.
It was written in the book of Law of the Kingdom.
And witnessed by the State Council."

"But I am your Master, the King and the Ruler
Surely you had to warn me presto.
This is the duty of any faithful subject.
I cannot trust you, you will die beheaded."

"May I beg Your Majesty one last favour,
Will you please add an amendment
Into the book of the Law of the Kingdom
That nothing of it applies to your Gracious Person.

"Hell with you," said the King angry,
"You have always a way to outsmart me.
Get out of my palace and my Kingdom.
Here is some money for your journey."

Since then the Jester recovered his freedom
Of a nomad and homeless Minstrel.
And went over the world singing his ballads.
People loved his songs and provided for his living.

The Minstrel sang about King John the wise man.
Who promised punishment to many
And finally harmed no one.
He sang about the fearful Black Knight.

And about the love of the noble lady
Who wanted her lover to be a great man.
And he sang about a vain Prince
Who sincerely believed in goodness.

The Minstrel composed many ballads
And some of them were forgotten
And some were forbidden and banished.
But he recalls them all and forever.

All of us are somewhat greedy
And some are haughty, and some dishonest,
This one is vane, and the other lazy.
And the world is full of no good people.

That's what we think, but the tiny Jester
He looks deeper in the eyes of the culprit.
He looks and discovers a precious treasure
And he sings a ballad before the Almighty.

THE END.

