

Gilded Lily in Lion's Mouth

By

Ivo de Jager

07740328224
dejagerivo@gmail.com
www.ivos.space

Cast of Characters

Richard I of England: 32, freshly crowned king of England, weathered by battle

Philip II of France: 24, king of France, elegant and wily

Christmas 1189. RICHARD sits in his Aquitaine rooms. The place is richly decorated, as befits a king. There is a low table with a carafe of brandywine and a few cups. RICHARD swirls his cup, brooding, then lays a weary head in his hands.

A knock on the door. Pause. Another knock.

PHILIP enters with a wrapped package.

PHILIP

I take it the silence is a welcome?

He waits for RICHARD's response. Nothing.

PHILIP

Very well.

He sits at the table and presents the package to RICHARD. As RICHARD unwraps it, PHILIP pours himself a cup of wine.

PHILIP

Merry Christmas.

The gift is a tunic made of fine materials.

RICHARD

A tunic?

PHILIP

Bearing your coat of arms. I had it commissioned specially for Richard the Lionheart, new King of England.

RICHARD

Indeed.

PHILIP

Please try to contain your enthusiasm. Think of decorum.

RICHARD

I'm in no mood for your barbs.

PHILIP

And I'm in no mood for your moods. Your brothers John and Geoffrey are respectively abroad and entombed. You're king. It's Christmas! Whatever is there to sulk about?

RICHARD

Johnny came back yesterday.

PHILIP

Ah, that explains it.

RICHARD

Shush, Philip.

Pause.

RICHARD

Father's dead.

PHILIP

Is that all?

RICHARD

Is it little?

PHILIP

I should think you'd be used to the idea after years of spiteful battles. Was his demise not your aim?

RICHARD

Henry may have been a foe, but he was my father above all else. I didn't expect to... miss him. Miss what we had.

PHILIP

And what is that?

RICHARD

The game. The hunt.

PHILIP is amused.

PHILIP

If it's an enemy you want, I can change faces.

RICHARD

Both of them?

PHILIP

All of them.

RICHARD

Don't the face of someone who cares for me.

PHILIP

That one is always on.

RICHARD

Oh? You said differently not too long ago.

PHILIP

Come now. Isn't my fighting by your side proof enough?

RICHARD

You only agreed to help against my father if I gave you Anjou and Normandy.

PHILIP

Well, friendship alone won't sustain my kingdom, you understand. I would have thought my loyalty would override a comment made seven years ago.

RICHARD

You would think so.

Pause.

RICHARD

You don't know how much it hurt - still hurts.

PHILIP

Do you know how much you hurt me, Richard?

RICHARD

I loved you. I love you.

PHILIP

I had to love you. Your father stripped mine of any dignity in court, and you did as much for me in life.

RICHARD

Dignity. You were fifteen. John's reputation was far worse at that age.

PHILIP

(sharply)

I am not like your brother. You were twenty-four. I didn't know how to love, before. I don't know that I do now. I only know you.

RICHARD

Your wife.

PHILIP

She gave me little Louis, the county of Artois. Not much else. If I hurt you, you destroyed me.

They sit in silence. Elsewhere, musicians start playing a Christmas tune.

RICHARD

Can I still count on you for the Crusade?

PHILIP

The thing's all planned. I can hardly withdraw now.

RICHARD

Good. Less lonesome travelling with family.

PHILIP

Family?

RICHARD drinks. PHILIP stares at him.

PHILIP

I've reigned for a decade. I am far from a boy. So why do you treat me like one?

RICHARD

I treat you with the respect due to a king.

PHILIP

I'm as much your family as John is mine.

RICHARD

That's not true.

PHILIP

I'm not your wife, or whatever sordid fantasy you entertain, Richard. I am Philip Augustus, King of France.

RICHARD takes PHILIP's hand.

RICHARD

Blood brothers.

PHILIP snatches his hand away.

PHILIP

No brothers would do as we've done. You think I'm yours because you've had me.

RICHARD

Then I'm your as much as you're mine.

RICHARD comes closer, and speaks more urgently.

RICHARD

I love you, Philip.

PHILIP

Stop it.

RICHARD

I named him after you.

PHILIP

Your prize stallion?

RICHARD

My son.

PHILIP

RICHARD

PHILIP

What "son?"

RICHARD

My only son. A bastard. His mother knows, my mother knows. And now you.

PHILIP

PHILIP

You truly mean it.

RICHARD

Laugh at this sentimental fool.

PHILIP is uncertain. He moves to embrace RICHARD, stops just before touching him.

PHILIP

Then we would have to laugh at each other, and that would be silly.

RICHARD whips toward him, surprised.

PHILIP

I think of that night often. Those few hours are fresh as morning frost, just as cold. But the memories endure. I can't turn you away completely, not even in my own mind. All the power God has given me can't rend these tender feelings. I hate it.

RICHARD

You haven't kissed me in years.

PHILIP

Haven't I?

RICHARD

I've kissed you. It's not the same.

PHILIP

Don't ask for the moon just yet.

RICHARD leans in. PHILIP doesn't move. RICHARD stops, close.

RICHARD

You will kiss me.

PHILIP

Probably.

RICHARD

You love me.

PHILIP

Possibly.

RICHARD

We'll go together to the Holy Land. You'll join me in Marseilles and we'll reclaim the territory together.

PHILIP

If you persist in giving me these disingenuous orders, the one place I definitely won't join you tonight is your bed.

RICHARD

PHILIP

I will see you off, but we will not depart together. I have things to resolve with Barbarossa -

RICHARD

That Austrian imbecile -

PHILIP

- that your temper would spoil. You will come a week after me, and we'll reconquer Christendom.

RICHARD

Philip -

PHILIP

Hush.

PHILIP comes close. They almost kiss.

Suddenly, a triumphant trumpeting sounds through the castle.

RICHARD

Mother.

PHILIP

The gorgon Eleanor arrives. Will we turn to stone when we meet her?

RICHARD

I've survived so-far.

PHILIP

Whether by luck or skill remains a mystery.

PHILIP makes to stand. RICHARD grabs PHILIP's arms.

RICHARD

She can wait.

PHILIP shrugs him off and stands up.

PHILIP

So can you. It's time to play the host. Come.

RICH

If I must.

PHILIP

You must. And if you do it well, perhaps you'll earn your kiss.

They exit.

End.