

King John

4.3

*Enter Arthur Duke of Brittain on the walls,
disguised as a ship-boy*

ARTHUR

The wall is high, and yet will I leap down.
Good ground, be pitiful, and hurt me not.
There's few or none do know me; if they did,
This ship-boy's semblance hath disguised me quite.
I am afraid, and yet I'll venture it. 5
If I get down and do not break my limbs,
I'll find a thousand shifts to get away.
As good to die and go, as die and stay.

He leaps down

O me! My uncle's spirit is in these stones.
Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones! 10

He dies

*Enter the Earls of Pembroke and Salisbury, and Lord
Bigot*

SALISBURY

Lords, I will meet him at Saint Edmundsbury.
It is our safety, and we must embrace
This gentle offer of the perilous time.

PEMBROKE

Who brought that letter from the Cardinal?

SALISBURY

The Count Melun, a noble lord of France, 15
Who's private with me of the Dauphin's love;
'Tis much more general than these lines import.

BIGOT

Tomorrow morning let us meet him then.

SALISBURY

Or rather, then set forward, for 'twill be
Two long days' journey, lords, or ere we meet. 20

Enter the Bastard

BASTARD

Once more today well met, distempered lords.
The King by me requests your presence straight.

SALISBURY

The King hath dispossessed himself of us.
We will not line his thin bestaineÁd cloak
With our pure honours, nor attend the foot 25
That leaves the print of blood where'er it walks.
Return and tell him so; we know the worst.

BASTARD

Whate'er you think, good words I think were best.

SALISBURY

Our griefs and not our manners reason now.

BASTARD

But there is little reason in your grief. 30

Therefore 'twere reason you had manners now.

PEMBROKE

Sir, sir, impatience hath his privilege.

BASTARD

'Tis true±±to hurt his master, no man else.

SALISBURY

This is the prison.

He sees Arthur's body

What is he lies here?

PEMBROKE

O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty! 35

The earth had not a hole to hide this deed.

SALISBURY

Murder, as hating what himself hath done,

Doth lay it open to urge on revenge.

BIGOT

Or when he doomed this beauty to a grave,

Found it too precious-princely for a grave. 40

SALISBURY *(to the Bastard)*

Sir Richard, what think you? You have beheld.

Or have you read or heard; or could you think,

Or do you almost think, although you see,

That you do see? Could thought, without this object,

Form such another? This is the very top, 45

The height, the crest, or crest unto the crest,

Of murder's arms; this is the bloodiest shame,

The wildest savagery, the vilest stroke

That ever wall-eyed wrath or staring rage

Presented to the tears of soft remorse. 50

PEMBROKE

All murders past do stand excused in this,
And this, so sole and so unmatched,
Shall give a holiness, a purity,
To the yet-unbegotten sin of times,
And prove a deadly bloodshed but a jest, 55
Example by this heinous spectacle.

BASTARD

It is a damneÁd and a bloody work,
The graceless action of a heavy hand±±
If that it be the work of any hand.

SALISBURY

If that it be the work of any hand? 60
We had a kind of light what would ensue:
It is the shameful work of Hubert's hand,
The practice and the purpose of the King;
From whose obedience I forbid my soul,
Kneeling before this ruin of sweet life, 65
And breathing to his breathless excellence
The incense of a vow, a holy vow,
Never to taste the pleasures of the world,
Never to be infected with delight,
Nor conversant with ease and idleness, 70
Till I have set a glory to this hand
By giving it the worship of revenge.

PEMBROKE AND BIGOT

Our souls religiously confirm thy words.
Enter Hubert

HUBERT

Lords, I am hot with haste in seeking you.
Arthur doth live; the King hath sent for you. 75

SALISBURY

O, he is bold, and blushes not at death!±±
Avaunt, thou hateful villain, get thee gone!

HUBERT

I am no villain.

SALISBURY Must I rob the law?

He draws his sword

BASTARD

Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again.

SALISBURY

Not till I sheathe it in a murderer's skin. 80

HUBERT (*drawing his sword*)

Stand back, Lord Salisbury, stand back, I say!
By heaven, I think my sword's as sharp as yours.
I would not have you, lord, forget yourself,
Nor tempt the danger of my true defence,
Lest I, by marking of your rage, forget
Your worth, your greatness and nobility.

85

BIGOT

Out, dunghill! Dar'st thou brave a nobleman?

HUBERT

Not for my life; but yet I dare defend
My innocent life against an emperor.

SALISBURY

Thou art a murderer.

HUBERT

Do not prove me so;
Yet I am none. Whose tongue soe'er speaks false,
Not truly speaks; who speaks not truly, lies.

90

PEMBROKE

Cut him to pieces!

BASTARD (*drawing his sword*) Keep the peace, I say!

SALISBURY

Stand by, or I shall gall you, Falconbridge.

BASTARD

Thou wert better gall the devil, Salisbury.
If thou but frown on me, or stir thy foot,
Or teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame,
I'll strike thee dead. Put up thy sword betime,
Or I'll so maul you and your toasting-iron
That you shall think the devil is come from hell.

95

100

BIGOT

What wilt thou do, renowneÁd Falconbridge,
Second a villain and a murderer?

HUBERT

Lord Bigot, I am none.

BIGOT

Who killed this prince?

HUBERT

'Tis not an hour since I left him well.
I honoured him, I loved him, and will weep
My date of life out for his sweet life's loss.

105

SALISBURY

Trust not those cunning waters of his eyes,

For villainy is not without such rheum,
And he, long traded in it, makes it seem
Like rivers of remorse and innocence. 110
Away with me, all you whose souls abhor
Th'uncleanly savours of a slaughter-house,
For I am stifled with this smell of sin.

BIGOT

Away toward Bury, to the Dauphin there.

PEMBROKE

There, tell the King, he may enquire us out. 115
Exeunt Pembroke, Salisbury, and Bigot

BASTARD

Here's a good world! Knew you of this fair work?
Beyond the infinite and boundless reach
Of mercy, if thou didst this deed of death
Art thou damned, Hubert.

HUBERT Do but hear me, sir. 120

BASTARD Ha! I'll tell thee what:

Thou'rt damned as black±±nay nothing is so black±±
Thou art more deep damned than Prince Lucifer;
There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell
As thou shalt be if thou didst kill this child. 125

HUBERT

Upon my soul±±

BASTARD

If thou didst but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair;
And if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb
Will serve to strangle thee; a rush will be a beam 130
To hang thee on; or wouldst thou drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon
And it shall be, as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up.
I do suspect thee very grievously. 135

HUBERT

If I in act, consent, or sin of thought
Be guilty of the stealing that sweet breath
Which was embounded in this beauteous clay,
Let hell want pains enough to torture me.
I left him well.

BASTARD	Go bear him in thine arms.	140
	I am amazed, methinks, and lose my way Among the thorns and dangers of this world.	
	<i>Hubert takes up Arthur in his arms</i>	
	How easy dost thou take all England up! From forth this morsel of dead royalty, The life, the right, and truth of all this realm	145
	Is fled to heaven, and England now is left To tug and scramble, and to part by th' teeth The unowed interest of proud swelling state. Now for the bare-picked bone of majesty Doth doggeÁd war bristle his angry crest,	150
	And snarleth in the gentle eyes of peace; Now powers from home and discontents at home Meet in one line, and vast confusion waits, As doth a raven on a sick-fall'n beast, The imminent decay of wrested pomp.	155
	Now happy he whose cloak and cincture can Hold out this tempest. Bear away that child, And follow me with speed. I'll to the King. A thousand businesses are brief in hand, And heaven itself doth frown upon the land.	160
	<i>Exeunt [severally]</i>	