

PROVOST Come hither, sirrah. Can you cut off a man's head?

POMPEY If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can; but if he be a married man, he's his wife's head, and I can never cut off a woman's head. 5

PROVOST Come, sir, leave me your snatches, and yield me a direct answer. Tomorrow morning are to die Claudio and Barnardine. Here is in our prison a common executioner, who in his office lacks a helper. If you will take it on you to assist him, it shall redeem you from your gyves; if not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping, for you have been a notorious bawd. 10

POMPEY Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman. I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner. 15

PROVOST What ho, Abhorson!—Where's Abhorson there? *Enter Abhorson* 20

ABHORSON Do you call, sir?

PROVOST Sirrah, here's a fellow will help you tomorrow in your execution. If you think it meet, compound with him by the year and let him abide here with you; if not, use him for the present and dismiss him. He cannot plead his estimation with you; he hath been a bawd. 25

ABHORSON A bawd, sir? Fie upon him! He will discredit our mystery.

PROVOST Go to, sir; you weigh equally. A feather will turn the scale. 30 *He exits.*

POMPEY Pray, sir, by your good favor—for surely, sir, a good favor you have, but that you have a hanging look—do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?

ABHORSON Ay, sir, a mystery. 35

POMPEY Painting, sir, I have heard say, is a mystery; and your whores, sir, being members of my occupation, using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery; but what mystery there should be in hanging, if I should be hanged, I cannot imagine. 40

ABHORSON Sir, it is a mystery.

POMPEY Proof?

ABHORSON Every true man's apparel fits your thief. *Enter Provost.*

PROVOST Are you agreed?

POMPEY Sir, I will serve him, for I do find your hangman is a more penitent trade than your bawd. He doth oftener ask forgiveness. 50

PROVOST, *to Abhorson* You, sirrah, provide your block and your axe tomorrow, four o'clock.

ABHORSON, *to Pompey* Come on, bawd. I will instruct thee in my trade. Follow. 55

POMPEY I do desire to learn, sir; and I hope, if you have occasion to use me for your own turn, you shall find me yare. For truly, sir, for your kindness, I owe you a good turn. *Pompey and Abhorson exit.*

PROVOST, *to Officer* Call hither Barnardine and Claudio. 60

Th' one has my pity; not a jot the other, Being a murderer, though he were my brother.