

Seven Ladies Macbeth

by

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DESCRIPTION

What came before Lady Macbeth became Lady Macbeth?

CHARACTERS

- GRUOCH (later, Lady Macbeth)
- ELFRIDA (mother of Lady Macbeth)/DUNCAN/GENTLEWOMAN
- SOLDIER/GILLACOMGAIN (first husband)/MACBETH's SQUIRE/DOCTOR/MACDUFF
- MACBETH
- NURSE/BISHOP/SINT (can be played by a male or female)
- CHORUS OF CROWS/GRUOCH'S ATTENDANTS/THE 3 WITCHES

CHORUS will wear half-masks made to look like crows.

There is nothing but interpretation.

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Scene 1: First Lady

Blackness. In the blackness, the sound of ELFRIDA, the queen, in carnal delight and distress—a rising wail halfway between pleasure and lamentation, with a final crescendo halfway between pleasure and a snarl.

As this happens, a light up on young GRUOCH. When ELFRIDA is finished, a light up on ELFRIDA slipping on a simple rough cotton caftan. They sit apart, at some distance. They hold each other's gaze, then GRUOCH looks away.

ELFRIDA: Gruoch?

We named you Gruoch—I don't know why.

I don't think you can change it.

The name sounds like it crawled out of the throats of crows.

Would you like me to remember for you

how your world began? Well?

Not that you have many memories—

GRUOCH: I heard—it—they—the screams—your screams—they—shook me—as I—

GRUOCH makes a sliding motion with her hand: slipping out of the womb. ELFRIDA mockingly imitates her.

ELFRIDA: My obligatory motherly screams, my obstetrical aria—

GRUOCH: Did I—hurt—

ELFRIDA: As I was saying, you don't have many choices about remembering, but do you have some. Well, two.

GRUOCH: I don't want to choose.

ELFRIDA: Three, then.

GRUOCH: I want to go back.

ELFRIDA: Not one of the three, I'm afraid.

GRUOCH: I want to go back. To there.

ELFRIDA slaps her own belly.

ELFRIDA: To the queen's labyrinth?
To the garden of breedin'?

GRUOCH: Please.

ELFRIDA: That desire makes you much too much like your father—

GRUOCH: What—

ELFRIDA: Who.

GRUOCH: Who is he?

ELFRIDA: Too much like any man,
which means not enough—

GRUOCH: I don't know "man" or "any" or—

ELFRIDA: Always wanting to adjourn themselves
To some moist salty female darkness—
Remember that.

GRUOCH: I don't know what you're saying.

ELFRIDA: I did not spit you into the light
for you to want such things.

GRUOCH: Can't I—please go [back]—

ELFRIDA: You have had your last taste of paradise, daughter—
even now, even though it's still early in your life,
Eden has melted down into a sticky hungering
common among the common and uncommon alike—
That sticks—

ELFRIDA grabs her throat.

ELFRIDA:—here—
Doesn't it?
Panging at you forever.
So much easier to hope for better times
when you hadn't been born.
Your birth shows me
what an unraveling fact
my life is—
too bad.

GRUOCH looks crestfallen, disheartened.

ELFRIDA: I will embrace you,
if that is something
you think you want.

*GRUOCH gets up, ELFRIDA gets up. They embrace each other from a distance,
without touching. ELFRIDA, for a moment, softens.*

ELFRIDA: I think I am heartily sorry.

GRUOCH: What are my other choices?

*But light out on ELFRIDA. At her feet, GRUOCH finds a sword and buckler. She
straps it on without hesitation, stares at it. A sound of wind comes up along with the
calls of crows.*

GRUOCH: How did I know how to do that?

*GRUOCH stares into the darkness, half a smile on her face. Out of the darkness
NURSE appears.*

GRUOCH: Nurse.

NURSE: I will answer to that.

GRUOCH: Why did doing that come so easily to me?
And feel so—so—

NURSE: Is “good” the word you want?

The CHORUS OF CROWS appears. They speak GRUOCH's name as if it came from their throats.

CHORUS: Gruoch!

GRUOCH: Good?

CHORUS: An indifferent spasm
of royal fluids—
and Gruoch comes—

NURSE adjusts the buckler.

NURSE: It would be good for you to begin forgetting—
her, for starters—
all the bastards.

GRUOCH: Forgetting my mother would be good?

NURSE: She and the others have already made you too old for your own good.

GRUOCH: I am completely lost.

CHORUS: When the child's tongue-tie
is cut at birth—
when that skin-thread holding
the mouth-bell's clapper is snipped—
snip!—
the one who had been muted,
the one forced by biology
to play the stuttering idiot,
now spits out rhyme, releases sense—
this is how Gruoch will suffer—
the umbilical cut now forces her
to learn the sort of knowledge
that can only turn into
a perpetual lack of wisdom—

NURSE waves her arms to shoo the birds away. They leave. NURSE smooths down GRUOCH's hair, clothes, then looks GRUOCH in the eye.

NURSE: You could be destined for greatness.

NURSE looks more intently.

NURSE: Or something equally as painful—
or boring.
If you're lucky, you'll die without drooling
or having to scream—
those are not small accomplishments.

GRUOCH returns NURSE's gaze. Then, with a mix of deliberation and innocence, GRUOCH unsheathes the sword and puts it between her legs, as if she were riding a hobby-horse. She begins to skip like a child.

GRUOCH: La - la - la - la - la - la -

GRUOCH stops, throws NURSE a defiant look, then continues skipping and chanting.

After a few seconds, GRUOCH stops, a look of puzzlement on her face. She looks down at the sword, back at the NURSE.

NURSE: Well?

GRUOCH rides the sword a few more times, as if testing something, then stops again.

NURSE: Good?

GRUOCH doesn't answer right away, but then nods her head yes and smiles.

NURSE: Who knew friction
could be so educational.

GRUOCH: I don't know what you mean.

NURSE: How does that feel?

GRUOCH: The same as when I hooked
the belt around my waist.

NURSE: Do it some more.

But GRUOCH doesn't move. Instead, she closes her eyes, as if recalling the sensation.

GRUOCH: My mother said I have two choices
about remembering my life,
even as short as it's been so far—
is that true?

NURSE: I don't believe in remembering anything.

GRUOCH: You are supposed to be
preparing me
for my life.

NURSE: I can't teach you the amnesia
you'll need
to find
a usable happiness.

GRUOCH: But I don't want to forget
what I am remembering
right at this moment.
It feels too good.

NURSE: The sword between your legs feels too good.

GRUOCH: Oh yes.

NURSE: Really?

GRUOCH: It feels like womb.

NURSE grabs the sword and pulls it free, shocking GRUOCH.

NURSE: And how does that feel?

GRUOCH: You could have—

NURSE: Before you accuse me, check.

GRUOCH feels between her legs.

GRUOCH: No—I don't think you cut—

NURSE places the sword-tip against GRUOCH's dress. GRUOCH hesitates, then stands her legs apart enough for NURSE to slide the sword back into place between her knees.

NURSE: You may be both lucky and unlucky enough
to survive your childhood.
Either way, I will still get paid.
Which of us would you rather be?

GRUOCH and NURSE stare at each other for a moment, then GRUOCH grabs the hilt of the sword and begins to hobby-horse again.

GRUOCH: Keep up with me.

NURSE: I am paid to follow you.

GRUOCH: You are paid to please me.

NURSE: I am paid to hurt you
at the appropriate times,
otherwise known as education.
That may not please you,
but it pleases me.

NURSE smiles, follows. Lights down.

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Scene 2: Second Lady

Sound of wind. Lights dawn. SOLDIER stands at attention, on guard. He rests his sword point on the ground, hands perched on its hilt. GRUOCH skips in, NURSE following.

NURSE indicates the sword.

NURSE: It has been said
you should not be wearing that.

GRUOCH: I like to wear it.

NURSE: It is said
that it makes you
very unlike a lady.

GRUOCH stops skipping.

GRUOCH: I thought
I was being
a child.

NURSE: That's over.

GRUOCH: So short.

NURSE: You've had longer than most.

GRUOCH: When?

NURSE: The moment the word "lady"
sickened the air.

GRUOCH: Oh.
Oh.
Could you suck it
back in—

NURSE: I am not paid enough.

GRUOCH: Oh.
Is "lady"
one of the hurts?

NURSE: How do you feel?

GRUOCH: Limpid—
is that a word?
It just sprang
into my mouth.

NURSE: There may be hope
for you yet,
unfortunately.

GRUOCH: Have I been educated?

NURSE: Do you know what death is?

GRUOCH: No.

NURSE: Then no.

GRUOCH: Then I need to know death.
And lady.
And limpid.
You said "makes you"—me—
"very unlike a lady"—me—
And what, it is said,
is a lady?

NURSE: Whatever men say she is—
it is said.

GRUOCH: Then am I a lady?

NURSE: On the building-up towards one, yes—

GRUOCH: Then that means
I am
what men
say I am.

NURSE: You're too young
to have men say anything
about you.
Have a taste for you, yes—
always their tastes to navigate,
like walking through
a cow-shitted field—

NURSE tip-toes through a cow-shitted field.

NURSE: And one and two and three and four—

GRUOCH imitates her, laughs.

GRUOCH:—and two and three and four—

NURSE: Stop it!

GRUOCH stops. NURSE repeats her steps.

NURSE: And one and two and three and four—
but of that we will need to—

GRUOCH points to SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: Is he a man?

NURSE: You must learn to focus.

GRUOCH: Is he a man?

NURSE: As a mongrel is a dog.

GRUOCH: Is that a "yes"?
Remember,
I am young and don't yet know
the subtle corrosive power
of metaphor.
That just sprang into my mouth.

NURSE: That is a very subtle thing
for such a young
obvious
girl to say.

GRUOCH: I am trying to surprise myself
every half-hour.

NURSE: You'll be surprised
how "surprise" wears off.

GRUOCH: Is he a man who would
say things
about
what I am?

NURSE: Yes.

GRUOCH: Good!
My half-hour
was coming up.

GRUOCH walks over to SOLDIER, sword drawn.

GRUOCH: That was so much simpler,
wasn't it?

NURSE: As if "simpler"
could simply
reschedule—

GRUOCH: *(to SOLDIER)* Oy!

NURSE:—the nausea
of experience—

GRUOCH: Oy!

NURSE: Listen to me!

GRUOCH faces NURSE.

NURSE: A clear heart guarantees you nothing—
a clear heart will make nothing clear.
A clear heart tricks you
into believing
that being sincere
is a virtue.

GRUOCH stares at NURSE.

GRUOCH: La - la - la - la - la - la—
eleemosynary—
that, too,
just leaped—

GRUOCH turns back to SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: Oy!

SOLDIER does not respond, remains at attention.

GRUOCH: What do you say I am?
Balance off
what the wicked tit
over there
says about you.

No response. Wind blows.

GRUOCH: A lady is.

No response. Wind blows.

GRUOCH: As a man I say that a lady is—

No response. Wind blows.

GRUOCH: I am told men say such things.
That men which are also considered dogs—
she says—
say such things.
I don't understand how
these connections connect,
but there they are.

No response. GRUOCH turns to NURSE.

GRUOCH: Either you lied to me
and he's not a man or a dog—
or he is being—
what's the word
I have the right
to say?

NURSE: You have the right to say all of them.

GRUOCH: (*reciting*) Father says words churn
the heart into piss—

NURSE: A pissant thing
for a king to say—

GRUOCH: Sssh!—I'm trying to [remember]—
-- only action
makes the heart hard enough
to be hard enough
for action.

NURSE: Do you always follow your father?

GRUOCH: Do I always—

GRUOCH ponders this possible heresy.

GRUOCH: I want the word first.

NURSE: Said against
what your father says
about words.

GRUOCH: (*uncertain*) Not against—

NURSE: You begin to suck on
that word-tit
and—

GRUOCH: Tell them to me!

GRUOCH brandishes the sword.

GRUOCH: Or I will—

NURSE mimics/mocks her action.

NURSE: "Or I will!"

Or you will this:
you will kill the one person
who cares enough about you
to treat you with contempt
so that you will come to love
what you hate needing
but cannot do without
and thus be stronger
when you have to kill me
and no longer need
what you hate and pretend to love
and thus can be rid of
the squalor of pretending.

Silence. Wind blows.

GRUOCH: I did not follow that.

NURSE: Do you want me to repeat it?
That you will kill—

GRUOCH: No! I am choosing,
on this half hour,
to stay unsubtle—
let's keep it that way.

GRUOCH points to SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: I want to know the words.
"Or he is being—"

NURSE: Obstinate. Or cautious.
Traitorous. Or discreet.
The word depends—on—
how you plan to bend your heart toward
killing him or
sparing him
because—

NURSE speaks directly to SOLDIER.

NURSE:—he is yours to kill or spare.
Aren't you?

GRUOCH listens with mouth agape, unsure of the logic, clear on the power underneath. She walks up to SOLDIER and inspects him as if she were inspecting a curiosity.

GRUOCH: Won't bending my heart to—
you know—

GRUOCH whispers.

GRUOCH:—killing him—

GRUOCH brings her voice back to full.

GRUOCH:—won't that hurt me?

NURSE raises an eyebrow, which annoys GRUOCH.

GRUOCH: You have to help me learn
to learn these things—
I am dependent upon—you—
your fart-filled skirts!

NURSE: This is what
the unlocking tongue
of your father means, Gruoch—
such questions—philosophy—
prayer—
simply make the muscles go dim.
A pinch of gall or
the dawdle of affection
can undermine
the fevered blood
of roused power.

GRUOCH: But I should kill him because
he does not answer me?
Or because
he has offended good taste—
where did that come from?—
and needs to learn
a lesson? Or because—
I don't understand half
the words I'm using—

NURSE: Kill him because
a king's daughter can.
Kill him because
you want to.
Kill him because
there is nothing better to do.
We all die—
it's not as if the worm-feast
hovering inside our skulls
is your fault.
Or do not kill him.
As you choose.
My dear.

GRUOCH lifts her sword and swings at SOLDIER's leg. With barely a move, SOLDIER moves and blocks her swing.

GRUOCH: Why did he do that if I can supposedly—

NURSE: You are not the only one with choices.

GRUOCH tries again. Soldier easily blocks each of her thrusts. ELFRIDA enters, watches.

Before long GRUOCH is panting heavily and drops to the ground.

GRUOCH: You are not making
my choosing easy!

NURSE notices ELFRIDA. GRUOCH notices ELFRIDA. SOLDIER kneels, head bowed. NURSE does not.

NURSE: It's how she's chosen
to work out the questions
that are questioning at her—
thinking that her father
required her to—

ELFRIDA: Shut up.

NURSE: Of course.

ELFRIDA: Gruoch!

GRUOCH stands, depleted, head bowed, unmoving.

ELFRIDA: You are deployed to protect her.

NURSE: From?

ELFRIDA: Gruoch!

GRUOCH still does not move.

ELFRIDA: From herself, at least.
This frontal—

NURSE: "Herself" is the one thing
she has to be afraid of least
around here.

ELFRIDA: Gruoch! Come here.

GRUOCH does not move.

NURSE: I have my limitations.

ELFRIDA: A wolf has only so many teeth,
yet it still manages
to feed itself well.

NURSE: Which is why you deploy me
rather than kill me.

ELFRIDA moves to GRUOCH, who has begun to shiver.

ELFRIDA: Don't begin with any excuses.
Or explanations.

GRUOCH: Nurse told me—
Nurse told me!
She told me that father—

ELFRIDA: The king, my husband, your father—

NURSE: My liege—

ELFRIDA indicates SOLDIER.

ELFRIDA:—his master—
that is the world—
arranged so—
the world as it
must appear real to be real.

NURSE: The problem with that
piece of instruction is that
she may—nay, she does—
have her problems with that—
lesson.

ELFRIDA and NURSE share a look that, if translated, would say, “A bosom full of the milk of human kindness must not interfere.”

ELFRIDA takes out a small knife and walks up to SOLDIER. She gestures to him, and he exposes his neck. Without hesitation ELFRIDA plunges the small knife into SOLDIER’s jugular. SOLDIER dies. NURSE moves in closer to inspect, then hands ELFRIDA a handkerchief.

ELFRIDA shows the knife.

ELFRIDA: Smaller, Gruoch—

ELFRIDA cleans the knife.

ELFRIDA:—that is how we women must deploy—
in small turns of the screw—
we gain nothing by
mimicking bucklers and slash
but must find
our own solid—

NURSE: Sordid—

ELFRIDA:—silences. *(to NURSE)* Shut up! Otherwise—

NURSE: Otherwise look to your daughter.

GRUOCH is in tremors, staring at SOLDIER. ELFRIDA takes GRUOCH's sword, hands it to NURSE, then slips the dirk into GRUOCH's hand. Almost immediately, GRUOCH calms.

She looks at the dirk, touches her chest to feel that her breathing has calmed, then, without hesitation, goes to plunge the knife into NURSE's thigh. NURSE blocks the thrust. GRUOCH tries again and again, in a mixture of rage and calculation.

NURSE, tiring of the game, finally grabs GRUOCH's wrist, smiles.

ELFRIDA: Let her go.
Stay still.

NURSE lets her go, and GRUOCH goes to stab again—but stops short.

GRUOCH: I choose.

ELFRIDA: Take her in and
wash her up.
Make sure she has something
that warms her.

ELFRIDA speaks to GRUOCH.

ELFRIDA: I will come to you later.

GRUOCH points to SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: What will father say?

NURSE and ELFRIDA exchange a look.

ELFRIDA: We don't need him
to know
what we have helped you
to know.

GRUOCH: *(to NURSE)* You said man or dog.
Which one is he now?

NURSE: *(to ELFRIDA)* We were discussing
the nature of metaphor.
We have very interesting discussions
when you are not around.

ELFRIDA: The dead may be luckier, daughter.

GRUOCH turns an unbeliever's face to ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA: Metaphor cannot break
their bones anymore.

GRUOCH: What?

ELFRIDA: They are intact without being
punished for being intact.

GRUOCH turns her unbeliever's face to NURSE.

GRUOCH: Luckier?

NURSE shrugs.

GRUOCH: That little clicky catch in your throat—
will I be able to learn
to do that as well?
"Exposition of shit."
I am not exactly sure
what that means—
it just came to my tongue.
What does it mean?
What does it mean?
Will that be happening
more and more, mother—
things coming into my mouth?

GRUOCH gives her mother a shit-eating grin, all-innocence once again.

ELFRIDA: She needs something to warm her.

NURSE: I assume that means
"not you."

ELFRIDA: Go. Now.

NURSE leads GRUOCH away. ELFRIDA kneels down by the corpse, extracts the sword from his grip. The sound of wind increases as she slices the air. She exits.

* * * * *

Scene 3: Third Lady

Wind continues. A wash of light from bright to dim to bright. SOLDIER alone.

GRUOCH comes on bearing a candle, comes to the dead SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: I am warm now.
What are you now?

GRUOCH waits for a response, gets none. She sits next to SOLDIER as a child sits, takes out her dirk.

GRUOCH puts a delicate finger into SOLDIER's blood, smears it on the dirk's blade, inspects it in the light. She hears crows.

At the sound of the crows, SOLDIER sits up. GRUOCH takes this in stride.

SOLDIER: I am not philosophy—

GRUOCH: No?

SOLDIER: No—you haven't done that to me.

GRUOCH: Oh, good—I was afraid—

SOLDIER: You should be afraid—but not of that. What you have in me is a corpse that will not haunt you—

GRUOCH: Do you promise?

SOLDIER: The memory of which will not haunt you—

GRUOCH: Oh, good, because—

SOLDIER: Because I mean nothing to you—

GRUOCH: That's not true.

SOLDIER: Then make it true, which is as it should be—

SOLDIER points to his neck.

SOLDIER:—if it's done for power, nothing should haunt you—the soul—you want a philosophy, their philosophy?—

GRUOCH: I don't know—

SOLDIER:—concern about the soul is to worry about nothing but wind. People such as yourself—

GRUOCH: And what is that?

SOLDIER: Who.

GRUOCH: "Who," then, is that, if not a "what."

SOLDIER: "Who" is that, then: those who never have to ask the price for what they desire. The "who" that are "those" never worry about the wind.

SOLDIER takes the dirk.

SOLDIER: Of course, this helps. Attitude only carries you so far.

SOLDIER licks it, gives it back.

SOLDIER: Taste of metal. Can be grounded in that.

GRUOCH goes to do the same.

SOLDIER: But I wouldn't, if I were you.

GRUOCH: I am not even me, I think.
So how could you be a "me" I'm not?

GRUOCH holds up the knife.

GRUOCH: If I don't know who I am,
I don't have to be any "am" at all,
do I?
So why wouldn't I do that?
Since I have become suspicious these past hours about the usefulness of an "am," an
"I."
These are the thoughts
that have come to me in my sleep
or while squatting over the privy.

SOLDIER: All I'm saying—

GRUOCH: I'm not haunted.

SOLDIER: All I'm saying is be careful about tastes—
some things, once tasted—
for instance, a slick of an apple
on a tongue named Eve—

GRUOCH licks, smacks her tongue.

GRUOCH: Metal?

SOLDIER: Metal.

GRUOCH: Metal is sweet, then.
Metal is like an apple.
GRUOCH notices SOLDIER staring at her.

GRUOCH: What?

SOLDIER: Sweet. Your mind
may not be
the only advanced thing
about you.

GRUOCH: You are talking to me.

SOLDIER: You conjured me.

GRUOCH: Because I was cold.
And my mother never came, despite her—
And my father—well.
And Nurse has spikes in her breasts, which is odd because they are soft and doughy,
with nipples like raspberries—

The sound of crows. The CHORUS OF CROWS enters.

CHORUS: We have come to annotate you.
Underline whatever you say.
Give you a sense of false importance.
Don't mind us.

GRUOCH: Tell me something.
I saw the knife go in.

CHORUS: Literal!
What a simpleton.

SOLDIER: What you saw was your mother
take in a breath,
then breathe it back out.

GRUOCH: (*sotto voce*) "Sickened the air."

SOLDIER: What?

CHORUS: He's good to her.

SOLDIER: I am.

GRUOCH: Inside—here—then—when she—
all twisted, feeling like my hair
after rough dreams—

SOLDIER: You wanted to cry out in pain and horror.

GRUOCH: Yes! Yes!

CHORUS: "And yet"—
Come on, girl!
Quicker!
Get out of your own way.
Don't sentimentalize so much.

GRUOCH: And yet to see my mother—

SOLDIER: This woman who gave you life—

CHORUS: In a manner of speaking.

GRUOCH: Make it seem like such a simple equation—someone—

CHORUS: Your father—
Say it!

GRUOCH: Someone!

CHORUS: His name
The taste of ashes
Perhaps?

GRUOCH: Someone—

CHORUS: (*sotto voce*) The father—

GRUOCH shoots CHORUS a look.

GRUOCH: Someone hurts you there,
so you hurt someone here
because there is too cold
and far away and—

CHORUS: And?

GRUOCH: And horrible—

CHORUS: And?

SOLDIER: And?

GRUOCH: And right—no,
"horrible" can't be "right"!

*But her face and body say yes. A pause as SOLDIER and CHORUS stare at her.
SOLDIER takes a daub of blood and anoints her forehead.*

CHORUS: Distance lends enchantment to the horrible.

SOLDIER: Shut up.

CHORUS: Just giving her
A basis
For suffering.

SOLDIER: Shut up.

GRUOCH: And thinking about both—
this done here—

GRUOCH touches SOLDIER's neck.

GRUOCH:—for that done somewhere over there—

CHORUS: Horribly right slash rightfully horrible!

GRUOCH: Hurting in the heart
and so the impulse—

CHORUS: The desire—

GRUOCH:—to make the equation resolve to
your advantage—
my language—

CHORUS: Will it happen?
Will it happen
Do you think?

GRUOCH: Both seemed right.

CHORUS: Ah!

GRUOCH: Killing you was right
because it could be done.
It was done,
so that must make it right.
Such rightness seemed like beauty.
Right.
Beautiful.
Action.
Equation.
Crying out in pain and horror.
And yet not crying because—of—
this—other—

CHORUS: She has found the truth
That will enslave her.
Innocence flipped—
Huzzah!

SOLDIER: Go away for now.

CHORUS: Now he will begin his work.
Other equations to continue.
We leave.

CHORUS disappears. SOLDIER kneels to GRUOCH.

GRUOCH: Why are you doing that?

SOLDIER: There are other bloods to know.

SOLDIER takes the dirk, daubs more blood on it, then anoints each of GRUOCH's breasts. She tries to protect herself.

GRUOCH: Don't do that!

SOLDIER hands back the dirk, then takes off his shirt. He is quite battle-scarred.

GRUOCH: This is not—

SOLDIER: Your father and mother—

GRUOCH: Nurse has told me about—

NURSE enters.

NURSE: About what?

GRUOCH: About what they do—
what they do in their darkness.
When I'm not there.

NURSE: And how you oozed out of that sweaty darkness.

GRUOCH: That was not right.
You cannot be right about that—

NURSE takes the dirk from GRUOCH, walks to SOLDIER.

NURSE: We have one map when we're born.

With the tip of the dirk, NURSE traces a line that runs from scar to scar, as if drawing a map. She circles SOLDIER like circling the globe.

NURSE: With skin so smooth, all ways look possible—
skin smooth, life begins with a lie.
Time—another map
is etched into us—
come here—

GRUOCH joins NURSE.

NURSE: Trace. Follow.

With her fingertip, GRUOCH traces the line that NURSE traces with the dirk.

NURSE: The scars—

GRUOCH pauses to run her finger over one scar again and again.

GRUOCH: The raised flesh—
the damaged welt—
how did this happen?

SOLDIER: In service.
In harness.
In dank forests and mucked fields
where the dead-breath-smell of enemy smells
no different than the pocky breath of empire
and king and queen—

NURSE: Not yet. (to GRUOCH) With such—penetrations—comes the gift—

GRUOCH traces the scar with her finger.

GRUOCH: Would this be a way to know
how to know what I am?

SOLDIER: Keep circling.

GRUOCH follows NURSE until they've circled SOLDIER. GRUOCH goes back to the scar, tracing her finger over it back and forth.

NURSE: With such a breach—

GRUOCH: Would this be a way to know
how to know what I am?
It looks like a star,
a blossom,
light on water—

GRUOCH indicates all the scars.

GRUOCH: Like a constellation,
a garden,
islands in an ocean—

NURSE: All of which you've only seen in books.

GRUOCH touches where SOLDIER had daubed blood on her breast.

GRUOCH: Is this part of that same map?

NURSE hands the dirk to SOLDIER, grabs GRUOCH, reaches under her dress. GRUOCH pulls back, repelled, but NURSE holds on to her, withdraws her hand. Her fingertips are bloody.

GRUOCH: What is that?
What has happened to me?
That is not my fault!

NURSE shows her fingers to SOLDIER.

NURSE: I thought something had been breached.

SOLDIER: What do you feel?

GRUOCH: What has happened?

NURSE wipes her hands on a handkerchief.

GRUOCH: Where did that come from?

NURSE looks at SOLDIER. SOLDIER nods, puts shirt back on, then drops down into his "dead" position. GRUOCH takes NURSE's handkerchief and smells it.

GRUOCH: Metal.

GRUOCH smells again.

GRUOCH: Metal.

NURSE: Come on. We must keep this to ourselves.

GRUOCH: Does that mean I have metal inside of—

NURSE: Do not think knowing that
means knowing very much.
You must now be very careful.
Come, we must wash you down.
Any spoor of this spilt on the air
and the licking wolves
will howl the gate down
because their tightened thighs
ache for ravage.
Come on! Come on!

GRUOCH points at SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: What about—

The CHORUS OF CROWS enters.

NURSE: Don't worry—
He won't be wasted.

NURSE and GRUOCH exit.

CHORUS: He will not go to waste.

CHORUS kisses SOLDIER. Blackness. Wind. The sound of a world grinding on its axis.

* * * * *

Scene 4: Fourth Lady

NURSE kneeling. ELFRIDA, dirk at NURSE's throat.

ELFRIDA: And what am I supposed to do?

NURSE: Put the knife away?

ELFRIDA: You were to have kept her—

NURSE: What? Safe?

ELFRIDA lets NURSE go.

ELFRIDA: Your capacity for being perpetually underwhelming always injures me.

NURSE: Disappointment is also a kind of service.

ELFRIDA: Do you realize what now must happen?
What the king has—

In light appears GILLACOMGAIN.

NURSE: The savagery of marriage is not my fault.
The savagery of a father arranging marriage
is also not my fault.
Nor is it my fault
that the moon aligned her guts
and opened that clitoral gate
for the hawking pricks
to come to come inside her.
I have tried to teach her
the contempt
that you have wanted her to—

ELFRIDA: It is not contempt!

NURSE: Then what would you call
the doses you have wanted fed to her
to cure—in your words—
the malady of her femaleness?

ELFRIDA: Not contempt—
at least not poured out loud
into the cups of men's ears.

NURSE: God forbid that men's ears
are ever reamed clean
of their own self-congratulation.
Why have you instructed me to remedy
what you call the mortal injury—

ELFRIDA: Enough!

NURSE:—of a weeping cunt and leaking breasts—

ELFRIDA: I will sew your tongue down—

NURSE:—by teaching her to mis-mouth her thoughts—

ELFRIDA:—with a bone needle—

NURSE:—and lay siege against
the wicked goodness
of her own flesh?

ELFRIDA:—and your own rat's-piss hair! I will!

NURSE: I stand reprimanded.
Vertical and yet abased.
My lady did not use "contempt."
Instead of contempt, she prefers to call it
giving her daughter
her late-blooming motherly love.

ELFRIDA looks at GILLACOMGAIN with fear and contempt.

GILLACOMGAIN: I am not accustomed to waiting.

ELFRIDA: I seem to have lost my own self-instruction.
Her father—my liege!—
has already contracted her.
Before I could—maneuver—
before I could—finish—

NURSE: Don't make her suffer
because you need to suffer to feel alive.
Your suffering is embarrassing
and self-indulgent
and a little late in coming
to the table.
I need to speak before
you stitch my tongue.

GILLACOMGAIN: Gillacomgain is not accustomed to waiting.

Light up on MACBETH.

ELFRIDA: Don't you have any fear for her?

NURSE: Why would I hold her back like that?

Light up on GRUOCH with her three ATTENDANTS—she is dressed to be wed. She notices MACBETH. MACBETH notices her. The three ATTENDANTS notice them noticing each other.

GILLACOMGAIN: Macbeth, what are you doing here?

MACBETH: I am invited—
invited, invited, invited—
to make your day bright.
Bright and happy and—

GILLACOMGAIN: I want him to leave.

ELFRIDA: My lord, I can't—

MACBETH: You shouldn't put her
in such a vice, Gillacomgain.
Such a grip!
I am a guest honored to honor you
on this, your day of knots—
you should feel honored
to be so honored.

GILLACOMGAIN: Only your corpse would honor me.

MACBETH: Did the corpse you made
of my father
honor you?

MACBETH turns to GRUOCH.

MACBETH: Do you know why he has such flutters
about my lurking
at his heels?

GRUOCH: I am innocent of why any man flutters.

GILLACOMGAIN: Move away from her.

ELFRIDA: We really should go.

MACBETH: Because he is afraid.

MACBETH touches GRUOCH's cheek. GILLACOMGAIN challenges, but only slightly.

MACBETH: He is afraid
that I will not be
the guest I say I am.

ELFRIDA: We should not keep
my husband waiting
any longer.

GRUOCH: Who is ever the guest he says he is?

NURSE: (*sotto voce*) Edge sharpens—good.

MACBETH continues to touch GRUOCH's face. GILLACOMGAIN does not move.

MACBETH: He is afraid that I will not forget
that he killed my father
so that he can wear those robes
that have made him agreeable
to your father for
this sweaty link
to your available flesh.

MACBETH turns to ELFRIDA.

MACBETH: Did I say “sweaty”?
I apologize.
I meant, of course, “sweetened.”

One ATTENDANT puts a tentative restraining hand on MACBETH's, then quickly pulls it away. MACBETH looks at ATTENDANT, nods, and ATTENDANT re-places her hand on his. MACBETH graciously withdraws his hand.

MACBETH: Do you know what my name means?

GRUOCH glances at ELFRIDA.

GRUOCH: It has been taught to me
that as a woman
I will be lucky
if I do not know
what anything means.

MACBETH: Let me then be the first sin
to breach your well-tended ignorance.
It means “son of life.”

MACBETH takes her hand, leads her to GILLACOMGAIN.

MACBETH: And why would a son of life
on this day of days
do anything, my sweet-faced—
sullen-faced—
you are not happy, are you?

Everyone waits for GRUOCH to respond.

GRUOCH: “Lady Gillacomgain” has,
I am told,
the proper number of syllables
for my future.

MACBETH: It plays much more nimble
on the tongue than, say,
Lady Macbeth.

MACBETH turns to GILLACOMGAIN.

MACBETH: She is yours.
Are you hers?

GILLACOMGAIN: It was your father’s tongue that unhinged him.

MACBETH wags his tongue at GILLACOMGAIN.

MACBETH: And has become hinged here—
let us not forget the miracle
of bodily resurrection
that has been offered to us all.
But has this played the uncivil tongue
by telling the truth?
Hmmm?
Would you accuse me—it—
of truth-telling?
Dear Gillacomgain.
On this, your day of knots?

GILLACOMGAIN roughly grabs GRUOCH and they come downstage and kneel, the three ATTENDANTS behind them. MACBETH paces upstage.

ATTENDANT 1: God’s piss!

ATTENDANT 2: God’s blood!

ATTENDANT 3: God’s arse spinning on a spit!

ATTENDANT 1: Can you smell the pissing around of them marking their turf?

ATTENDANT 3: The stench makes me weep.

ATTENDANT 2: Fucking children with knives, that's what they are.

ATTENDANT 1 indicates GRUOCH.

ATTENDANT 1: And look at her—she's got the smell up her nostrils, she does, doesn't she?

ATTENDANT 2: She does.

ATTENDANT 3: The stink of men being men.

ATTENDANT 1: Not that—no.

ATTENDANT 3: Then what?

ATTENDANT 1: The stink of men pretending to be men.

ATTENDANT 2: Her nostrils flared.

ATTENDANT 3 indicates GILLACOMGAIN.

ATTENDANT 3: And him with Macbeth's rude breath on his neck—he can barely crimp his asshole to keep his soul home in his body.

ATTENDANT 1: He might as well let it go—he ain't going to have it for long.

ATTENDANT 2: You think?

ATTENDANT 3: He has as much chance of making it to her bed tonight as a worm singing solo at a congress of hungry crows.

ATTENDANT 1: What a thought—his soul bloomed out like a fart!

ATTENDANT 2: You laugh like that's new news.

ATTENDANT 3: It is the nature of man to be nothing but gas on a windy day.

The "ceremony" ends. GRUOCH and GILLACOMGAIN rise. MACBETH approaches them.

GILLACOMGAIN: We don't need anything from you.

MACBETH ignores GILLACOMGAIN and takes GRUOCH by the arm.

MACBETH: Let's begin to make him
the cuckold he deserves to be.

MACBETH begins to lead her away, and it takes GRUOCH several seconds to realize she should resist him.

GRUOCH: Leave me alone.

I said—
leave me alone.

MACBETH: I completely mean to do just that.

GILLACOMGAIN comes at him, sword drawn. They fight, savagely. Savagely. GILLACOMGAIN dies. MACBETH pulls down GILLACOMGAIN's pants, exposing him. He gives no quarter in his hatred as he stands over the corpse.

MACBETH: Did you really think?

Did you really believe?
What a rancid cunt you were,
you are,
to think in that cracked bowl
the thought
that you could sliver off
the life of Findlaech mac Ruardi
and not find his son's severing hand
ready and more than ready
to pull your guts out
through that cock
and hang them over the moon
for flies to populate
and the wind to fuck away
into dust?
Did you really—

MACBETH more or less comes to his senses, looks at GRUOCH.

MACBETH: Why aren't you weeping?

MACBETH speaks to ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH: Why aren't you wailing?

GRUOCH: You seem ready and content
to do all of that for us.

GRUOCH glares at GILLACOMGAIN's corpse, takes up his sword. MACBETH seems to offer his neck.

MACBETH: I would understand if—

Instead, GRUOCH uses the tip of the sword to move GILLACOMGAIN's cock back and forth as if to study it. Then, without warning, she swings the sword at MACBETH and stops just short of slicing open his neck.

GRUOCH: Attend to him.
Make him ready
for any available honor.

The ATTENDANTS move to re-clothe and re-arrange GILLACOMGAIN in a systematic ritual manner. GRUOCH holds the sword over MACBETH's neck. It is not without its pleasure for MACBETH.

NURSE: Gruoch—

GRUOCH: Has making me a widow
made you happy?

MACBETH: Has becoming a widow
made you sad?

GRUOCH flicks his ear lobe with the tip of the sword.

GRUOCH: Has revenge made you feel
more sweet?

MACBETH: Yes.
Would revenging make you feel
less guilty?

NURSE takes the sword from GRUOCH's hands, gives it over to the ATTENDANTS, who place it on GILLACOMGAIN.

ELFRIDA: I must inform your father.

GRUOCH: *(to ELFRIDA)* Tell my father
that my life is now arranged
and that he can feel rested
in his labors
on my behalf.

MACBETH: You are still young.

GRUOCH: Do you think I mean the convent?

MACBETH: Do you think I think
that's what you mean?

GRUOCH: I don't know how
an assassin's mind works.

MACBETH: Neither do I.
A convent would be a shame.

GRUOCH: Perhaps it was a monastery
I was thinking of,
where men would go to rid us
of their wicked limp-cocked lives.

ELFRIDA: You must begin to act
as you should act!

GRUOCH signals the ATTENDANTS.

GRUOCH: Come you spirits
that tend
on mortal bodies—
make me wail.
Prepare my teeth for gnashing.

*ATTENDANTS prepare GRUOCH, who kneels by GILLACOMGAIN. ELFRIDA
stares at MACBETH.*

*NOTE: The grief takes place on one side of the stage, the conversation on the other.
A choreography for this grief, perhaps done as dumbshow, to match the
conversation.*

ELFRIDA: No matter what we thought—
how we disliked—

MACBETH: What he stole I now have back.

ELFRIDA: You killed a guest!

MACBETH: What he bled from my father
has now blooded me again.

ELFRIDA: You broke our word!

MACBETH: And what the son re-possesses
the widow can now possess.
If.
She.

NURSE: Queen Elfrida—Lady Mac[beth]—

ELFRIDA: Your pitch for my daughter
carries nothing but
a map of shit
and a prophecy of salt.

MACBETH: I will camp by the river.
I will take
as much of my contagion with me there
as I can
so as not to offend—

ELFRIDA: You think what you did was noble?

MACBETH: “Noble” is for poets and other amnesiacs.
I slaughtered a man.
Pig-style.
In rageful choice.

ELFRIDA: After insulting him
by sniffing at his—

MACBETH: This judgment face of yours—
expecting this barbarian
to pitch bright words
to celebrate his brute deeds?

MACBETH takes ELFRIDA by the arm as if they are going for a stroll—but it is strained and sarcastic. They walk. NURSE follows.

MACBETH: Let me tell you something.

ELFRIDA tries to pull away, but MACBETH keeps her close.

MACBETH: Your daughter
did not learn her sword
from her father.
Or only.
She learned it from you.

MACBETH examines ELFRIDA’s arm from shoulder to fingers.

MACBETH: The impulse for it
if not the actual muscle
in the arm,
the slang of the wrist.

ELFRIDA does not respond.

MACBETH: I can arrange reasons,
defensible ones—
after all,
that sack of tripe cooling
in the chapel
unbuttoned my father.
I can tell-tale the events
for my own glory, if I wish—
no one in this ash-pit Scotland
will untell my telling,
slimed as they are
with their own red sins.
But—
I did kill a human being.
Have you ever killed another?
Ever wished to kill another?

MACBETH runs his finger down her arm.

MACBETH: If I opened this up,
would I find that impulse
pulsing here?

NURSE: The Queen has been
an excellent mother.

MACBETH: Then she will be able
in my words
to hear how honest I am.

MACBETH releases ELFRIDA and prepares to leave.

MACBETH: We may remorse for a slaughter
and thus truly ache to ream ourselves
of shit with salt and
new-lease a cleansed soul.
But we are ever double-faced in our single selves,
And if our remorse does not avoid honesty
he—or she—cannot deny
the paralleled joy that comes from being,
in that sword-handed slaughterous moment,
God-like in a life that offers us
no moments for godhead.
He deserved to die.
I deserved the joy that came
from giving him what he deserved.
It was—I was—not “noble”—
anything “noble” pales beside
such intoxicate power.

NURSE: Queen Elfrida—if I may—
There is nothing ever
but opportunity.
Grief—Gillacomgain will have
all required—she will do
all required—
but as the river ignores the rock,
the mother ignores—

ELFRIDA: You would suggest—

NURSE: I was simply discoursing on
what little I know of
the physics of grief
and the mathematical dangers of
widowed maidens
in a world of swords.

GRUOCH and the ATTENDANTS have finished their grieving.

ELFRIDA: *(to MACBETH)* Are you serious?

MACBETH: I have my kingdom back,
taken back from the one
who took it from me.
Kingdoms should be populated.

ELFRIDA leaves. NURSE follows. MACBETH leaves for the river. GRUOCH leaves for her thoughts.

ATTENDANT 1: Figures.

ATTENDANT 2: It does.

ATTENDANT 3: The messes never end up being theirs.

ATTENDANT 1 kicks the body.

ATTENDANT 1: It's ours, now—fillet and chop.

ATTENDANT 2 and ATTENDANT 3 give ATTENDANT 1 a look.

ATTENDANT 2: You're kidding.

ATTENDANT 1: Only half.

ATTENDANT 2: You can't mean—

ATTENDANT 1: Actually, less than half kidding.

ATTENDANT 3: She does mean.

ATTENDANT 2: Fillet, chop, shank, rib—

ATTENDANT 3: He was royalty—got fed the best grains—primed all his life.

ATTENDANT 1: Shame since now he's dispensed and dispensated that only the worms will get warm from his deliquesce—

ATTENDANT 2: Listen to her warm her tongue!

They look at each other.

ATTENDANT 2: We can't! We can't!

ATTENDANT 3: Some unused part of him coffin'd in the grave will serve to represent the whole—

ATTENDANT 1: (*with pride*) Synecdoche!

ATTENDANT 3: Us from the lower down can certainly benefit from what remains of the remains after what she said is satisfied—

They look at GILLACOMGAIN.

ATTENDANT 2: It is the way of nature. To feed on what does not feed on you.

ATTENDANT 1: And they did leave the leavings to us while they whirl'd off in their royal be-moan-ing.

ATTENDANT 3: So careless like them.

They look some more at GILLACOMGAIN.

ATTENDANT 2: Doing this will change us.

ATTENDANT 1: Doing this will fulfill us.

ATTENDANT 3: And fill us.

ATTENDANT 2: No—attend me—we will be translated. We will not be who we are now.

ATTENDANT 1: Who wants to be that anyway? It is time we took on our powers.

ATTENDANT 2: All right—when shall we three meet again?

Darkness. The ATTENDANTS exit. GILLACOMGAIN gets up, tidies himself, exits.

Water. Wind. MACBETH at his camp. His clothes and sword lie to one side as he ritually washes himself.

GRUOCH enters. MACBETH hears her, does not clothe himself but continues to wash. When he is finished, he kneels, head bowed.

GRUOCH: You do need to pray.
A damned man should pray.

MACBETH: Either leave me alone or
leave me dead.
But leave me.

GRUOCH: Though seeing you pray
is like watching someone try to mask
shit under sugar—

MACBETH: Go back.

GRUOCH picks up MACBETH's pants.

GRUOCH: Or you will do what?

GRUOCH throws his pants away, picks up his shirt. MACBETH tries to focus, but he cannot ignore her.

GRUOCH: I would much rather watch this disease
signed Macbeth
try to cure itself.
Trying to ease the dis-eases back there
has tired me out.

GRUOCH balls up the shirt and tosses it away. She picks up the boots.

GRUOCH: No one needs to lick these anymore—

GRUOCH tosses one.

GRUOCH:—right—

GRUOCH tosses the other.

GRUOCH:—or left—

GRUOCH tosses away any other items she finds until only MACBETH's coat and sword remain.

GRUOCH: Ah.

GRUOCH puts on the coat, picks up the sword. Bangs the sword on the floor several times to let the closed-eyed MACBETH know she holds it.

GRUOCH: In every shricing
there comes
a penance-point.

GRUOCH points the sword at MACBETH, sights down its length.

GRUOCH: Here is yours:
I have decided to haunt you.
Because what else is a widow
good for? What else
can a pointless ghost do
but penetrate the one
who ghosted her—

GRUOCH jabs him in the ribs. MACBETH flinches but does not break his pose.

GRUOCH:—perhaps force
the God-extracted rib back
under his heart so that he feels
pity for the trash he has created—

As GRUOCH speaks about her “ghosting,” she will blow into his ear, put a finger in his ear, pinch his left nipple, etc.

All through this MACBETH tries to maintain his pose of prayer.

GRUOCH: Perhaps become the wind-borne lament—
-- that roots
like an earwig
in the brain's cleat—
-- or become the guilt-arrow
that saves the heart
by savaging it in half—

GRUOCH lets the nipple go. MACBETH lets himself appear unaffected, still deep in prayer. GRUOCH gathers his hair in her hand.

GRUOCH: Or perhaps the ghost
will grow more forgiving—
not come off so pukingly pathetic.
This Delilah hand
will take this Samson hair—

GRUOCH wipes the sword on MACBETH's hair.

GRUOCH:—and not unman the man—

GRUOCH traces his arm.

GRUOCH:—or disarm the arm—

GRUOCH traces his thigh.

GRUOCH:—or hollow out the thigh—

GRUOCH traces his throat.

GRUOCH: Would such saintly restraint
be wasted
on the handsome assassin?

By this time GRUOCH is kneeling directly beside MACBETH, in profile, whispering in his ear.

MACBETH: If you've come to kill me—

GRUOCH: I have not come to do
or to be
the expected widow.
No suck-up supplicant,
no turn-cheek sanctimone,
no harpy killer—
the usual choices.
The usual chores.

GRUOCH wedges the tip of the sword between the back of MACBETH's thigh and the calf.

GRUOCH: Move!

MACBETH raises himself slightly and GRUOCH slides the sword across MACBETH's calves. GRUOCH lays a heavy hand on MACBETH's shoulder, and MACBETH lowers himself. GRUOCH wipes her hands on MACBETH's jacket.

GRUOCH: I have come, instead,
to name you.
You arrogant.
Son.
Of-a-bitch.

MACBETH struggles not to look at her.

GRUOCH: You half-masted.
Scut-sucking.
Cock-face.

MACBETH struggles not to respond.

GRUOCH: You spunkless.
Prick-snipped.
Coward.

Again, MACBETH masters the impulse to respond as her eyes bore into him. Then GRUOCH laughs a full-throated laugh, smacks her forehead.

GRUOCH: I have been so stupid—
pissing away such good insults—
because it's not insults
your bare-assed holiness needs—
you need to look like the clown
that you are.

GRUOCH reaches into a pocket of her dress, takes out a small earthenware pot. She rises, and with a forefinger digs out a dollop of rouge. She paints MACBETH's face and body as she speaks and will end up kneeling back where she began.

GRUOCH: Thinking only of himself.

This humble clown of God,
trying to turn his butchery
into blessing.

If he could only see
how puke-colored he is
in our eyes, how bile-bitter
his prayers smell—
let us flag him as stupidly
as he looks squatting
on his crimped ass—

Without warning, and without opening his eyes, MACBETH flicks out a hand to take GRUOCH by the throat, but she is a step ahead of him and grabs his wrist.

GRUOCH: At last.

Some honesty.

Taking his hand, GRUOCH puts his fingers on the top latch of her dress. MACBETH refuses to unbutton it.

GRUOCH: I don't have many choices.

Do it!

MACBETH does it. She moves his hand down to each latch, and he undoes each one, still keeping his eyes closed. She rises, shucks off his jacket, steps out of her dress, leaving only a simple shift. She takes MACBETH's head and holds it against her crotch.

GRUOCH: This is how a widow's fear smells.

Make it your incense, hypocrite.

GRUOCH holds his head even tighter against her pelvis.

GRUOCH: I don't have many choices.

MACBETH inhales deeply and lets out a raw ragged exhale. She takes the shift off, now naked herself, and kneels by MACBETH, waiting.

And they wait. And for the first time GRUOCH looks uncertain of herself, a look she loses immediately when MACBETH opens his eyes.

She puts a hand on his forehead, leans his head back.

GRUOCH: Open your mouth.

MACBETH does. She examines his teeth.

GRUOCH: You have them all. Good.

She moves his head back and forth.

GRUOCH: You missed cleaning your ears.

MACBETH grabs her wrist to stop her.

GRUOCH: When you don't have many choices, lord,
you check the merchandise twice,
and twice again.

MACBETH: You have interrupted my penance.

GRUOCH: I can make you feel more penitent
than any god,
if penance is what you want.

MACBETH: You have come between me and my soul.

GRUOCH: Like a harness
that ropes the horse
with the rider.

MACBETH: And which one are you?

GRUOCH: Depending on what my lord desires,
I will ride or be ridden.

MACBETH: You will ride even if you are ridden.

GRUOCH: Then that makes me a good partner
to the great lord Macbeth.

They look intently at each other.

GRUOCH: Have you ever wondered
how Eve and Adam spent
their first night
outside the garden?

MACBETH: This is not right.

GRUOCH: That is not important.
Have you ever wondered?

MACBETH: No.

GRUOCH: They tried teaching themselves
how to pray their way back in
but as sleep took them over
they found—riding each other—
much more heart-warming.
And on the second night
they learned the same lesson.
It is funny how
after all that time
the same choices still seem
to choose us.

GRUOCH leans forward until her forehead touches the ground. MACBETH, kneeling up, takes the sword from his calves, and for a moment, a beheading is possible. Then he puts the sword to one side and takes up the same submissive posture. They then stretch out the length of their bodies and slide together as the lights go to black.

* * * * *

Scene 5: Fifth Lady

Sound of wind, then a BOOM as a gate slams. Lights up on BISHOP teased by the three ATTENDANTS, who look more feral and witch-like than before.

In indirect light MACBETH and GRUOCH lie entwined.

BISHOP: Leave me alone!

ATTENDANT 1: You're born alone.

BISHOP: Don't—

ATTENDANT 3: You die alone.

BISHOP: I am known—

ATTENDANT 2: But in-betwixt you can have us snapping at your nates to keep you
companied—

BISHOP: I don't need—

ATTENDANT 1: And out of the depths of despond—

BISHOP: My stomach is fine—

ATTENDANT 3: And from the clutches of despair—

Suddenly, ATTENDANTS stop, stare upward, cock their heads as if listening. They exchange glances.

ATTENDANT 1: Someone—the “she”—

ATTENDANT 2: This way—

ATTENDANT 3: Comes.

They sniff the air. They exchange glances.

ATTENDANT 2: It is not him—

ATTENDANT 1:—that feels—

ATTENDANT 3:—despair.

ATTENDANTS: Let him float on his own.

ELFRIDA enters, ghostly and tense. She wears a scarf.

The ATTENDANTS release BISHOP but then block his exit.

ELFRIDA: Well?

BISHOP: I have been summoned.

ELFRIDA: Well?

BISHOP: And when summoned I always come.

ELFRIDA: Well?

BISHOP: But this coming
this time
authorizes nothing.

ELFRIDA: You do not have a choice in this matter.

BISHOP: Choice is an illusion, lady—

ATTENDANTS: Hah!

BISHOP: Things that are right are right—
and the same for things wrong—
knowing this,
it's easy to live well
without suffering from "choice"—
as you so clearly are right now—
suffering, that is—
from choice, that is—

ELFRIDA: If you don't do this,
I will make sure
I don't suffer alone.

BISHOP: It appears you will suffer
whether I do this or not.
And none of us, really,
suffers alone, madam—
like it or not, we all
go down
to the pit
together—

ATTENDANTS: Down without a sound!

BISHOP: Though people mistake
that there is comfort
in such numbers.

ATTENDANTS: A broken heart
falls numbered
to the floor.

ELFRIDA waits. ATTENDANT 1 forms a chair on which ELFRIDA sits.

ELFRIDA: All down together, perhaps—
but on schedules I can name
as I choose.

BISHOP: I dislike pain as neatly
as the next soul,
but you can't bully me with it
into doing what
should not be done.

ELFRIDA: Convictions.

BISHOP: I sleep well at night.
Every night.
You do not look well—
if I may—

ELFRIDA: Beside the point.

BISHOP: Because you know
that this
isn't right.

ELFRIDA: That, too, now seems
beside the point.

ATTENDANTS growl at BISHOP.

ATTENDANTS: Aarggh!

ELFRIDA: Enough!

ATTENDANTS: For now.

BISHOP: How can evil be
beside the point?

ELFRIDA: Your imprimatur.

ATTENDANTS: Now.

ELFRIDA: Stop it!

ATTENDANTS: For now.

ELFRIDA stands, walks. ATTENDANTS sit.

ELFRIDA: You question what
your lord,
my husband,
asks for?

BISHOP: He asks?
Has he asked?

ELFRIDA: I ask, he asks.

BISHOP: But in the spirit of skepticism
and science
all I can observe
is your mouth mowing the air—
so why not this evil
just from you, dame?
I have never known his voice
to carry the pig sty in it.

ELFRIDA: Your voice will stop carrying anything at all
if you keep using that voice.

BISHOP: And if he has spoken
I should hear his speaking
from him directly—
I have always heard from him—

ELFRIDA: With sharper impatience—

ATTENDANTS: Much sharper.

ELFRIDA:—attend to me.

BISHOP: You don't do policy well.

ELFRIDA: And you're being single-minded
when you should be pluralized.
Don't you think he would be here
if he thought you important enough
to coddle and prod
and pet and flatter?
Not here, though, is he?

BISHOP: No.

ELFRIDA: Ergo—he expects flexibility—
you are just his means—

BISHOP: An ecclesiastical tap
for a grease-rimmed bung-hole—

The ATTENDANTS, in one manner or another, growl.

ELFRIDA: Back off!

ATTENDANTS: We only exist to serve.

ELFRIDA: I want you prepared.

BISHOP: To job out my honor like you?

ELFRIDA: Bishops are not that hard to find,
even in Scotland. Queens
are held
a little more precious.

ATTENDANTS: A little more.

BISHOP: For villainy.

ELFRIDA: For necessity.

BISHOP: What's the difference in this case?

ELFRIDA: Bishops, again, are not
that hard to find, Bishop.

MACBETH and GRUOCH stir, wrap themselves in coverlets. They listen.

BISHOP: Let the Bishop summarize:
I have performed a marriage
and a funeral
in the space of one sun's arc—
the celebrants at one
the mourners at the other—
now a wife made widow
to be made wife
to the widow-maker—
perhaps better confession
and a kiss of the scourge—

The ATTENDANTS move closer to BISHOP.

ATTENDANT 1: You shouldn't get your short hairs snicked on the forms, father.

ATTENDANT 1 grabs her crotch.

ATTENDANT 1: Letting these swing loose would be advice you should follow.

BISHOP: Don't touch—

ATTENDANT 2: Especially around here.

ATTENDANT 3: Especially now.

BISHOP: Stop it!

ATTENDANT 2: Oyez.

ATTENDANT 3: Aye.

ATTENDANT 2: Loose hanging.

ATTENDANT 3: Aye.

ATTENDANT 2: Even a celibate still needs his manhood—

ATTENDANT 1: Fair is foul and foul is—

ATTENDANTS 2 & 3: *(to ATTENDANT 1)* Not here!

All THREE go mum. MACBETH stands. GRUOCH stands.

BISHOP: *(to ELFRIDA)* This is the house you keep now—
full of—
anatomical advice—

BISHOP points to ATTENDANT 1.

BISHOP: She's right, though—

ATTENDANT 1: Told you.

BISHOP: You treat the forms like muck and sewage,
meant to be slogged through
and then scraped off, thrown away—
but not by me—

*MACBETH walks into the scene, stands in front of everyone, half-naked.
ATTENDANTS 2 and 3 make the sound of wind.*

ATTENDANT 1: Enter wind. All hail—

BISHOP: Thane—

ATTENDANTS stop, then suddenly make the sound of thunder. Stop again.

MACBETH: I can understand.

BISHOP: Thane—

MACBETH: I can understand
your misunderstanding of
her proper understanding of
what needs to be done—

BISHOP:—your clothes—

MACBETH:—you who has
given himself over
to keeping the God in each of us
green and succulent—

BISHOP: You must cover yourself—

MACBETH makes a sweep with his coverlet, briefly exposing himself, before more tightly cinching it around his waist.

MACBETH: Did you understand that, father?
Understand her?

BISHOP: Do you mean
am I now bettered
by the mockery of my “betters”?
Sorry, but I don’t feel mocked
because I don’t see any “betters”
to mock me.

MACBETH: Your theology is disrepair’d, father—
you have a hardness of heart.

BISHOP: And a marriage of slops
between a minor thane of a foul province
and a queen’s daughter
will repair it?

MACBETH: I sympathize with
your moral dilemma, Bishop—
God unto God, Caesar unto Caesar,
balancing on the tip-toes,
being the amiable shepherd—
but this might be a good time
to be shrewd about
those parts of you stamped mortal.

BISHOP: Let the Bishop summarize:
It seems the common path to power
around here is to carve out
the guts of a close cousin
or discard an inconvenient father.

ATTENDANTS: (*muttering*) Or ecclesiast.

GRUOCH: (to MACBETH) I am not to be forgotten here.

GRUOCH points to ELFRIDA.

GRUOCH: And neither is she.

The ATTENDANTS move to GRUOCH.

ATTENDANT 1: Cunt speaks.

ATTENDANTS 2 & 3: Aye.

ATTENDANT 2: We attend.

ATTENDANTS 1 & 3: So should you.

ATTENDANT 3: Cunt speaks what is true.

ATTENDANTS: Always.

GRUOCH: (to MACBETH) Tell him the truth,
and don't fall back into warrior Macbeth,
cock-tight Macbeth,
blister-tongued Macbeth.
Old Macbeth.

MACBETH looks at GRUOCH.

ATTENDANTS: Tell. Him.

GRUOCH: Don't soil us with
your gone-by pride.

ATTENDANTS: Don't.

GRUOCH: Or you will have to kill me
if you do
because I will—

ATTENDANTS & GRUOCH: (*overlapping*)—hate you—

GRUOCH:—which would be so disappointing
and such a waste of last night's
first night.
Are you listening to me old cock?

MACBETH: I am listening to you, feather tongue. (*to BISHOP*) Truce.

BISHOP: Begin by dressing—

MACBETH: In which borrowed robes, Bishop?

ELFRIDA: Gruoch?

MACBETH indicates his coverlet.

MACBETH: This honest rag serves me at the moment—*(to ELFRIDA)* Your daughter has no name at the moment—

ELFRIDA: Yes she has!

GRUOCH: No I don't.

ELFRIDA: So it's happened.

MACBETH: *(to BISHOP)* Pay attention—

GRUOCH: *(to BISHOP)* Ask him about his sins.

BISHOP: What?

GRUOCH: Ask him about that rag and his sins—

BISHOP: I will not be scripted—

MACBETH and GRUOCH simply wait. Then MACBETH kneels to BISHOP. BISHOP, nonplussed, kneels as well.

BISHOP: What of your sins, then?

MACBETH: I have none.

BISHOP: You killed a man—

MACBETH looks at GRUOCH.

MACBETH: And neither does she.

BISHOP: You have—you have—

MACBETH: Fucked?

BISHOP:—his instantaneous widow—
and you would deny—

MACBETH: *(to ELFRIDA)* She wanted that.

BISHOP: *(to ELFRIDA)* Did you?

ELFRIDA: *(to MACBETH)* Give my daughter's name back!

BISHOP: Did you?

ELFRIDA: You want a theology?
A woman—

ATTENDANT 1: Alone—

ATTENDANT 2: Alone—

ATTENDANT 3: Alone! Sorry—

ELFRIDA: What justice in the life of
a woman alone?

ATTENDANTS: None! Sorry—

ELFRIDA: He offered.

GRUOCH: I accepted.

ELFRIDA: *(to MACBETH)* Give her name back!

MACBETH: *(indicating BISHOP)* That is entirely up to him—to you—

BISHOP: *(perplexed)* I can't help but see the evil in this—

ATTENDANTS: Old forms! Old eyes!

BISHOP: But it seems that seeing the evil
is a pointless talent—

MACBETH: Which means we can begin your repair.

GRUOCH: *(to ELFRIDA)* And yours.
Take comfort, mother.

MACBETH rises, enfolds GRUOCH in his coverlet, embraces her. BISHOP rises.

GRUOCH: Think on this new theology.

MACBETH: Begins with that first night
outside banished Paradise.

The ATTENDANTS move and dance to the words.

MACBETH: Adam and Eve—
they have no more comfort—

GRUOCH: They only have the heat
from their terrible bodies—

MACBETH: Only that fuming heat
as any protection against.
And the—

ATTENDANTS: Fuck—

MACBETH:—they made during
their first ticking darkness—

ATTENDANTS: That first night after their last night—

MACBETH:—became the world's first absolution—

GRUOCH:—dirt forgiving dirt—

MACBETH:—which trumped all
that God-bitch of a flaming sword—

GRUOCH:—and the acid serpent—

MACBETH: After that first marrying—

GRUOCH: Whatever anger they felt turned
to joint sadness—

ATTENDANTS: About their inevitable deaths—

MACBETH: And that sadness
flooded their senses—

GRUOCH: Joined death to the morning's piss
and the overnight hunger—

MACBETH: And—most importantly—
joined a body to a soul—

GRUOCH: Because, Bishop, first Adam and first Eve
had no souls in their flesh
before they had such sadness—

MACBETH: First Adam and first Eve
made their own flesh "flesh"
during that first banished darkness.

The ATTENDANTS finish.

GRUOCH: Soul through darkness,
flesh through exile—

BISHOP: You would put yourselves over God?

MACBETH and GRUOCH face each other.

GRUOCH: Of course not.

MACBETH: Just that God seems to have better skills
at finishing things off
than beginning them.

GRUOCH: So we refinished ourselves
through what God had forgotten
but His Son remembered—

BISHOP: Murder and—fucking!—

ATTENDANTS: Ooooh!

BISHOP:—are not in the Gospels—

ATTENDANTS: Aaaah!

BISHOP:—are not love!

MACBETH: That word—
that one still hanging
from your mouth—

BISHOP: Love?

MACBETH:—is not limited—
you are.

BISHOP: The soul is the only thing
that keeps the dirt out of us,
keeps us out of the dirt—

ATTENDANTS: Oh, father! Your short hairs are snicked again!

MACBETH: Don't worry, father—
we still love our souls—

GRUOCH: We have worked hard to make them ours—

MACBETH: But we love them because
they terrify us—

BISHOP: Terrify you?

MACBETH's SQUIRE comes in carrying two bundles of clothing, for MACBETH and GRUOCH.

BISHOP: Terrify you?

GRUOCH: Terrify us in the best
of all possible ways.

MACBETH: (to SQUIRE) Good.

BISHOP: Terrify? Terrify?

MACBETH indicates to the ATTENDANTS to take GRUOCH's bundle, which they do, and begin helping GRUOCH dress. SQUIRE helps MACBETH dress. Neither are ashamed of their nakedness.

MACBETH: Help your daughter.

ELFRIDA: I am too sick at heart.

MACBETH: Why is everyone here so limited?
So annoyingly tragic and sentimental?
Help.
Your.
Daughter.

ELFRIDA goes to help the ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH: Bishop?

MACBETH indicates for BISHOP to help SQUIRE, which, to his surprise, he does. MACBETH and GRUOCH face each other as everyone dresses them into their bridal clothes.

MACBETH: I am sorry for the old Macbeth.

GRUOCH: The old Macbeth was to be sorry for.

MACBETH: And the old Gruoch?

GRUOCH: What will my name be?

MACBETH: What do you want your name to do?

GRUOCH: If I take your name,
I take it—

MACBETH: Wound me.

GRUOCH: You don't give the name to me.

MACBETH: I'll take the wound as a gift.

GRUOCH: Will you give the same wound to me?

MACBETH: Wounds are like mouths—
through what else
can we feed each other
grace?

The dressers turn MACBETH and GRUOCH to face outward. The ATTENDANTS grab BISHOP and dance him around. SQUIRE finishes dressing MACBETH, ELFRIDA finishes dressing GRUOCH.

ATTENDANT 1 licks BISHOP's ear.

BISHOP: Don't—

ATTENDANT 1: You have wax in your ears.

ATTENDANT 2 puts a finger in BISHOP's ear.

BISHOP: Please—

MACBETH: His confusion will save him.

ATTENDANT 2: The worms will crawl in.

BISHOP: Please—

ATTENDANT 3 cups her hands around his ears and whispers to him. BISHOP collapses.

ATTENDANT 3: The worm is in!

GRUOCH: Because his confusion
will make him more tender.

ATTENDANTS roll BISHOP into sitting up, fan him, mock-minister to him.

ATTENDANT 1: Runion.

ATTENDANT 2: Aroint.

ATTENDANT 3: Rump-fed.

BISHOP comes to, sees the ATTENDANTS, throws himself forward on his hands and knees. ATTENDANT 1 is immediately on him like a wrestler and easily flips him

onto his back, pins his shoulder. ATTENDANT 2 slams her hand down to signal the pin, ATTENDANT 3 holds BISHOP in her lap as if they were a Pieta. ATTENDANTS 1 and 2 kneel to either side like mock cherubim.

MACBETH and GRUOCH are now completely dressed.

MACBETH: Let her sit.

SQUIRE gets on his hands and knees. ELFRIDA sits on his back. MACBETH goes to her, touches her cheek, which ELFRIDA does and does not accept. Then ELFRIDA bites his hand, just a nip, quickly and without malice.

ATTENDANTS begin humming a lullaby to BISHOP.

MACBETH and GRUOCH come down to BISHOP's level. BISHOP shifts his eyes between them but dares not move.

MACBETH: Father, bless you that you dwell
among the perfect forms
and try to outfit us with them.

GRUOCH: Because the ordinary folk,
simmering in their flesh,
need the forms—

MACBETH: For comfort—

GRUOCH: To soothe the shame they feel
for accepting to be, well, ordinary—

MACBETH: And safe—

GRUOCH: And spineless—

MACBETH: Letting the terrible beauty of their souls
boil away into prayer—

GRUOCH: And devotion—

MACBETH: And compassion—

GRUOCH: And good works.

MACBETH: Sin is the soul's way
to get back to
its first enormous power.

GRUOCH: Evil is the soul's way
to keep itself
from suffocating under the tedium
of a good heart.

ATTENDANTS as CHORUS OF CROWS

ATTENDANTS: Bishop, you are being renovated.
Unremember all.
They do not go that way.

MACBETH: You see—limited—

ATTENDANT 1: No other way to say it!

ATTENDANTS as CHORUS OF CROWS

ATTENDANTS: By thinking the usual soul
Has only the good
At its heart's core—

ATTENDANT 2: The spark!

ATTENDANT 3: Of divinity!

MACBETH: And this—belief—
that if you let the spark
ignite—

ATTENDANTS: Whoosh!

ATTENDANT 3: The body will be salvationed
by that goodness.

ATTENDANTS: Not so!

They all spit.

GRUOCH: That is such a mean and small purpose
for something made so beautiful
by pain.

GRUOCH leans in to BISHOP, whispers.

GRUOCH: The soul has explosions in it
which threaten to make us great—

MACBETH also moves in.

MACBETH: To make us great
before death
shaves off our tongues.

GRUOCH: We will not go the usual way.

MACBETH: Do you follow?

BISHOP: I should not be hearing this.

MACBETH: Are you terrified for your soul?

BISHOP: I don't know.

MACBETH: Good.

Addresses ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH: Set him up.

ATTENDANTS manhandle BISHOP into standing. ELFRIDA stands. SQUIRE stands. BISHOP prepares.

ATTENDANTS go to ELFRIDA. Light shifts to those four. ATTENDANTS, as one, gasp and moan as if in orgasm. GRUOCH moves into the light.

ATTENDANTS: Do you remember?

ELFRIDA: We named you Gruoch—
I don't know why.
I don't think you can change it.
The name sounds like it comes from
the throats of crows.

GRUOCH: You said that to me.

ELFRIDA: Not that you have many memories—

GRUOCH: And I said, "I heard—it—them—the screams—your screams—they—shook me—as I—"

GRUOCH makes a sliding motion with her hand: slipping out of the womb.

ELFRIDA: "The obligatory motherly screams," I said.

GRUOCH: Did I—hurt—

ELFRIDA: And I said, "You don't have many choices—"

GRUOCH: "I want to go back. To there."

ELFRIDA slaps her own belly.

ELFRIDA: "To the queen's labyrinth?"
God, I am so foul!

ATTENDANTS: Foul is fair—

ELFRIDA: "I did not spit you into the light to want such things."

GRUOCH: I pleaded.

ELFRIDA: "You have had your last taste of paradise, daughter—"
God, I am so foul!

ATTENDANTS: Fair is foul—

ELFRIDA: I will embrace you,
if that is something
you think you want.

They do not embrace.

ELFRIDA: I am—still—heartily sorry.

ELFRIDA turns and leaves. MACBETH indicates for SQUIRE to follow her.

MACBETH: Begin it and end it.

BISHOP: You do?

MACBETH and GRUOCH nod.

BISHOP: 'Tis done.

BISHOP exits. ATTENDANTS suddenly sniff the air.

ATTENDANT 1: He's here.

ATTENDANT 2: He's come.

ATTENDANT 3: Late for one, on time for the other.

MACBETH: I was hoping we could avoid him.

GRUOCH: I think it will be good to have him here.

MACBETH: I hate having to respect
what deserves no respect.

GRUOCH: Then it gives you the model of
what not to be when you become.

MACBETH shoots her a look.

GRUOCH: You are currently a minor thane
of a foul province,
according to some.

ATTENDANT 1: He's coming closer, you two.

MACBETH: You are pitching something to me.

GRUOCH: Nothing that's not already
pitched its tent in your mind.

ATTENDANT 2: Just pitch it out! He's—

MACBETH: I disagree with you.

ATTENDANT 3: Just admit it—she's got your number—

GRUOCH: I have a father in absentia,
a mother in absentia-to-be,
and am now yoked—
by choice, don't get me wrong—
to a minor thane of a foul province,
and possessed of a soul of terrifying beauty.
Which way do my thoughts go?

MACBETH: Turning theory into practice, it seems.

GRUOCH: What else do you plan on doing
with your life?
Our life?

The ATTENDANTS strike an annunciatory pose.

ATTENDANTS: Duncan, Duncan
Brute stupid from birth
Throne-stuck by chance
Comes to celebrate
His ignorance.

DUNCAN comes in cradled by the SOLDIER. He is shocked to see MACBETH and GRUOCH. SOLDIER wears two swords.

DUNCAN: Where is Gillacomgain?

SOLDIER puts DUNCAN down, who totters.

DUNCAN: Where is Gillacomgain?

MACBETH kneels. GRUOCH kneels. ATTENDANT 1 picks up a wooden box and brings it to SOLDIER, who opens it, reacts repulsed, then shows it to DUNCAN. DUNCAN stares at the contents. SOLDIER goes to close the lid—DUNCAN stops him. DUNCAN stares. For a long time. Finally, he gestures. SOLDIER closes the lid. ATTENDANT 1 takes it but carries it back to the other ATTENDANTS. Slowly each passes it to each—each looks, each reacts.

DUNCAN: Where is—the rest?

MACBETH: Resting.

DUNCAN: Through him to me.
Through him to me.

MACBETH: Through him to her.
To queen, not king.
My father is avenged.

SOLDIER whispers in DUNCAN's ear.

DUNCAN: I had heard about that.
His doing that.
So you—

DUNCAN stares, seems to have lost his train of thought.

MACBETH: Through him to her.
To queen, not king.

DUNCAN: I am satisfied. Satisfied.
Are you satisfied?

GRUOCH: I am a faithful wife.

DUNCAN: "Faithful" from your mouth—when—

DUNCAN points to the box but says nothing more. For a long time.

DUNCAN: Something has shifted.

MACBETH rises, gives a hand to GRUOCH, who rises. MACBETH goes to DUNCAN, who at first backs away from him. But with care MACBETH lifts DUNCAN to carry him and carries him off. SOLDIER remains. ATTENDANTS put the box down, wait.

GRUOCH walks up to SOLDIER.

GRUOCH: Do I [know]—

SOLDIER hands her a sword.

GRUOCH: I do.

GRUOCH kisses the sword, tastes the metal on her lips.

GRUOCH: I thought I was going
to have to lose this—

They fight hard. Hard. To an agreed draw. GRUOCH goes to give him back the sword, but then keeps it. GRUOCH exits. SOLDIER waits, exits.

Wind. Thunder. Slam of doors. ATTENDANTS carry the box downstage.

ATTENDANT 1: If they want to be really human—fully human—

ATTENDANT 2: Then let's do "human" to them—

ATTENDANT 3: In full measure.

ATTENDANT 1: Shouldn't be too hard.

ATTENDANT 3: I mean, they're asking for it.

ATTENDANT 2: They should get what they ask for.

ATTENDANT 1: Are you hungry?

ATTENDANT 1 opens the box. The three stare at the contents. Together they spit into the box. ATTENDANT 2 closes it. ATTENDANT 3 picks it up and shakes it, puts it back down, opens it.

ATTENDANT 2: I'm hungry.

ATTENDANT 3: Hungry I am.

ATTENDANT 1: Come wind.

ATTENDANTS: Come wrack.

Wind. Thunder. Slam of doors. Darkness.

* * * * *

Scene 6: Sixth Lady

GRUOCH with quarterstaff. Hair wild, half-dressed. She wears a leather thong from which hangs a small wooden cross. ATTENDANTS, now completely the witches they were meant to be, also have quarterstaffs. They are off to the side, as if tramps around a fire. They occasionally pick something to eat from the wooden box.

Not far from them lies SINT, bloodied and unconscious. Next to him is a kit bag.

Wind. Thunder. GRUOCH takes several steps. Suddenly silence, light.

ATTENDANT 2: Something—

ATTENDANT 3: Putrid?

ATTENDANT 1: Paltry?

ATTENDANT 3: Pickled?

ATTENDANT 2: This way comes.

GRUOCH takes one more step. Wind. Thunder.

ATTENDANTS: Wicked—yes—that's [it]—

GRUOCH takes one more step. Silence, light. She fakes a step, but the earth is not fooled.

ATTENDANT 1: You have to be quicker than that, cuntster.

GRUOCH swings her quarterstaff at ATTENDANT 1, who with only half an effort blocks it. Wind and thunder return.

ATTENDANT 2: Your grief embarrasses us.

ATTENDANT 2 swings at GRUOCH, who blocks it. They exchange several blows.

ATTENDANT 1: We thought you were better—

GRUOCH: You think I cherish it?

ATTENDANT 3: We didn't give it to you for you to cherish—

ATTENDANT 1: We gave it to you to keep your wounds fresh—

ATTENDANT 2: And thus your mind open.

GRUOCH: You killed my father?

ATTENDANT 1: The death of a father—

ATTENDANT 2: Is not hard—

ATTENDANT 3:—to arrange.

GRUOCH: He was still young!

ATTENDANT 1: Before his time?

ATTENDANT 2: Who knows?

ATTENDANT 3: Every day is our last day.

ATTENDANT 2: Besides, entropy churns all your philosophies to shit.

ATTENDANT 1: Besides—it's not like you didn't want it to happen.

The wind fills the ears.

ATTENDANT 3: Take note.

ATTENDANTS 1 & 2: Taking note.

ATTENDANT 3: She doth not protest too much.

ATTENDANTS 1 & 2: Nope.

SINT groans. They all ignore him.

ATTENDANT 2: Mother's soon to follow?

GRUOCH: Don't you dare.

ATTENDANT 3: Who are you to command anything, dame?

SINT groans. They all ignore him.

ATTENDANT 1: You're just a cunt—cunts don't get to command anything.

ATTENDANT 3: No matter how much you have a husband who says he is your dearest partner—

ATTENDANT 1: Has he really let you do anything?

ATTENDANT 2: After all, he is just another father for you—and father-cock trumps daughter-cunt every time.

ATTENDANT 1: Unless you have fatherless cunts like ours.

ATTENDANT 3: Would you like to be one of us?

ATTENDANT 1: Think you could rise to that level?

SINT groans. They all ignore him. He groans again, sits up, looks around. A look of panic—he pats his jacket, pulls out a pair of glasses, puts them on.

ATTENDANT 2: The first thing you did was take those off and tuck them away—shielded them. What are they?

SINT: Have I done something to deserve what I received from you all?

ATTENDANT 1: *(to ATTENDANT 2)* What I want to know is, Do you have food in that bag?

SINT: In a manner of speaking.

SINT looks to GRUOCH.

SINT: I know you—lady.
These others—

ATTENDANT 3: For today—who knows about tomorrow? Entropy churns all philosophies to—

ATTENDANT 2: What kind of “manner of speaking”?

SINT: I was coming to seek shelter at your—
I am lost.

ATTENDANT 2: Talk to me.

GRUOCH: I am in mourning.

SINT: Is that why these three pummeled me down?
Is that part of a ritual in this area—
to batter travelers as a sign of
the reigning grief?

SINT reaches into his bag and pulls out a notebook and a pencil.

SINT: I must record
this strange [behavior]—

GRUOCH: I am in mourning!
I have lost—

But before finishing her sentence, GRUOCH wheels on the three ATTENDANTS, and the four of them engage in a fierce round of quarterstaffing—though it is clear, from their choice not to gang up on her, that the ATTENDANTS serve as vents for GRUOCH's confusions.

SINT makes sure to keep himself and his bag clear of the battle. As they fight, SINT writes.

ATTENDANT 1: Done yet?

GRUOCH: No!

ATTENDANT 2: Done yet?

GRUOCH: No!

ATTENDANT 3: Done yet?

GRUOCH: Yes.

SINT: Excuse me—is that, too,
all part of—something—
common to this area—
sorry, don't mean to be intrusive—

Winded, GRUOCH tries to catch her breath. The ATTENDANTS watch her. SINT writes, waits, writes, ponders, writes. Finally, GRUOCH speaks.

GRUOCH: I did hate him.

SINT: Who?
Sorry—
not my turn, right.

But this doesn't prevent SINT from writing in his journal.

ATTENDANT 1: He was never there—now your father'll never be there forever.

ATTENDANT 2: He's reached his zenith of doing best what he did best in his life—

ATTENDANT 3: Which is ignoring you.

ATTENDANT 1: You should be grateful that death has relieved him of the tedium of feeling guilty about ignoring you—

ATTENDANT 2: And that with his death you are now free to suffer your freedom completely free of—

ATTENDANT 3: Isn't that what all that blather you and Macbreeeaaaaath—

ATTENDANT 3 mimics heavy breathing.

ATTENDANT 3:—made about Adam and Eve and fucking yourself into existence all about?

SINT: (*sotto voce*) I am lost
but fascinated—

ATTENDANT 1: You, girl, have to learn to live with the consequences of getting what you desired if not deserved.

SINT: (*sotto voce*) Yes, yes—

ATTENDANT 1 suddenly lifts her head, sniffs. So do the other two ATTENDANTS. So does SINT, though he has no idea what he is sniffing for. ATTENDANT 1 reaches into a pocket and pulls out dice. She rolls them. The three read the results. They sniff again. ATTENDANT 1 picks up the dice. They turn to GRUOCH.

ATTENDANT 1: Last chance to join us.

ATTENDANT 2: With us, you get freedom without the dire consequences.

ATTENDANT 3: Way better than staying on the tedious path of being and becoming a human—
humping along all that unfinishable business—

GRUOCH ignores them. They prepare to leave.

ATTENDANT 2: A drum, a drum—

ATTENDANT 3: Dum-dum-dee-dum—

ATTENDANT 1: Fee-fi-fo-fum—

They exit, taking the wooden box with them. SINT is writing, finishes. He waits. GRUOCH stares. SINT clears his throat—nothing. Silence. Wind.

SINT: As I said—

GRUOCH: Shut up.

SINT: Of course.

GRUOCH: I have lost my father.
Don't you have an opinion?

SINT: You told me to shut up.

GRUOCH: I told you to shut up.

SINT: Right.

GRUOCH: Because in the end
words are useless—
like boils—

SINT: Like plagues.

GRUOCH: Serve only to afflict—

SINT: Affect—

GRUOCH: Shut up.

SINT: Right—just following along—

GRUOCH: The disease of chatter in my head—

SINT: (*sotto voce*) An unfortunate habit—
mine [also]—

GRUOCH:—chatter chatter chatter,
the barking of crows,
none of it adds up—

SINT: Lady, you are in grief—

Before SINT can finish, GRUOCH threatens him with the quarterstaff.

SINT: I would prefer that you didn't—
again—
it hurts—
I am not an enemy—

GRUOCH: You are an accident—

SINT: No—
well, perhaps—

GRUOCH:—"chatter" who presumes to tell
the lady what she feels—

SINT: To explain would be—bold—
wouldn't it?—
who could explain a lady?
"she moves with grace"—
who can explain movements of grace?—
I just observe—

GRUOCH: What?

SINT: A human in pain—
lost in the middle of the road—
not unlike myself, though I would never—
equate—
no, I was trying to find shelter—
as I said, I am lost—
and I observe—
that—
you—
are—

GRUOCH moves away from him. SINT pulls his bag closer to him.

GRUOCH: There is a war going on.

SINT: Yes—true—
I am trying to avoid—
no, not avoid—
don't get me wrong—

GRUOCH: My husband is off fighting—

SINT: Macbeth—
Macbeth mac Findlaech.

GRUOCH: You know him.

SINT: Of him.
Word of his—

GRUOCH: What do you have in that bag?

SINT: Nothing.

GRUOCH: It's not empty.

SINT: I meant nothing of
any importance
to a lady.

GRUOCH makes the gesture of writing.

GRUOCH: What was that?

SINT: I try to do nothing that offends—

GRUOCH: When the three she-phlegms were here—

SINT: I don't think I was—

GRUOCH slams the quarterstaff on the ground.

SINT: Writing—I was writing—
you look puzzled—

GRUOCH: What is writing?

SINT stands—in pain, to be sure, but steady.

SINT: Excuse me—
I've just been a little—
disjointed here—

He carefully and stiffly sets the kit bag over his shoulder.

SINT: There. Good.
Now—you ask,
what is writing?

GRUOCH points to the glasses.

GRUOCH: And what—

SINT: These?
You don't—
of course not,
why else would you ask—
these are called "glasses"
or "spectacles"—

On an impulse, he takes them off and goes to put them on GRUOCH's face. GRUOCH pulls back. SINT pulls back, realizing his breach of etiquette. GRUOCH gestures to him, and he places the glasses on her. GRUOCH looks around, not sure what it is she's seeing through.

SINT pulls out his journal, opens it, holds it in front of GRUOCH.

SINT: What happens?

GRUOCH jerks back, then leans forward.

SINT: Take them off,
then put them back on—
to compare—
yes, right, like that—

GRUOCH: They make things clearer—
these—

SINT closes the journal, takes the glasses back, puts them on.

SINT: In a manner of speaking, yes—
clearer—

GRUOCH: And in that—thing—

SINT: This? Journal—a kind of book—

GRUOCH: That's writing?

SINT: Yes.

SINT puts the journal down, pulls out a wooden case from his bag, opens it, takes out the pencil he was using.

SINT: I use this—
my own invention, actually—
a long thin piece of coal
that I've sanded down—
cupped it in two halves of
a twig I've split
and hollowed out,
wrapped in leather to keep
the halves together—

SINT hands it to her—carefully, reluctantly eager to get it back.

SINT: To keep it sharp
I can just grind it on a rock
or something hard and rough—
a beggar's beard, say—
that was a joke—
please, be careful—
sorry, don't mean to be—

But GRUOCH is not going to do anything to harm the pencil. She hands it back to him. SINT puts it away, gets his journal.

GRUOCH: The journal uses your words.

SINT: Well, yes, uses—
collects—
you're right—

GRUOCH: Words—

SINT: You sound—

GRUOCH: They lie. Cheat.

SINT: To me, words are like these glasses.

GRUOCH: Those don't lie and cheat.

SINT: Do not misunderstand me, lady—
I don't say words tell the truth—
I wouldn't ever say that—
they only make, well, sometimes—
they can help make things clearer—

GRUOCH: If words don't tell the truth,
and not telling the truth is lying,
then the person who collects words
must be a liar,
since words don't tell the truth.
Isn't that clear,
or are my words lying?

SINT takes a small but significant step backwards.

SINT: There's a logic to what you say—
you are very clever—

GRUOCH: For an unread queen—lady—

SINT: A logic that I wish
you wouldn't follow
to its conclusions—

SINT points to the quarterstaff.

SINT:—conclusions especially made of ash—
conclusions which would be false,
in any case,
at least as they pertain to me—

SINT moves, GRUOCH moves, quarterstaff ready.

GRUOCH: Convince me.

SINT: Truth?

Who can say, eh?

Who can really say?

GRUOCH: You can say.

SINT: Well, then, I would say
that saying you have—
saying that one has—
the truth—
just locks you—
locks one—
down.
Locks one in.

GRUOCH: Make it simpler.

SINT: To a sheep, the fence is a truth,
and the sheep believes
the fence will keep it safe.

GRUOCH: Until the wolf slithers in and—

SINT: The wolf is clarity.
The wolf brings in clarity
about the vulnerability of fences.
Of truth.

GRUOCH: Through blood.

SINT: It's only one sheep.

GRUOCH: But for that sheep,
it's a steep lesson—

SINT: How much does one sheep matter
if other sheep—
if they can move out of
being sheep for the moment—
learn something real
from the wolf?

GRUOCH: That they're just available meat?

SINT: We're all just meat—
the world has been nothing ever
but a slaughterhouse,
history nothing but an instruction manual
for butcher's tools—
that's nothing new, nothing useful—
do you need a tutor,
by any chance?
For anyone in Inverness—
children?
Yourself?
I am quite available.

GRUOCH: So, meat is the end-all of it all.

SINT: Let's take this as a job interview, shall we?
Here's my best:
I prefer to think
that thinking of meat—
I'm sorry, always making
these split distinctions—
"think that thinking of"—
force of [habit]—

GRUOCH: Quit lip-flapping—

SINT: Thinking of meat
is the beginning-all,
not the end-all—
once you know you're meat and
not really some sort of
broken-backed angel trash-tossed
in ancient times out of a garden
with uneatable apples—
really, the stories people
tell themselves—

GRUOCH goes to swipe the legs out from under SINT, but he leaps over the quarterstaff.

SINT: Did that touch a nerve—

SINT ducks a swipe from GRUOCH.

SINT: If I am hopping and dodging here,
how can I finish answering
your excellent questions
and challenging observations?

GRUOCH: I am not meat. My father is not—

SINT: Have I told you my thoughts
on feeling grief
for the death of a father?
Have I?

GRUOCH stops.

SINT: Do not mishear me—
I have the greatest respect
for human “meat”—
it is the ground and root
of all we are—
thinking meat,
feeling meat,
grieving meat.
Respecting that idea
is like having these spectacles—
it clears things up.

GRUOCH: My father’s meat rots.

SINT: Bodies rot.
But not your memory
of him in you.

GRUOCH: He had such grace.

SINT: Grace continued in you,
so therefore not lost.
Lady, do you not understand?
Not that you’re not capable
of under[standing]—

GRUOCH: Stop sucking back in fear
everything you spit out.
Spit it out.

SINT: You won’t hit me?

GRUOCH: Only if I need to clarify you.

SINT: I will be clear
so that I can be clear of bruises
but not so that you can be clear of me and—
all right, I'll move it on—
here is the lesson:
once you understand meat,
once you understand the wolf,
what follows is that you,
the sheep that survives,
has the necessity—
no—the right—
to make sure that
no wolf ever clarifies you
down to death.
That look—you don't believe?

GRUOCH: You sound like my nurse.

SINT: Then you have a smart nurse
because she and I are right—
whatever the sheep does
in protection of its own meat
is the right thing done.

GRUOCH: Had.

SINT: What?

GRUOCH: Had a nurse.

SINT: I'm sorry—

GRUOCH: I killed her—
a sign of love
that I no longer needed her—

SINT: And I am scoring in you
the theology of meat?

GRUOCH: Anything? Anything done?

SINT: Do you not love your father?

GRUOCH: What do "father" and "anything done"
have to do with each other?

SINT: Think on the connections—
the father in you
who made you fierce and graceful—
and then history
always never-endingly meat-hungry—
and then your husband off at war—
for—
what?
Whatever it is he fights for?
Done to protect—
protect you, protect him—
he is precious to you?

GRUOCH: You are very confusing.

SINT intakes a big lungful of air.

SINT: Then I suck all the words back.
Even though you told me not to do—
not to confuse the lady.

SINT shoulders his bag, prepares to leave. GRUOCH pounds the quarterstaff.

GRUOCH: I said that you were confusing—
not that I was confused,
you patronizing clot-pole.

SINT: Then the interview is going well?

GRUOCH lifts up her head, sniffs, suddenly feral.

SINT: Sorry. What?

GRUOCH: His fighting—endless—
they have just—

SINT: Is it possible—
should we move off the road?

GRUOCH: You were looking for shelter.
You'll stay with me.
With us.

SINT: That is kind—

GRUOCH: I am not kind.
I want something from you.

SINT: “Kind” and “want”
are not mutually exclusive—

GRUOCH: Shut up.
You’re in danger.

The ATTENDANTS return, carrying their box.

ATTENDANT 1: Either of you hungry?
We have new bits.

They circle SINT, picking at his clothes, his bag, his hair.

ATTENDANT 2: Warm—

ATTENDANT 1: Warmish—

ATTENDANT 2: Fresh—

ATTENDANT 3: Mostly—

ATTENDANT 1: From the field of battle—

ATTENDANT 3: “Field of battle”—sounds rural—bucolic—

ATTENDANT 3 belches.

ATTENDANT 3:—the “colic” part is right—might as well call it the wolf’s dinner plate—

ATTENDANT 2: Even the ravens got bored with the amount of unjointed carnage lying around—

ATTENDANT 1: Scavenging can be such tedious work—

ATTENDANTS: So, what have you two been up to?

GRUOCH: You saw him, didn’t you?

The ATTENDANTS sit, start eating out of their box, don’t answer right away. SINT reaches into his bag for his journal, thinks better of it.

ATTENDANT 1: We saw him.

GRUOCH: And?

ATTENDANT 2: Very king-like, that Macbeth.

SINT can’t resist. He pulls out his journal and pencil and begins to write and sketch.

ATTENDANT 3: (*laughing*) Which only means that he sliced up more people than anyone else!

GRUOCH: And Duncan—where was Duncan?

ATTENDANT 1: Very far away, his orders to his soldiers like farts, smelly and weightless—

ATTENDANT 2: Unpleasant but easily ignored—

ATTENDANT 3: Which Macbeth did—very king-like in his ignoring—slice-slice—

ATTENDANT 1: Chop-chop—

ATTENDANT 2: Snick-snack—

ATTENDANT 3: The ravens and the wolves loved him.

ATTENDANT 3 nudges the others, points to GRUOCH.

ATTENDANT 3: She muses. And him—look at the scribbler-dribbler over there, sucking it all down.

ATTENDANT 2: Greedy bastard.

ATTENDANT 1: He's got something up his sleeves—

ATTENDANT 2: And something down his pants—

ATTENDANT 1: The lady has been so alone lately.

ATTENDANT 2: And then he just shows up—

ATTENDANTS 1 & 2: Hmmm.

ATTENDANT 3: Oy!

GRUOCH turns slowly to face the ATTENDANTS.

ATTENDANT 3: Snap out of your reverend reverie. You have to use us or lose us—we are getting bored with how little progress you have made—after all our teachings. Other opportunities call.

GRUOCH looks to SINT. SINT stops writing.

GRUOCH: You said anything done?
To protect?

SINT: That's my opinion.
Otherwise—

SINT points at the ATTENDANTS, who are still eating from their box.

ATTENDANT 3: What?

ATTENDANTS 1 & 2: What?

SINT: Otherwise it ends in that—
drool and molars and
munch and munch and munch
and then the pit privy.

GRUOCH: How much clearer could it be?

SINT: As clarity goes in a confusing world—

GRUOCH: Take me back there.

ATTENDANT 1: The battle's done.

ATTENDANT 2: The battle's lost and won.

GRUOCH: I want to see him—
but I don't want him to see me.

The ATTENDANTS look at one another.

ATTENDANT 3: We can do that—that would be a good way of using us.

ATTENDANT 2: And not losing us.

ATTENDANT 1: Thanks for choosing us.

The ATTENDANTS close their box and stand up.

ATTENDANT 1: We were getting low anyway.

ATTENDANT 2: We seem to need a lot.

ATTENDANT 3: More than we imagined.

GRUOCH: Then wait.

ATTENDANTS: Our love for you allows us to be commanded.

GRUOCH signals for SINT to move closer so the ATTENDANTS can't hear.

SINT: Just be careful.
They love nothing.

GRUOCH: So now you introduce love.

SINT: That is all
I've been talking about,
lady—

SINT holds up his journal.

SINT:—love threads through everything.
Without love,
we are just ravens,
ravenous,
ravening up.

GRUOCH: You have a strange idea of love, then.

SINT: What's strange is that
anyone thinks that love is at heart
gentle, kind, deferential, reciprocal—

GRUOCH: I have often suspected—

SINT: Of course.
Your nurse—

GRUOCH: My father—

SINT: Why else are you here now,
like this?
What you are going
to go do with them for him
is going to be done for love.

GRUOCH: And you say love can embrace such a—

SINT: It embraces everything, lady.
That's what makes love so
fearsome. That's why people try
to tame love down
to a heart and a flower
and a squeeze and a bump.

SINT whispers.

SINT: They fear the greatness
love can lead them to.
And you, my lady,
have a hunger for greatness.

ATTENDANTS: Are we leaving with you, or leaving you with him?

SINT holds up his hand to them.

SINT: Almost done.

The ATTENDANTS hold up three middle fingers back to him.

GRUOCH: My dead father—

SINT: This is the only way
to compass the grief
for your absent father.
This is where this all started,
isn't it?

GRUOCH: Otherwise—

SINT: Go on.

GRUOCH: Otherwise it will eat me up.

SINT: Grief is such a wolf.

GRUOCH: Clarifies or butchers.

SINT: Your choice.
Make it your choice.

GRUOCH slips the leather thong with the cross over her head and hands it to SINT.

GRUOCH: The heap of stone we call home
is that way.
That will get you in.
Wait.

GRUOCH also hands him the quarterstaff.

GRUOCH: Just in case
you meet strange women
on the way.
And one last thing.

GRUOCH touches the journal.

GRUOCH: You will teach me to do this.

SINT: That was already assumed.

GRUOCH moves to the ATTENDANTS. Each holds out a hand.

ATTENDANT 1: The Weird Sisters—

ATTENDANT 2: Hand—

ATTENDANT 3:—in hand.

GRUOCH: It seems that I have come home.

Hand in hand, they exit. SINT alone. He writes.

SINT: "The Weird Sisters, hand in hand—"

SINT closes the journal, puts it and the pencil away.

SINT: The gift of gab once again
does the trick—
my meat is still my own.

A hesitation, then SINT exits in the direction taken by the women.

Darkness. Wind.

* * * * *

Scene 7: Seventh Lady

DOCTOR and GENTLEWOMAN in a corridor in the castle. To one side, in shadow, is SINT with his journal open, pencil ready.

DOCTOR: I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

GENTLEWOMAN: Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

DOCTOR: A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching!

Enter GRUOCH.

GENTLEWOMAN: Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

SINT: *(in a whisper)* Now we begin.

DOCTOR: What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

GENTLEWOMAN: It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

GRUOCH: Yet here's a spot.

SINT follows along in his journal.

SINT: "Yet here's a spot."

DOCTOR: Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

DOCTOR pulls out paper and his own pencil.

SINT: Already done.

As GRUOCH speaks, SINT follows along in his journal, as if he were ready to prompt her with cues if needed.

GRUOCH: Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--

DOCTOR: 'Tis as if she reads from segmented pages—

GRUOCH: Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

DOCTOR: Do you mark that?

SINT: Mark away.

GRUOCH: The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?--
What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o'that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.

DOCTOR: Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

SINT: The best is to come.

GENTLEWOMAN: She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: heaven knows what she has known.

SINT: You are quite amazing.

GRUOCH: Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!

DOCTOR: What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

SINT: We should be charging you admission.

GENTLEWOMAN: I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.

DOCTOR: This disease is beyond my practice: yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

GRUOCH: What's done cannot be undone.

DOCTOR: Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles—

GRUOCH takes out the dirk and, without hesitation, plunges it into her heart. SINT mimics the action. GRUOCH crumples. DOCTOR moves forward. GENTLEWOMAN squelches a scream.

DOCTOR: My God!

GENTLEWOMAN holds him back.

GENTLEWOMAN: No physic, no physic for her—her heart is finally at peace.

DOCTOR: But her soul!

GENTLEWOMAN: Do you think she has one left? Corroded to a nubbin by her griefs. Besides, what you can do about her soul? Go. Tell.

DOCTOR: God, God forgive us all! Look after her. My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight. I think, but dare not speak.

GENTLEWOMAN: Reverse this—do not think, and go speak.

DOCTOR exits at a run.

GENTLEWOMAN: Good night, good doctor.

GENTLEWOMAN waits, looking in the direction of the departing DOCTOR.

GENTLEWOMAN: He's gone.

GRUOCH gets up, removes the knife from her heart. SINT comes on, takes out a handkerchief and wipes the knife clean.

SINT: You did the lines well.

GENTLEWOMAN: His own foul blabs
will be soon be genuine abroad.
To sundry, then to all.

SINT: We only need the one to hear. And you?

GRUOCH: Not in front of her.

SINT: Of course not. Go.

GENTLEWOMAN: Yes, my queen. My pay?

SINT takes coins out of his pocket, hands them over. GENTLEWOMAN leaves. The ATTENDANTS come out of the darkness.

GRUOCH: She is her own species of blabbermouth.

ATTENDANT 1: She won't be that for long.

SINT: Let her do her work first—
she has more lines to say.

ATTENDANT 1: I don't listen to you.

GRUOCH: Do as he says. So that she says.
And then we will ready ourselves
for the trip.

The ATTENDANTS leave.

GRUOCH: I suppose we should get ready.

SINT: I've written you a future in which
your talents will be uniquely honored.

A scream, as if echoing down a stone hallway. Faintly heard: "The queen, my lord, is dead."

GRUOCH: The arrival.

More screams, clash of swords, general chaos. The ATTENDANTS appear, pushing a rack with clothing on it. On the bottom of the rack are five briefcases.

ATTENDANT 2: It's a right smart chaos down among the bowers slogging up to Dunsinane.

ATTENDANT 1: Duncie.

ATTENDANT 3: Insane.

ATTENDANT 2: I have to hand it to you, Bint—

SINT: Sint.

ATTENDANT 2: Lint—

SINT: Sint.

They all start exchanging their clothes for the clothes on the rack.

ATTENDANT 2: You wrote a mean scripting for the hoi polloi and glitterati of the Scottish court—Duncan's butchering—

ATTENDANT 1: Then our blabberings about a line of eight kings—

ATTENDANT 3: No man of woman born—

ATTENDANT 2: That was good.

ATTENDANT 1: You have 'em carving each other up!

They have all changed into smart modern business clothing.

ATTENDANT 1: Blood gushing.

ATTENDANT 2: Guts a-flying.

ATTENDANT 3: Felt a little longing for the old days.

They take their leather briefcases.

GRUOCH: There are no more old days from now on.

They sit at a modern conference table. They take reports out of their briefcases. MACBETH runs in, sword in hand, bloodied.

GRUOCH: We no longer do it that way.

ATTENDANT 1: Now by market share.

ATTENDANT 2: Aggregate percentages.

ATTENDANT 3: Unsubsidized offshore partakings.

MACBETH: What are you talking about?

GRUOCH goes to MACBETH, takes his sword.

GRUOCH: We no longer do it this way, is what they're saying—unless we rent people with your skilled barbarics to secure a market for us here or there around the world—

GRUOCH throws the sword away.

GRUOCH: Of course, no longer dignity or glory for you in doing any of that for us—just contract, just part of it's "simply business."

MACDUFF enters. MACBETH turns to face him, empty-handed. GRUOCH moves back to the conference table, and the five of them enact/mime a "conference": discussion, checking of cellphones, note-taking, etc. Occasionally they watch the fight that moves around them, but they don't take much note of it.

MACBETH: (to GRUOCH) You knew the wolf was coming, didn't you?

GRUOCH: No more or less than you did.

MACDUFF steps to MACBETH's sword.

MACBETH: Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.

MACDUFF: I have no words:
My voice is in my sword—

MACDUFF kicks MACBETH's sword to him. They fight.

MACDUFF: Thou bloodier villain
Than terms can give thee out!

MACBETH: I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.

MACDUFF: Despair thy charm...Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACBETH: Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!

MACBETH speaks right into GRUOCH's ear.

MACBETH: And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.
I'll not fight with thee.

MACBETH lowers his sword. MACDUFF looks at him in disbelief.

MACDUFF: Don't be a fucking idiot. You have to—

MACBETH: I don't have to do anything—

MACDUFF: You will not cheat me!

MACDUFF lays on and drives MACBETH to the ground, his sword at MACBETH's throat. MACDUFF drops his sword and kneels. As he kneels, he pulls a huge hunting knife from his belt. He is going to behead MACBETH.

GRUOCH signals to SINT, who hands her his journal. He bends over her shoulder as she crosses something out and writes something else in.

MACDUFF: You stupid git, you force me to be more savage than is required by this act of forced honor—

MACDUFF moves to do the beheading. GRUOCH clears her throat, signals MACDUFF to come to her. He does. She has him read the journal.

MACDUFF: Really?

GRUOCH: That will be beheading enough.
It's the only kind of beheading
that makes sense in the world
as it now is.

MACBETH: What?

MACDUFF returns to MACBETH, shoving him back. Neck exposed, MACBETH waits. But instead of slicing his throat, MACDUFF moves to MACBETH's crotch, and in one swift slice severs his genitals. MACBETH screams.

MACDUFF brings the bloody mess to the conference table. ATTENDANT 1 opens the wooden box, and MACDUFF drops it inside. He points to the journal.

MACDUFF: What does it say there I'm to call it?

GRUOCH: Profit.

MACDUFF: "Profit" it is.

MACDUFF leaves. GRUOCH comes over to MACBETH, kneels by him.

GRUOCH: Welcome to the new world order.
What you did, we now do.
What was done to you is now
the measure of our successes.
It's a much much saner way—

ATTENDANT 2 puts a hand on the box. ATTENDANT 3 slaps the hand.

ATTENDANT 2: And cleaner—

GROUCH: Much saner and cleaner way
to run the war of every man
against every man.
What you lost is what we want
from everyone.

*GRUOCH takes MACBETH's sword and begins to carve the air with it. SINT and the
ATTENDANTS put things away in their briefcases, stand ready to leave.*

Lights go to black.