

THE FALL OF LADY M

a play

by

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CHARACTERS

LADY MacBETH	a noble woman in the autumn of her years (forties / fifties)
AGNES	Lady MacBeth's chambermaid / Gentlewoman (five to ten years her elder)
VANESSA	Lady MacBeth's second chambermaid (late twenties / early thirties)
3 WEIRD SISTERS	ages open (gender not: they are indeed women . . . and sisters: within a few years of each other at most)
LADY MacDUFF	a noble woman – in her late thirties / early forties

THE SETTING

MacBeth castle and surrounding countryside in Scotland.

THE TIME

Spring 1057

“By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes.”

- Second Witch
(*MacBeth* – ACT IV, sc 1)

SCENE 1

(At rise

A chamber room in the MacBeth castle. Modest at best, a seat, a door, a window, a vanity, a clothing tree with a walking gown set upon it.)

(As the scene opens, LADY MacBETH is seated on the chair. She is a noble woman, whether by birthright or by having taken hold of opportunities in her past is unimportant now—she is where she is: wife of the Thane of Glamis, and her eyes ever on the next rung up the ladder. She is in the autumn of her years—forties one would say in a time when the seasons of our lives turned quicker than they do today. Attending to her are AGNES, her Gentlewoman and chambermaid. AGNES is slightly her elder and has been her attendant since Lady MacBeth's marriage to Lord MacBeth. AGNES brushes Lady MacBeth's hair as VANESSA, Lady MacBeth's second chambermaid focuses on the gown set out upon the clothes tree—removing dirt, hair, lint and other debris from the garment. LADY MacBETH is still dressed in her morning robe—although whether it's still morning would hardly be apparent by this lone fact.)

LADY MacBETH

Isn't that so, Agnes?

AGNES

Quite, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

And would you agree, Miss?

VANESSA

Vanessa, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

(Choosing not to correct the poor girl [thereby revealing her disinterest as to her name] she instead repeats the question:)

And would you agree?

VANESSA

On what, M'Lady?

(There is a brief silence.)

LADY MacBETH

Quite right. Agnes here presumes I said something worth responding to: a question or a riddle or a point of view AND That I'd asked her to provide such a remark, when in truth I'd said nothing. And yet in asking for a response, Agnes told me I was "right". Didn't you, Agnes?

AGNES

Yes, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Were you not listening?

AGNES

I must not have been, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

So, what were you thinking on? What has your mind so occupied?

AGNES

Nothing of worth, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

(After a slight reflection:)

God, am I that much of a bitch?

(No reply.)

Don't think that I don't know what I'm called behind my back. But this bitch has fangs, so beware. I'm just dying to have someone say that to my face.

(Looking into a mirror:)

They say I paint my face with babies' blood. Have you heard the rumors?

AGNES

People can be cruel. They're jealous.

LADY MacBETH

M-hmmmm. You could learn a thing or two from Agnes here, Miss.

VANESSA

Vane—

(But AGNES is shaking her head "no"—she stops.)

LADY MacBETH

She has mastered the art of non-speak. Did you notice how she didn't answer my question at all?

(AGNES and VANESSA share a look—should she answer that or not?)

LADY MacBETH

How is training going, Agnes?

AGNES

Very well, M'Lady. Miss Vanessa is a good student.

LADY MacBETH

See? Nothing. No answer. I've learned a lot from you, Agnes. I will hate to lose you.

AGNES

Oh, I'm not going anywhere, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

For now. For now. Lady to a Thane hardly needs a full entourage. I'm afraid unless things improve one of you will have to go. So, don't teach her too well.

AGNES

Of course not, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

(Looking at the dress:)

Is it done?

(VANESSA steps back, away from the dress. LADY MacBETH inspects the outfit.)

LADY MacBETH

(To Vanessa as she surveys the dressing gown:)

Go, fetch us some water.

(No reply.)

Do you know what water is? Do you bathe? Don't bring me bath water.

(No reply.)

I'm allowing you leave. Bring back something to my taste.

VANESSA

Water, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Fine. Water. Go.

(VANESSA takes her leave. LADY MacBETH takes her time surveying the gown.)

LADY MacBETH

She missed a spot.

AGNES

(After attending to the smudge:)

It seems to be stained.

LADY MacBETH

And I liked this gown. I hate to have to lose things that I like.

AGNES

I could have the tailor—

(But Lady MacBeth's look says it all:)

It is a shame, M'Lady. Shall I fetch you another?

LADY MacBETH

In a minute.

(Sizing her up against the clothing:)

This would fit you, wouldn't it--we're close enough the same size, you and I . . . ?

AGNES

M'Lady, you are too generous.

LADY MacBETH

I was only asking. Tell me, how is she really doing?

AGNES

Miss Vanessa?

LADY MacBETH

Who else?

AGNES

She's young.

LADY MacBETH

That I know; she'll outlive us both.

AGNES

And she's eager.

LADY MacBETH

Eager for what? To please her Lady or to find a husband?

AGNES

A bit of both I would think.

LADY MacBETH

You don't know?

AGNES

I don't know.

LADY MacBETH

Find out. I scarcely want to train up a new girl just to lose her to a most unfortunate set of circumstances. She turns heads, which on her own may be admirable, but I surely can't be seen with her. Perhaps we should scar her. Nothing too unfortunate. An eye or an ear. No, not an ear, an ear can be remedied by the flow of her hair. An eye, it will have to be an eye. Discuss it with her, will you?

AGNES

Yes, M'Lady.

(VANESSA returns with a glass of water.)

LADY MacBETH

And here she is now.

(To Vanessa:)

You do have beautiful eyes.

VANESSA

. . . Thank you, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Too bad.

(Takes a drink of water.)

What is this?

VANESSA

Water?

LADY MacBETH

Yes, I can tell it's water.

(Looks to Agnes:)

Fetch me a gown.

AGNES

(Referring to the gown on the tree:)

Shall I?

LADY MacBETH

Not just yet. By your leave.

(AGNES bows and exits. Pause.)

LADY MacBETH

You brought me nothing to eat?

VANESSA

You asked only for drink, . . . M’Lady.

LADY MacBETH

There is a blemish on this dress.

VANESSA

(Searching for it:)

I can have that—

LADY MacBETH

No. There is a blemish. It is unusable.

(VANESSA is at a loss for words.)

LADY MacBETH

You may wear it, if you wish.

VANESSA

M’Lady, no.

LADY MacBETH

I insist. Tailor it on your own time to fit you.

VANESSA

. . . Thank you, M’Lady.

LADY MacBETH

It is good to have nice things, isn’t it?

VANESSA

I don’t know what to say.

LADY MacBETH

“Thank you”, was enough.

VANESSA

. . . But Miss Agnes.

LADY MacBETH

What about Miss Agnes?

VANESSA

Surely she is more deserving / than I.

LADY MacBETH

And she has pretty things. She has several. Word of warning though.

VANESSA

Yes, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Do not purposely destroy my things in an effort to gain them. Agreed?

VANESSA

Of course, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Of course what, you've said nothing.

VANESSA

Of course: I agree. I would never soil things of yours for any reason let alone my own personal gain.

LADY MacBETH

Good to know.

(Looking one last time over the dress.)

You have been pulled into a trap to fail, you know that don't you? Do you know by whom?

VANESSA

No, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Your tutor. Agnes. Agnes the old. She has not taught you well. Or correct me, if I'm wrong, she has not explained to you *water*?

(No reply.)

That *is* the proper response. Because if I am wrong: never correct me, even if I ask it of you. And when I ask for water: it means I'm hungry . . . for something sweet—maybe forbidden—a fruit out of season—a delicacy from the kitchen. And I never drink water. People do bathe in it—as do I. But a lady doesn't ask for spirits, does she? They are gifted to her by a generous and grateful servant or a host. These are things Agnes has not yet taught you? It's understandable. She's afraid you'll take her position. Which eventually you will. Therefore she set her trap for you to fail. I can't say I should hold it against her. If I were her, you'd be dead by now.

(No reply.)

That was a bit of humor, love. We like to laugh when we can.

LADY MacBETH (continued)

(No reply.)

You'll do fine. I will get you to laugh yet. It is my challenge.

(Pause.)

LADY MacBETH

You are very pretty. How are you on applicating make-up?

(No reply.)

Blush. Cheeks. Eyes.

VANESSA

I have no experience.

LADY MacBETH

And in need of none for a few years to come I see.

(Indicating a box or drawer from the vanity:)

These are the tools. I am your canvas. Do you paint?

(No reply.)

On canvas? Parchment. Do you do portraits? I've heard your quite good so don't lie.

VANESSA

It is a hobby.

LADY MacBETH

You must show me your work some time but for now: I am your work of art.

VANESSA

Miss Agnes?

LADY MacBETH

Miss Aggie's hands shake. She has lost her touch. This is why you're here. She would have you fail. I don't want my face to be a failure. I doubt many women do.

(She sits, eyes closed awaiting application.)

You may use the water to wash off what is undesirable. Start.

VANESSA

. . . Yes, M'Lady.

(Through the following VANESSA carefully applies make up.)

LADY MacBETH

Tell me about your last position. For Lady MacDuff, I believe?

VANESSA

Yes, M'Lady

LADY MacBETH

How was she to work for? A tyrant? A pushover? Tell me something awful.

VANESSA

There is nothing to tell, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Oh, of course there is. You were in her direct service?

VANESSA

Nurse to her children.

LADY MacBETH

Oh, of course. Did you like it? No children here to speak of. Unless you count Lord MacBeth, of course.

(No reply.)

Very well, tell me something of yourself, Miss.

VANESSA

Vanessa.

LADY MacBETH

V if you must. For now to me you are Miss V.

VANESSA

(Almost without thinking:)

And that would make you Lady M?

LADY MacBETH

You have wit? Well, we'll see who makes who laugh / first.

VANESSA

I apologize, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Don't. But never interrupt me when I am speaking again. That may have been acceptable with the MacDuff children but a noble woman finishes her thoughts. Anything else is disrespectful.

VANESSA

I apologize, / M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

That: I accept. You're still young. And as you hear: I may interrupt you; you may not interrupt me—that is simply the way it is—How am I looking?

(As VANESSA offers the mirror—changing her mind:)

No—no, not yet; we'll wait to see the finished piece.

(There is a silence as VANESSA applies eye make-up. LADY MacBETH looking down for the shadow to be applied finds her gaze falling upon VANESSA's cleavage.)

LADY MacBETH

Are you still firm?

VANESSA

M'Lady?

LADY MacBETH

I remember those days. Enjoy them while you can.

VANESSA

. . . M'Lady . . .

LADY MacBETH

If you have nothing to say: say nothing. Don't just address me for no reason. I think that's why God commands us not use His name without reason: it's annoying. I simply remarked you are firm. Men enjoy that in a woman.

VANESSA

I wouldn't know.

LADY MacBETH

Truly? That is a sad tale. How old are you, may I ask? No, the answer will only upset me; you are old enough.

VANESSA

I . . .

LADY MacBETH

Never met the right man? Any man can be the right man. Or are you—You like men?

VANESSA

Of course, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Whatever happened to yes and no?