

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

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

“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

You see? Agnes here presumes I said something worth responding to:[a question or a riddle or a point of view, when in truth I'd said nothing—and yet 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?]

AGNES

[Nothing of worth, M'Lady.]

LADY MacBETH

(After a slight reflection:)

God, am I that much of a bitch?

VANESSA

M'Lady /...

LADY MacBETH

[M'Lady M'Lady ...] You don't think that I don't know what I'm called behind my back. [I'm just] dying to have someone with the wherewithal to say it to my face.

(Looking into a mirror:)

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

VANESSA

People can be cruel.

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

[Miss Vanessa is a good student.]

LADY MacBETH

See? Nothing. No answer. [I've learned so much from you, Aggie. I will hate to lose you. But Lady to a Thane hardly needs a full entourage; I am afraid unless things improve one of you will have to go: so,] don't teach her too well.

AGNES

As it pleases you, 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:)

Water, Miss.

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

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

VANESSA

Water, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Perfect. 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

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

(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

Tell me, how is she really doing?

AGNES

Miss Vanessa?

She's young. Eager.

LADY MacBETH

[For what?] To please her Lady or to find a husband? A father for her ... how many does she have ...?

AGNES

I wouldn't know.

LADY MacBETH

[One, obviously. But where is it?]

Find out. I scarcely want to train up a new girl just to lose her to some misguided fantasy. And 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

(Taking in Vanessa's countenance a moment:)

You do have beautiful eyes.

VANESSA

... Thank you, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Pity.

(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

By your leave.

(AGNES bows and exits. Pause.)

LADY MacBETH

And 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

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.

VANESSA

Yes, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Do not purposely destroy my things in an effort to gain them. Forstået¹?

VANESSA

Of course not, / M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Of course not *what*, you've said nothing.

¹ "Understand?" - Norwegian

VANESSA

Of course *not*: I agree. I would never...

LADY MacBETH

(Looking one last time over the dress.)

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

That *is* the proper response. Because if I am wrong: never correct me, even if I ask it of you. *water*: may mean I'm hungry... for something sweet perhaps, a fruit out of season—something from the kitchen; and I never drink water. I only bathe in it—but a Lady doesn't ask for spirits now, does she?: They are gifted to her, understand? But Agnes, it seems, is afraid you'll usurp her position; and she's right—eventually you will. Therefore I believe 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. That was a bit of humor, love. We like to laugh when we can. You'll do fine.

(Pause.)

LADY MacBETH

You are quite pretty. How are you on applicating make-up?
Blush. Cheeks. Eyes.

VANESSA

I confess I have no experience / in 't.

LADY MacBETH

(Indicating a box or drawer from the vanity:)

These are the tools. I am your canvas. Do you paint?
On Parchment; Paper; Portraits? I've heard your quite good so don't lie.

VANESSA

A hobby only.

LADY MacBETH

You must show me your creations 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 is now sitting, 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

It was, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

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

VANESSA

There is nothing worth telling, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

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

VANESSA

Nurse to her children.

LADY MacBETH

Her *Wet* nurse? Tell me, did you like it; having someone else's stripling gnawing at your bits? Well, you won't need worry about that here. No children to speak of in Glamis. Unless--unless you count Lord MacBeth, of course. But you'll stay clear, I expect. I'll take that as a "yes".

VANESSA

Yes, of course.

LADY MacBETH

Very well. Oh, talk about your waif, let's get through that—Where is he—she?

VANESSA

She.

LADY MacBETH

She.

VANESSA

With my parents.

LADY MacBETH

One? Or a litter?

Parents; you have parents; How many of there *are* you?

VANESSA

Only myself.

LADY MacBETH

So they're all dead then.

VANESSA

No, my—no. They are north.

LADY MacBETH

Husband?

VANESSA

Passed.

LADY MacBETH

Past or passed; is he still; your husband / or—?

VANESSA

I'm sorry. He is dead.

LADY MacBETH

Ah. My uh heart to yours. But it helps if you say it clearly, am I right? So your parents are raising your one progeny in your absence: how poetically tragic, you must miss her dearly.

VANESSA

Every day.

LADY MacBETH

Hmmm. This talk is too sad, speak of something else, Miss.

VANESSA

Vanessa.

My name, M'Lady, is Vanessa. Hers / is—

LADY MacBETH

V, if you must. For now, to myself, you are Miss V.

VANESSA

(Almost without thinking:)

And that would make you Lady M?

LADY MacBETH

[We have] wit? Well, we must barb some time and see who makes who laugh / first.

VANESSA

I apologize, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

No, don't. And never interrupt me when I am speaking. 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 are 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 shadow to be applied, finds her gaze falling upon VANESSA's cleavage.)

LADY MacBETH

You're still firm: I see the MacDuff beasties hadn't ruined you yet. We got you away just in time.

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. So tell me, how many have you had?

VANESSA

... the.. only one.

LADY MacBETH

Men, my dear ... not children. We spoke of children. Keep the pace. How many lovers have you had? Suitors? Trysts?
It's a number.
Blush.

VANESSA

You're speech / is such that I...

LADY MacBETH

For me. Blush. That. There.

VANESSA

Oh, yes.

(She picks up a ball of chalk. She looks to apply it directly.)

LADY MacBETH

What? No. With a brush.

VANESSA

... yes, of course

LADY MacBETH

Northern Scotland clearly—east of Ireland or west of Norway? No, don't tell me. Ja? Ja?² Am I right? Of course, I'm right. Hat jeg rett?³ Did I use the phrase correctly?

VANESSA

...Yes, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Norse men are so beautiful, aren't they? But scarce nowadays, I presume, considering recent events.

VANESSA

Men war.

LADY MacBETH

That they do.. We either lose them *in* a war or *to* a war.

VANESSA

I sometimes think the land would run / better—

² "Yes? Yes?" - Norwegian

³ "Am I right?" - Norwegian

LADY MacBETH

Ruled by women. You're saying that to get on my on my good side.

(Referring to her make-up:)

If I still have a good side.

VANESSA

M'Lady?

LADY MacBETH

M.

(LADY MacBETH watches Vanessa work as she tries to brush the chalk directly: letting her go on this way a little longer for her own amusement:)

LADY MacBETH

Try the knife.

VANESSA

The knife?

LADY MacBETH

Shave the chalk. Dip the brush into the shavings. Then apply.

VANESSA

... Yes, I—.. wouldn't know.

LADY MacBETH

This is why we are teaching you. You seem to have so much to learn.

(Stops Vanessa, catching her in mid movement:)

Are you worth the effort?

VANESSA

... I should hope so... M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

Know. Never hope. Don't dream: do.

(Lets the silence land and then:)

Let me see my eyes, I'm tired of waiting.

(VANESSA hesitates unsure how to respond then finally hands Lady MacBeth the mirror, awaits her reaction.)

LADY MacBETH

(Referring to shaving the blush:)

Continue.

(VANESSA shaves the chalk—careful not to waste while LADY MacBETH admires her eyes.)

LADY MacBETH

They were right: You have a steady hand. And a decent eye for color.
(Sets down the mirror.)

Blush.

(VANESSA applies the make-up appropriately to Lady MacBeth as AGNES enters with a new gown.)

LADY MacBETH

Nothing to eat; are you all trying to starve me?

AGNES

There is a commotion.

LADY MacBETH

Tell me.

AGNES

A messenger has arrived.

LADY MacBETH

More.

AGNES

(Exchanging gowns on the tree:)

The Thane of Cawdor has been taken traitor.

LADY MacBETH

Oh. I thought it was news. I knew of *that* before it happened.

(Looking at Vanessa:)

Thane Cawdor was our guest here and I spoke to him in private... 've learned a man will give up a few secrets to a woman under the right circumstances—or the wrong ones.

AGNES

It is news to the rest of the / house, M'Lady

LADY MacBETH

Am I bad? I'm bad, aren't I? Tell me I'm not bad.

VANESSA

... A woman of means left alone for months on end...

LADY MacBETH

(To Vanessa [after letting her words trail away], indicating Agnes as a proper example:)

You hear her?

You see?: You're learning already.

LADY MacBETH (Continued:)

(Taking the mirror and examining herself:)

Men have their whores outside these walls, a woman has her rights as well. We simply have to be more discreet is all. His Lordship is lucky; he was maintained by God that he may whore himself with anyone at anytime and not leave an heir. You never discussed why we had no children?

AGNES

(Coming to Vanessa's rescue:)

It is not ours to say, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

(Adding a few last touches to her make-up herself:)

I, on the other hand, must be more careful—responsible: before or after the fact: precautionary or reactionary: one way or another the deed gets done. After all, a woman's desires are as real for her as they are for him, wouldn't you agree?

(No reply nor expecting one:)

I have come to learn in life that there are but three types of women in this world. Those who do, and those who don't, and those who must, which are you? Oh, and then there's Agnes here: those who are not discussed: those who do with each other. Isn't that right, Aggie?

(To Vanessa:)

Did you know that about Miss Agnes, Miss V?
Good answer.

(Referring to her makeup skills:)

Nicely done.

(To Agnes:)

[There is] a messenger waiting for me.

AGNES

Yes, / M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

(Standing:)

Help me into my gown.

(She remains still, awaiting attendance, glancing over the new gown:)

I like that one. We all have good taste today. This is a good day.

(She removes her morning robe, revealing herself in a slip.
To Vanessa:)

Take the gown.

(VANESSA moves to remove the gown from the tree.)

LADY MacBETH

Later. Take the gown from Miss A. Oh, this will be fun, everyone will be initials.
(Simplifying her instructions to Vanessa:)
Hold the gown she is holding. So that she may “adjust me in”. She so enjoys it.

(The women comply. LADY MacBETH lets the moment linger uncomfortably before she resumes speaking as the two women work to dress her.)

LADY MacBETH

It’s my fault the poor girl was confused; when I told her to “take the gown”—she thought I meant “take the gown”—not “take the gown”. I gave the poor little girl the remnant, Miss Agnes. I hope you don’t mind. I think it’s her color, don’t you?

AGNES

It is yours to do with as you wish.

LADY MacBETH

Yes, it is, isn’t it?

(As AGNES holds her bosoms:)

Don’t let her linger too long dear, she’ll get the wrong impression.

(AGNES only looks to VANESSA—as if that were enough to convey pleading for her to thread and cinch the backside of the dress to hold Lady MacBeth into place at haste.

VANESSA does her best to complete the task quickly but foremostly without discomforting Lady MacBeth herself in the process. Once done both chamber women separate themselves from her.)

LADY MacBETH

That was awkward.

I like this.. the three of us. Too bad it can’t last. [I will] hate to have to / choose.

(MESSENGER enters, knowingly unannounced. The MESSENGER is dressed as a man—even to the point of whiskers but makes no effort to support the facade with her voice or demeanor.)

MESSENGER

My Lady.

LADY MacBETH

How dare—Who are / you—