

THREE WITCHES

a play

by

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CHARACTERS / TROUPE

diversity casting encouraged in all roles

3 WEIRD SISTERS:

- JUNE The eldest (mid/late twenties), a medicinal addict
- MAY Second born (a year to three younger than June), caretaking both her sisters
- NOVEMBER (at least six years younger than May) cognitively challenged--oxygen deprived at birth, and experimentally medicated to manage her condition—leaving her somewhat scattered and unconventional

LADY MacBETH a noble woman (late 30s / early 50s), driven to want for more

VANESSA Gentle Woman to Lady MacBeth (late 20s / early 30s)

HECATE an entrepreneur, surviving by her wits (20s / 40s)

MacBETH Lord and Thane of Glamis (late 40s / late 50s), a soldier in love

BANQUO* Lord, Soldier and Best friend to MacBETH (late 30s / early 40s)

LADY MacDUFF a noble woman (30s / 40s), a mother, wife/widow?

FLEANCE* Banquo’s son (20-something)

MUSICIANS (violin, bodhran, tin whistle, flute, guitar),
JUGGLERS, CIRCUS/CARNIVAL PERFORMERS to be added as desired

**to be played by the same actor*

MESSENGER / HERALDS / SOLDIERS ...

to be played by the same above members of the troupe (including Musicians) as needed.

Extended character descriptions available on request.

THE SETTING

A stage, representing MacBeth castle and surrounding countryside in Scotland.

THE TIME

Spring 1057 — as presented by an acting troupe circa 1660

SYNOPSIS

Three Witches retells the saga of *the Scottish play* (aka *MacBETH* as long as you're not reading this aloud in a theatre) from the vantage of the Three Weird Sisters without the use of anything truly supernatural. The story is relayed to us by a troupe of travelling players who assume all parts large and small (encouraging diverse casting opportunities).

Hecate, a self-proclaimed dark witch (just a businesswoman running a show), is double booked and trades off her second appointment to the sisters (rival white witches/apothecarians of their day) for a few hallucinogenic roots. The job is to deliver a message to Lord MacBeth, manipulatively arranged by Lady MacBeth herself, thus setting into motion the events laid out in William Shakespeare's tale of greed, lust and power.

The king (Duncan) is killed, MacBeth assumes power; or should we say, Queen MacBeth assumes power. King MacBeth does all he can, even killing Banquo (his best friend), in order to secure his wife's love. The rest of the country skirmishes; Lady MacDuff requests sanctuary for her family; Banquo's son, Fleance, runs away, only to injure himself and be found by the youngest of the Three Sisters, November, who takes him home, like a lost dog, in order to nurse him back to health. Meanwhile Hecate erupts on the sisters' home, demanding her share.

Word arrives that Lady MacBeth plans to cleanse the New Scotland of any undesirables, a list that proves quite extensive including Jews, foreigners, the lawless, the different (in body or mind), immigrants, racially impure, and traitors to the crown. In order to survive the coming genocide, it is up to the witches to take history into their own hands.

The events of this story align with the events laid out in William Shakespeare's *MACBETH*. The characters themselves, however, may widely differ from traditional interpretation.

"I think every story should really be a love story at its heart."

- Nina Zarietchnaya
(*The SEAGULL* by Anton Chekhov)

*"How responsible am I for the well-being of my fellows?
To ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it."*

- Martin Luther King, Jr.
Senate Hearings on Economic Justice, 1966

"Fair is foul and foul is fair."

- Witches
(*MacBeth* – ACT I, sc 1)

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.
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud, but as an aside.
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES

(in alphabetical order:)

Angus	<i>ANG</i> (as in ang[le])— <i>us</i> (as in [f]uss)
Caithness	<i>KATHE</i> (as in Faith)— <i>ness</i> (as in [dr]ess)
Cawdor	<i>KAW</i> (as in raw)— <i>dor</i> (as in door)
Donalbain	<i>DONal</i> (as in Donal[d])— <i>bane</i> (as in vein)
Duncan	<i>DUN</i> (as in [F]un)— <i>con</i> (as in control)
Fleance	<i>FLEE</i> (as in she)— <i>ans</i> (as in the Star Wars character name [H]an S[olo])
Glamis	(rhymes with in [p]alms; the “i” is silent)
Gruoch	(<i>GRUU</i> [as in grou[p]— <i>chk</i> : as in pulling up phlem)
Hecate	<i>HEC-ut</i> (rhymes with [B]ECKett)— <i>ay</i> [as in [d]ay)
Lenox	<i>LEN</i> (as in Lenny)— <i>ux</i> (as in [t]ux[edo])
Malcom	<i>MAL</i> (as in Mal[lard duck])— <i>com</i> as in (.com)
Mentieth	(as in <i>MON</i> [day]— <i>teeth</i>)
Novvi	(a soft ‘o’: as in <i>Nov</i> [el]— <i>ee</i>)
Ross	really? Really? ... (a soft ‘o’ as on [b]oss)

(At rise:

Music.

Or at least the semblance of rhythm and melody.

All performers are set on stage. Instruments range from traditional handheld celtic fare: violin, flute, tin whistle, guitar, lyre, bodrahn—to the improvised: syncopations produced on one's own body, slap box drums (cajon), whistling, humming and vocalizing.¹ The troupe may not even play well but wouldn't it be nice if they would.²

Those not playing music are drawing our attention visually through juggling, acrobatics, sword handling, or any other form of spectacle.

The sole purpose for their rabble rousing at this point is to assemble a crowd together [including ourselves] to hear their tale.

There is very little set to speak of other than a scant amount of furniture: chairs, perhaps some shelving, possibly a window, and a few assorted props. Any additional work to establish location may be created with lighting. This is a traveling troupe of players at best—circa mid-1600s.³

A passing of the hat is not out of question.

A Member of the Troupe⁴ steps up and addresses the audience-quieting all: cast and audience alike:)

TROUPE MEMBER

OK, alright, enough, enough, alright: before we get started: this is the disclaimer and the tease. It's Scotland. Year of our lord—or somebody's Lord—1057.

A.D. "Based on a true story and true events". Ands some of it is made up—

Excuse me: "Some characters and scenes have been Created for dramatic purposes". See Shakespeare did the same thing when he / wrote—

(A number of the cast attempt to quiet the cast member by "ssssh-ing" or making music or noises loud enough to drown out the name that shall not be named)

¹ Though wonderfully Scottish in nature: the pipes; (Bag or Uilleann) tend to produce sounds louder than would be considered background or underscore so I would not recommend these instruments unless sparsely used.

² Any member of the troupe may play any instrument, however, musicians who exclusively play music and not undertake a speaking role may be a fine choice as well (and should be given equal respect as/by the rest of the performers).

³ The Interregnum era (an unsovereigned period between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II) and the Eve of the Restoration. The years of the Great Scottish Witch Hunts of 1660-61. 54 years *after* Shakespeare penned MacBeth.

⁴ Troupe Member is up to the production's discretion—lines may be shared by one individual or divided up between Company members. it may even alternate between performances and/or cast members.

TROUPE MEMBER (Continuing:)

(oh for gawdsakes) but he—but *Shakespeare* never had ta protect hissself from lawsuits and for gawdsakes there weren't much records back from 1057 so you know he made a lot of shite up. So, we're here to set the record straight. And that's that. Thank you. "Disclaimer" over.

(Troupe Member steps back into place.

MAY⁵ steps forward.

Music continues underneath the following / not unsimilar to an opening musical number—to arouse and keep the audience's attention; during which the troupe, short of dancing⁶, non-verbally punctuating much of May's exposition:)

MAY

(Keenly attentive in her purpose to keep the crowd assembled and engaged throughout her opening address:)

A prologue.

This be the moment we ask you to suspend belief [as in lie to yourself].

That this space, where we are all gathered, may not exist. That we, all, may be transported to a room, a castle, a cave, or mere thought itself.

That we, be not men nor women, but actors. With but one purpose: to entertain; and why would we want to entertain yourselves?: to relieve you of coin. Truth. So, we are but who we are AND what we say we are. Unless we lie. Because people lie. Nobles lie. Peasants [lie]. Good people lie, not just villains; villains are people. We are all villains to someone; we are all someone's monster; someone's witch.

We three, are sisters (the three of us) and instead of plying you with pages and pages of exposition: She, is the eldest; She, is the youngest and I, am in the middle. Her name [the eldest] is June, she was born in the month of June. I was born second: in the month of May [hence my name]. She was born in the month of November ... two out of three. Still, our father named her November because I doubt he thought she would live past the month's end. Novvi [short for November] came into this world feet first as our mother left. And eventually had to be pulled out of [what remained of her]. Our father shortly followed on foot; he ran away. Do not blame him; do not pity us: there was—there is, honestly, something amiss with Novvi: she's not—she never was right; not that she's wrong but she *is* difficult. Had she been born from a cat or a dog, she would have been set outside the litter; that is nature's way. But we were .. young and our father .. could not overcome his grief—he knew he was a danger to her so, rather than kill

⁵ Unless of course MAY is the Troupe Member giving our Disclaimer, in which case MAY is already in place...

⁶ Although choreography is not infeasible

MAY (Continued:)

the child that killed his wife: he left. We didn't. June and I, raised her; best two young girls could—Oh, and please, do not be so romantic as to think that all was some great misunderstanding and that our father returns or our mother never truly died because we were there and I still bare witness that these things happened; and, *no*, he will *not* magically appear at the end of our play everyone's a prince or king or gleefully married, for we are women and dirt poor bitches at that; and we will stay so—and Am I boring you, sir? Would you prefer we get on with it? Wouldn't we all; but we can't; we go on *day to day to day* .. and I will *not* share this prologue because I am the only one who can explain it because she [November] can't and she [June] .. can't. Not to worry, she doesn't understand a thing it is I'm saying. Neither of them do.

You understand her [November], now as for her [June]:

June and I sought out cures for Novvi's conditions (there are many—as many conditions as there are cures). And we learned what herb will do this, what berry, that. And in the learning we gained a trade. Med'cines. Med'cines for every want and every need. And the local common watched us from afar and called us names—Weird Sisters' always Novvi's favorite—but they would come to us in the dark for our knowledge. We quickly learned [that] people will pay for this knowledge and pay even more for the fauna itself. More precisely, they'll pay more for their wants than for their needs. We learned to cater to those wants.

White witches, they call that. And in the journey for the next herb or the next mixture of root and flower, June found herself lost into that euphoria of forget. Novvi takes what I give her: gentles her mind and staves off her seizures. And I remain in the middle. And we lie to ourselves that life is good.

Meanwhile, the Country around us seems at constant war; with its neighbors and itself. Truth from lies—rumors and lies, peace and lies, war and lies. They [my sisters] don't know the truth. They [the Noble dressed actors] manufacture it.

They [the remaining] support it, suborn it or feed off it. She [June], runs from it. She [November], must be protected from it. So ...

(Pointing out the cast of the actors by character:)

Nobleman, Nobleman, Noble lady, his wife, What you would call the competition and ... a servant. So ... that should stave off ten or twenty minutes of our tale. Sit up, sir, things may start moving after this.

(End music.

Music may or may not support the following⁷:

The Two Men [MacBETH & BANQUO] travel together far upstage and step just out of light as simultaneously:

⁷ Music may be used at most any point to enhance the story (though NOT prolong it) and need not be limited to the moments laid out in the pages that lie ahead.

the Noble Lady (LADY MacDUFF) escorts the Servant [VANESSA] to a another far edge of the stage, leaving her [Vanessa] holding a carpet bag. LADY MacDUFF then exits. A sitting stool is procured and given to Vanessa to hold as well.

The remaining women [JUNE, NOVEMBER and HECATE] take their next positions mise en scène as our final player “his Wife” (LADY MacBETH), carrying a make-up tray in her hands, takes but a few steps forward while VANESSA moves dutifully to arrive in position before her [Lady MacBeth]. VANESSA immediately sets down the stool:)

LADY MacBETH

(Completing her cross:)

You’re new. What happened to Miss Agnes?

VANESSA

I wouldn’t know.

LADY MacBETH

I didn’t ask you.

(She sits and hands Vanessa the make-up tray.)

MAY

(Giving us one last look.)

[You see? Wha’d I tell you?]

(Light shift:)

(THE SHANTY:

The Sister’s home, a one room hovel; the walls are lined with shelves displaying various jars, pots, baskets and vials of questionable vegetation and serums. HECATE is searching the inventory as MAY steps back to assume her own position upstage of them all, overseeing the scene.)

JUNE

(Following her [Hecate] a little too closely:)

Do you know what you’re looking for?

HECATE

I’ll know it when I see it.

JUNE

What is it ails you?

HECATE

“Ails” me? (a bunch of bitches digging up every stool they see and leavin nothing for the rest of us maybe)

NOVEMBER

What?

HECATE

(Doing her best to keep her distance from June, she moves around November, making sure not to remark on the girl’s appearance [November sets somewhere on the spectrum of having Down Syndrome or some other noticeable challenge]⁸.)

‘Scuse me.

(To May—referring to June:)

You really shouldn’t be letting her be sampling your own wares.

JUNE

(Regarding November:)

Don’t mind her.

MAY

Everything alright over there?

HECATE

It’s a fine array of shrubbery and herbs you have [here].
What’re you asking [for this one]?

MAY

Not for sale.

NOVEMBER

You know what they’re for?

HECATE

I know what they’re for.
How do you expect to turn a profit?

MAY

The rest is all fine; that’s for the girl.

⁸ The role of NOVEMBER should preferably be played by an actor with disabilities, if you please.

HECATE

Maybe that's all I came here for. Maybe somebody dug it all up; so you can ask anything you want.

MAY

Maybe somebody dug it all up cuz maybe it was a med'cine.

HECATE

It puts you in a haze, doesn't it?

MAY

It depends on who takes it; It's not for sale.

HECATE

You're saying she takes it? She's prescribed it—it's her medicine?

MAY

What if I am?

HECATE

Three roots. It's all I'm interested in.

JUNE

(They are now best friends:)

What would you be needing three roots for?

HECATE

(Getting rid of her:)

Maybe I'm a witch.

MAY

Maybe I'm the queen of Scotland.

JUNE

(Hecate's intention going completely over her head:)

Dark or light?

If you're a witch ...

HECATE

A witch is a witch.

MAY

There be dark that cast spells and whatever other bullshite they can make people believe in and then there's those who know med'cines, herbs, and actually do some good for people.

HECATE

Like keeping the unborn unborn? Don't get piety on me.

JUNE

(Moving on to another selection:)

Have you tried—

HECATE

(Staying on topic—to May:)

Whaddo you like for it?

MAY

I think I like you gone.

HECATE

You three're barely keepin a roof over your head here.

(Referring to June:)

And what the hell's with her?

MAY

Family.

HECATE

Sos, you got two lead weights [here] and merchandize I want. I already know about you three: you spend more time on your backs than you do selling this shite. You say she's sick, [and] what's her excuse?

MAY

Who the hell do you think you are?

HECATE

Someone who maybe does their groundwork. Get to know your adversaries first. But I also came here to give you a leg up: a gift. I'm double charted: can't be two places at one time. Some witches be successful. Three roots and I'll give you the second job.

JUNE

We'll take it.

MAY

[It's] not for sale.

JUNE

We could discuss two.

HECATE

I need three.

Wealthy landowner, owns a castle. Just sending a message. From the wife. Only they can't know it's from her. You'll have to "divine it".

JUNE

["Divine"?]

HECATE

Witch it up. You get payment from him then go and tell her all's done and get paid again from her. Send in the waif. Manor born are gulls for that.

MAY

So why don't you take the job?

HECATE

[A] previous engagement; Does it matter? You want the job or / not?

JUNE

Two roots.

(Lights fade up,
revealing:

HECATE

Three's my goin' price; it's about to move to four.

MacBETH &
BANQUO now
standing side by side,
their backs to us.)

JUNE

Done. Witch to witch.

(To May:)

We'll dig up more.

(Referring to November:)

We keep her 'tween us. She'll be / fine.

MacBETH

(Still with his back to us,
relieving himself along the
upstage foliage:)

(Lights fade on the
women as they exit:)

Find your own tree.

BANQUO

(ditto:)

There isn't one.

MacBETH

Then do your business on a bush.

BANQUO

You afraid I'll faint at the sight of it?

MacBETH

More afraid you'll make a splash.

BANQUO

It could only improve your smell.

(The SISTERS, carrying a carpet bag amongst them, re-emerge downstage from whence they exited, covertly spying the two men. A beat.)

MacBETH

(We have an audience.)

BANQUO

(I doubt they can see anything.)

MacBETH

(I doubt they could see it up close.)

(The men finish their task. Turn. There is an awkward pause.)

JUNE

Which [one] of you is the banker?

(MacBETH & BANQUO share a look.)

MacBETH

He [is]—This is Lord Banquo, and I am Lord M/ac(Bebbebe[th])

JUNE

So, you are 'him'.

MAY

The chosen one.

BANQUO

Chosen for what, I'm afraid to ask.

JUNE

Whatever you like.

MacBETH

(Understanding only too well:)

We have no need. We have our wives that we are going home to.

JUNE

I'm sure you can work it up again ...

BANQUO

On your way.

MAY

We have a message for you, M'Lords.

MacBETH

From?

JUNE

... God.

MacBETH

Ladies [if I may call you that] ...

MAY

(To us:)

And then we gave him some long drawn out riddle 'bout how he [MacBeth] was going to be a king and twice a Thane (a governor of sorts).

NOVEMBER

First twice a Thane and *then* a king.

MAY

Thank you, Novvi. First: a double Thane and *then* in line to be king.

BANQUO

Sorry to disappoint you [girls], but he's only once a Thane and we serve at the pleasure of King Duncan.

MacBETH

Good Ladies, whatever you're selling we're not in the market for.

BANQUO

Be on your way.

MacBETH

I'm sorry, we have no coin to give you and ... I'm afraid we have not much in provision; but what we have, we shall share.

(As MacBETH offers a bit of food, folded in a cloth,
BANQUO does not follow his lead.)

We're hardly a day away, give her the bread.

(BANQUO reluctantly complies. The Sisters place the food into their traveling bag as the lights begin to fade up on LADY MacBETH and VANESSA, applying make-up.)

BANQUO

And what do I get for this: what do you have in your fortune teller's sack for me?

NOVEMBER

(Pointing to MacBeth:)

Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, King to be.

MacBETH

I have nothing more for you, child.

BANQUO

Don't humor them, Lord—they're worse than—This is what happens to street urchins when they grow up.

JUNE

You notice that did ja? [Growed up?]

BANQUO

I wouldn't want the fleas.

MAY

No, there *is* word for you ... that ... You [Banquo] may be a father.

BANQUO

Oh, my heavens, I must tell my wife at once: the boy *is* mine. Twenty odd years, I've always wondered.

(The TROUPE freeze in position as MAY turns out to comment to us:)

MAY

"*Tell my wife*"?—Yes, he's a widower: lost the woman to the plague—like I said when we started this: people lie. (I'm not going to do this everytime.)

MAY (Continued:)

(She assumes back into the scene—all continue:)

A father. To kings. A father to kings.

BANQUO

And who pray tell me, will be my queen?

JUNE

What queen shall ye want to bed?

MacBETH

Not mine that's for damned sure.

BANQUO

My god, yours would never have me. She hardly wants you.

JUNE

I'm sure there's plenty to go around.

MacBETH

Alright, enough of this. Keep your talk and your legs closed. Should you find yourselves by the castle Glamis, I'm sure we can find some suitable work for you there.

NOVEMBER

Oh, we're done with that. We're witches now.

MAY

(to JUNE:)

[You see what you've done?]

BANQUO

She speaks.

MAY

Please, pay them no mind.

MacBETH

Nor you him.

(Giving her a coin or three:)

Do you write?

MAY

Thank you, Sire.

MAY

(Referring to June:)

Enough to get by.

JUNE

oh, I c'n hold a pen ... or two.

MacBETH

On second thought: [on your way, enough of this.]

BANQUO

Be gone, vanish.

JUNE

The young one, is that your fancy?

MAY

(Abruptly ending the scene [again, to us]:)

Aaand we left.

(The men begin to cross off as the SISTERS continue opposite:)

MAY (Continued:)

(To June:)

I will not have her know that, damn you.

JUNE

What's good enough for me and good enough for you: not good enough for her?

MAY

(piss off.)

(A MESSENGER⁹ stops the men just before they exit:)

MESSENGER

M'Lords.

MacBETH

Boy.

(The MESSENGER hands MacBeth a letter and waits.
MacBETH reads.

The SISTERS stop to watch from a distance:)

JUNE

"We're witches now."

⁹ MESSENGER may be played by troupe actor also playing Lady MacDuff

MAY

Don't be getting any grand ideas.

JUNE

What grand ideas?

(Through the following scene the Sisters wait; watching the men: MacBETH finishes reading the letter then turning the page over composes another missive: Meanwhile lights continue on LADY MacBETH, still seated, as VANESSA, tends to Lady's make up for the coming day.)

LADY MacBETH

And your prior position, Miss?

VANESSA

Vanessa, M'Lady.

LADY MacBETH

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

Your last position was for Lady MacDuff, I believe?

MAY

This was—this *is* a one-time thing, / Understand?

VANESSA

Yes, M'Lady.

MAY

/ Understand?

JUNE

Of course; what's not to understand?

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

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

Of course not, no, I would never.

LADY MacBETH

Three denials and no accusation; should I / be concerned?

VANESSA

I have never, would never/—will

LADY MacBETH

Please [I heard you the first time]; 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?

(Through the following dialogue:

VANESSA searches thru the make-up tray for a bit of reflecting glass [a mirror], she hands it to Lady MacBeth who studies the make-up artist's handiwork.)

JUNE

We send her in. You heard what she [Hecate] said.

MAY

I'm not sending her [Novvi] in alone.

NOVEMBER

I can / do—

(MacBETH finishes his letter, hands it back to the original Messenger, along with coin, and sends him on his way as

JUNE begins affixing NOVEMBER's costume to resemble the messenger, "manning it up" to the point she tries drawing a moustache on the girl. MAY tries to intervene with logic [not June's strongest suit]:)