

*****START*****

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 n 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.)

*******END*******

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.