

LADY MACBETH by J. Le Sire

Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

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Etext by Dagny

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Characters

LADY MACBETH

A DOCTOR

A MAID

THE VOICE

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The stage represents the hall of a medieval castle. To the right, a table on which are a cushion of velour and a crown. To the left an arm chair. Back left, a table.

AT RISE, it is night. The clock strikes.

DOCTOR: By the King's orders, for the last two nights, I've been watching at the Queen's bedside, and the Queen is sleeping. Nothing has come to confirm your strange report and I doubt

MAID: Wait, your science is wrong, for since King Macbeth went into the field to fight the English, the Queen rises at the slow striking of twelve at night, and, draping herself in her robes, slips from her bed. Then she tells something strange, horrible, confused. Suddenly her voice changes, her expression relaxes, that's when she awakes.

DOCTOR: So then, she acts and speaks in her sleep?

MAID: (with terror) Look, look, she's coming. On my life, on my eternal soul, she's really asleep.

DOCTOR: It's a strange sleep. She speaks, she sees, and yet she's sleeping, because her body's acting.

MAID: She's coming, she's coming.

DOCTOR: Let's avoid her presence. Let us retire into the shadows and listen in silence.

(They withdraw.)

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LADY MACBETH: (alone, entering slowly, holding a lamp in hand; her sleep is agitated; the clock strikes) The clock is striking. Midnight! I hear it without terror! (as if speaking to someone present) You are trembling! A warrior, a Macbeth to be afraid! You are pale! What's become of your intrepid courage? Press on, why forge ahead, will you, since my hand is guiding you. (she puts down her lamp) My heart is beating to break out of my breast and death seems to freeze my voice! My eye is opening slowly with effort. Perhaps I am sleeping. The soul wakes and this eternal flame is not asleep. (after a pause) The witches said, "Macbeth, you will be king." Dare extend your hand and don't tremble with fright. That old geezer that your heart environs with respect: He's not a mortal; he's only a crown. His life is the extinction of your fame. His life is slavery and k out of my breast and death seems to freeze my voice! My eye is opening slowly with effort. Perhaps I am sleeping. The soul wakes and this eternal flame is not asleep. (after a pause) The witches said, "Macbeth, you will be king." Dare extend your hand and don't tremble with fright. That old geezer that your heart environs with respect: He's not a mortal; he's only a crown. His life is the extinction of your fame. His life is slavery and obscurity for us. Go on! Duncan must die. You are trembling, O demented one. When you can strike a defenseless man what do you fear? Overwhelmed with exhaustion, Duncan is sleeping. Cease repeating that empty word "Virtue"! Virtue is only a word, a shadow, a vain phantom. In the end, what's a crime that pays for a kingdom? Chase away visions that trouble your spirit. Listen! Someone's coming! Why, no. It's midnight, it's midnight!

A VOICE: (singing offstage)

It's midnight.

Yes, it's midnight striking in the holy chapel

This hour recalls your actions to God.

It's midnight!

Exactly. Count this hour and sleep with joy.

As for you, criminal, shiver and wake with terror.

It's midnight.

LADY MACBETH: Fire spreads through my breast, a somber hope animates me. I'm leaving — because you are afraid, pusillanimous man! The crown is yours if you wish to seize it. You are letting it fall. It's up to me to finish it. Remember this word, revive your courage. This word "You will be king"! repeated in the storm! — Ah, your face is clearing. At last I've reached you again. The savage light in your eyes, dagger in your hand.

(with joy)

He's dead! He is dead. What a horrible sorrow comes to press my heart! Lord, is it possible that's remorse? No, no, it's not remorse. Ah, the scepter is ours since Duncan is dead! It's strange! In sleep he resembles my father! Shut my eyes then! Put out my light. He is no more! God what a scream! It's that of a stag. I didn't strike him; mine was not the blow. Macbeth, suspend your arm! It's I — I am your wife! I'm afraid! I'm afraid! I'm afraid! Throw that blade away. He's my father! Murderer begone! You horrify me. Parricide! Why, no. Pardon my error. I love you, O my Macbeth, and wish that the world adore you on its knees. In my profound soul a single name's engraved — yours! It is my faith. O it's sweet to love. Reply, O my king! Who said that word to you? King! Indeed that's my dream. A furious delirium that never ends — torture of Hell full of fright, of terror that burns my flesh and tortures my heart. Tunic of Nessus stuck to your shoulders. Tunic that could contain the two poles, and yet it chokes me with its undulating folds. I want to tear it off, alas, my furious efforts are impotent, for the current drags me. Since Hell wishes it, well, so be it. Let's be Queen! Queen! Why Duncan lives — No — Macbeth struck him and the scepter, on that day, escaping from his hands, is going to fall into ours. A scepter, a crown. Remember well, Macbeth — It's I who gave them to you. Oh, I feel that I am dreaming and that I'm speaking aloud.! From my desperate heart, despite me, the funereal revelation of my crime is escaping word by word. And on my paling face the terrifying secret is branded. It's read in my hands that I cannot wash. It's read in my eyes, and, to better accuse me, Duncan seems to raise his threatening head. Momentarily, he raises his dying eyelids. His virtuous eye illuminates, it burns my glance; his blood pours.

(with terror)

He had so much blood, that old geezer! Blood — Always blood. It isn't my blood. In that case what is it? Silence. Let's dry it. That's fine!

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VOICE: It's midnight.

Mortals, pray! Implore clemency from heaven.

From above God protects old and young.

It's midnight.

Just men, pray! From Heaven God reads in your heart.

Criminal, repent and shiver with terror.

It's midnight!

LADY MACBETH: Who's he talking to? Children? Threatening their lives? Is he envious of my maternal happiness? A crown on their heads is a beautiful ornament. And sparkles proudly on their blond hair. Yet more blood! The crown injures their heads. Ah, under its trefled gold memory arises! What to do to kill this somber memory! This incessant torture that never wants to end. To deflect the curse of God from me? I have so much need of blessing that I would like to pray. But God, in his wrath, makes prayer expire on my arid lips. Lord, I repent; Lord, I have faith in you! Pardon! No, no. I'm not lying, my heart had no terror. It conceived the crime. Back! Back, ghost! Yes, I wanted your death because I wanted your crown. Who placed the dagger in Macbeth's hand, who guided his uncertain and haggard eye? It was I. It was I. In a dark alcove is raised a royal bed full of mystery and shadow. That's where Duncan sleeps. A mysterious noise seems to hover in the air and to reign in these parts. Noiselessly and step by step a man gets there. He rears up; a woman follows him; she holds a lamp whose strange light infiltrates under the velour of the weakly lit dais — across the curtain, the flame reddens. Striding for a moment, its light trembles over the lugubrious bed, pouring forth a bloody reflection. The wife is pale but her face is menacing. And in her eyes the furor in her soul can be read. She guides Macbeth's arm. That woman, that woman — she's me! I wanted power. It belongs to me! I have it! Horrible spectacle to view — a wave of blood springs from the breast of my victim. And on my reddened hand it imprints my crime. As with hot iron the executioner brands you. The stain's disappeared. No, no. (with terror) It's staining the water. (she rubs her hand)

VOICE: It's midnight.

At midnight remorse comes to torture your soul.

Hear God the Avenger's voice which accuses you.

It's midnight.

Pray, Christians, pray.

Here's the angel of vengeance

And his divine sword can strike you to the heart.

It's midnight.

LADY MACBETH: Blood. Always this blood which chokes and oppresses me. It's climbing, climbing again. The vengeful wave already touches my lip. It's going to drown me. My strength is returning; I don't want to die! Always the odor of blood in the air that I breath, in the perfume of flowers, in the sighing wind. Blood. Let's dry it. The stain's disappeared. The accusatory sign is no more.

(with terror)

It's reappearing!

(rubbing her hands)

O stain from hell, miserable vestige of crime. Disappear, vanish I tell you. Nothing can erase it! Well, well, this iron I am going to burn my hand with; I'm going to burn my flesh. Nothing more. — Yes, there it is. Terrible torture. Enough, enough, I'm dying! Under your redoubtable hand I would like to awaken, for this dream is horrifying. Oh! To sleep without thinking — how lucky that must be, To sleep. To dream forever. Terrifying life: sinister hour, alas, followed by despair. Who will deliver me from this frightful torture? To whoever wakens me I will give my crown. I will give my power.

(waking up)

Who spoke of the crown? of this heavy burden? Finally, I'm waking! On my head heaven unfolds its splendors. Thus, everything is real. The crime, yes the crime, it is trickling down the walls. It's breaking my heart, tearing my entrails. In these foaming waves it's carrying off my life. But Scotland is my prey and I will reign still!

REFRAIN BY CHORUS

CURTAIN.

