

There's silence. Then they hear the deafening sound of a plane going overhead. They start to exit.

HETTY. One last thing . . . We've all been under pressure, and tempers have been frayed, but I just want you to know there isn't anyone I'd rather have at my side today . . . I want you to know that.

Pub piano. The MAYOR totters on in a Santa hat to applause.

MAYOR (*full of Christmas cheer*). The Lady Mayoress and I are very honoured to be here . . . it's lovely to see this pub hall being put to such good service. Last time there was a 'do' in the Globe it turned into a right rough-house, didn't it, Eileen? But the good news is we're going to have the Arsenic Players and Mister William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Ooh, am I allowed to say that? Anyway, I'm sure the show will be absolutely on a par with last year's *Puss in Boots* . . . and we're going to have a sing-a-long and some grub at half-time . . . so at least that's something to look forward to! I see we're about to kick off . . . So I give you . . . the one and only, Ladies and Gentlemen . . . The Artichoke Players . . .

The lights dim. Spooky shadows appear.

In the wings FLORA is doing thunder and operates a small overacting smoke-machine. HETTY is manning the lighting switchboard. To begin with, the image of the witches looks superbly convincing.

IVY (First Witch). When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lighting or in rain?

CHARLIE (Second Witch). When the hurlyburly's done . . .
When the battle's lost and won.

JOCELYN (Third Witch). That will be ere the set of sun.

IVY (First Witch, *coughing*). Where the place? Upon the heath.

They are virtually obliterated by smoke.

CHARLIE (Second Witch). There to meet with Macbeth . . .

ALL. Fair is foul and foul is fair. Hover through the fog and filthy air . . .

JOCELYN (*audibly*). The smoke's got in my eyes . . . I can't . . .

The audience starts to cough.

HETTY (Macbeth). So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

FLORA (Banquo). What are these, so wither'd and so wild in their attire . . .

HETTY (Macbeth). Speak, if you can.

JOCELYN (Third Witch, *coughing*). I can't . . .

HETTY (Macbeth). What are you?

IVY (First Witch). All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

CHARLIE (Second Witch). All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

JOCELYN (Third Witch). Stay . . . mine eyes do call me hence . . . (*Whispers.*) . . . won't be a jiffy . . . sorry . . .

REGGIE (*on prompt script*). Wrong . . .

JOCELYN backs out rapidly.

HETTY (Macbeth). Wither is she vanished?

FLORA (Banquo). Into the air . . . as breath into the wind.

HETTY (Macbeth). Would she had stay'd . . .

FLORA (Banquo). I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? . . .
If you can look into . . .

JOCELYN hastily comes back on doing a strange dance. She has put on her glasses.

JOCELYN (Third Witch). All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter . . . sorry.

IVY (First Witch). Lesser than Macbeth and greater.

CHARLIE (Second Witch). Not so happy, yet much happier.

JOCELYN (Third Witch, *coughing fit*). . . . kings though
(*Coughing.*) . . . none . . . (*Coughing.*)

REGGIE. Wrong . . .

They exit.

FLORA (Banquo). Stay you imperfect speakers . . .

*In the wings, CHARLIE, dressed as the Porter, ROSALIND
as Macduff, go through their fight with their forefingers.*

ROSALIND. Left right, left right, spin and lunge.

CHARLIE. Sweep, and spin, shoulder left, cut to the knee.

ROSALIND. The waist.

CHARLIE. The knee.

ROSALIND. It's going a bit better, isn't it?

CHARLIE. Evens . . .

Onstage. Knocking.

HETTY (Macbeth). Whence is that knocking?

How is't with me when every noise appals me?
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

HELEN *enters as Lady Macbeth.*

HELEN (Lady Macbeth).

My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white . . . I hear a knocking
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber.
A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then?

HETTY (Macbeth).

To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

CHARLIE *enters as the Porter.*

In the wings, they discover they cannot wipe off the blood.

HELEN. The blood won't wipe off . . . Jesus what will we do?
Everyone will know we murdered him so there's no plot
left . . .

HETTY. Try pulling down your sleeves.

They try to no avail. FLORA is madly knocking away.

FLORA. Nil desperandum, I have an idea. Ivy, keep knocking.

*CHARLIE is onstage as the Porter with ROSALIND as
Macduff.*

*HETTY reappears as Macbeth, wearing the big leather
lighting gloves. They look aghast.*

HETTY (Macbeth). Good morrow both.

ROSALIND (Macduff). Is the king stirring within there?

HETTY (Macbeth). Not yet. *Silence.* I'll bring you to him.

*The drone of planes in the sky above cross-fades into
applause.*

Applause. The MAYOR returns. Now well and truly drunk.

MAYOR. Well, I think there's something in there for everyone
. . . Now I'm very happy to announce that the mince-pies
are ready . . . and for those of you a little bit worried about
the kiddies' bed-times . . . the good news is . . . the second
half's much shorter!

*JOSEPH and GERTRUDE have returned. Everyone is
putting on their beards and moustaches. REGGIE arrives
with his camera.*

FLORA. Welcome back our fellow citizens, the Rosenbaums,
who are now officially 'Category C, exempt from all
restrictions applicable to enemy aliens'.

General cheering.

JOSEPH. It is truly a good deed in a naughty world. But how
is it with you?

HETTY. It's been farcical . . .

ALL. No . . . no.

HETTY. . . . an unmitigated disaster.

HETTY takes out the telegram. She puts it back unopened.

IVY. It's all been a bit barmy.

HETTY. However, we have our dear friends back with us, and we have facial hair. So there is no excuse this half. We have everything to play for. And remember, speak from the heart, feel from the heart . . .

Scenes underscored by GERTRUDE with JOSEPH in the wings.

Everyone is acting really well.

HELEN (Lady Macbeth).

How now, my lord! Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? What's done is done . . .

HETTY (Macbeth).

We have scotched the snake, not killed it . . .
Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

HELEN (Lady Macbeth). Come on . . .

Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks.

HETTY (Macbeth).

Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further.

HELEN (Lady Macbeth). You must leave this . . .

HETTY (Macbeth).

O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
Thou knowest that Banquo and his Fleance lives . . .

HELEN (Lady Macbeth).

But in them nature's copy's not eterne . . .

HETTY (Macbeth). There's comfort yet.

Ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's drowsy peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.

HELEN (Lady Macbeth, *whispers*). What's to be done?

HETTY (Macbeth).

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed . . .

Seyton and Macduff (CHARLIE and ROSALIND) cross the stage doing a superbly dextrous sword fight. As they reach the wings they hug and congratulate each other.

FLORA (Ross). Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt.

He only lived but till he was a man . . .
But like a man he died.

JOCELYN (Siward). Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
I would not wish them to a fairer death . . .

Macbeth and Macduff (HETTY and ROSALIND) are fighting.

HETTY (Macbeth). I bear a charmed life which must not yield
To one of woman born.

ROSALIND (Macduff). Despair thy charm;

And let the angel whom thou still has served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped . . .

HETTY (Macbeth). Accursed be the tongue that tells me so . . .

Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

Exit fighting. Alarms, trumpets, etc. and cheering applause.

The cast come offstage after their curtain call. REGGIE is filming them with his cine-camera.