

Macbeth's Children

A Confrontation with William Shakespeare's Macbeth

by

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NOTE

The original version of this script was initially developed and workshopped with the help of thirteen young actors in the Cambridge Performance Project during the spring of 2001: Sky Rote, Sophie Blum, Amanda Catterfield, Sofia Erlien-Cerullo, William Ford, Jenni Grout, Rebecca Hecht, Marcel Moran, Henry Patterson, Felicity Slater, Elizabeth Sapiro-Mitten, Connie Tancredi-Brice, and Owen Thomas. Many thanks go to them, to the parents and friends who supported the project, and to the city of Cambridge for its support of the arts.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- DUNCAN, King of Scotland
- MALCOLM, Son of Duncan
- DONALBAIN, Son of Duncan
- BANQUO, Thane of Scotland
- FLEANCE, Banquo's son

- MACBETH, Thane of Glamis, later of Cawdor, later King of Scotland
- LADY MACBETH, his wife

- MACDUFF, Thane of Fife
- LADY MACDUFF, his wife
- ATHOLL, his son

- FIRST WITCH
- SECOND WITCH
- THIRD WITCH

A NOTE ON CASTING

Many of the actors will double (this is indicated in the text).

The original casting in the workshop did not follow gender; for example, female actors played Duncan, Donalbain, Macduff, and Atholl. This presented no problem in the workshop.

Macbeth's Children

Scene 1

On a field of battle somewhere, THE WEIRD SISTERS, equipped with bags. Perhaps a tree. Perhaps a moon. Perhaps sounds of battle. They are playing a card game, each holding six cards, with a discard pile. Perhaps the cards are oversized. They eat from their bags.

FIRST WITCH throws down a card. SECOND WITCH and THIRD WITCH look it over, consider it.

SECOND WITCH

For what are you waiting?

THIRD WITCH

I calculate.

SECOND WITCH belches, tries to get a look at THIRD WITCH's cards.

SECOND WITCH

If you don't hurry it up—

(belches again)

—I'll announce far worse wind from my southern hemisphere.

FIRST WITCH

What did one belch say to the other belch? "Let's be stinkers and go out the back door."

THIRD WITCH

What're you downing that gives you such an eructation?

SECOND WITCH

(looks in bag)

Kidney, I think.

THIRD WITCH

Right or left?

SECOND WITCH

(tastes)

Not sure, but left, I think.

FIRST WITCH

Prefer right myself.

THIRD WITCH

I like right, too. Male or female?

SECOND WITCH

Child, I think.

THIRD WITCH
(picking up card)

Well, if it's "child," then—

SECOND WITCH

Hey!

THIRD WITCH

—too late—then delicious by definition, right?

They ponder this.

FIRST WITCH

"Child" is definitely preferred to anything else we can snag from these fields of killing.

THIRD WITCH throws down a card, yawns.

THIRD WITCH

And lucky us—so many carcasses bloom from which to select the choicest of cuts.

FIRST WITCH picks up the card and goes to discard. But the three are interrupted by CHILD SOLDIER who wanders in. The weapon carried by CHILD SOLDIER should be much bigger than the actor.

FIRST WITCH

On the hoof—

SECOND WITCH

So to speak—

THIRD WITCH

As we speak.

They lay their cards face down, move to CHILD SOLDIER. As they do, they each take an item out of each bag: FIRST WITCH takes a roll of string or twine, SECOND WITCH takes out a cloth tape measure, and THIRD WITCH takes out a knife or scissors.

It is not certain if CHILD SOLDIER knows they are around him.

As they circle CHILD SOLDIER, they chant and do the Dance of Measuring Out Life: FIRST WITCH unrolls some string, SECOND WITCH measures it, THIRD WITCH cuts it. They use the string to trip up CHILD SOLDIER and anything else they can think of, then finally use it as a garrote to kill.

FIRST WITCH

Look sharp, sisters, lick your gums—/ Something toothsome this way comes.

SECOND WITCH

And when such comes, we can't refrain—/ We feel delight by causing pain.

THIRD WITCH

Life is short, then worms a'meal—/ How short? depends on how we feel.

ALL

In our world, foul never turns fair: / You won't find grace and beauty—

FIRST WITCH points at SECOND WITCH.

FIRST WITCH

There—

SECOND WITCH points at THIRD WITCH.

SECOND WITCH

Or there—

THIRD WITCH points at FIRST WITCH.

THIRD WITCH

Or there.

CHILD SOLDIER is dead. THE WEIRD SISTERS carve up the carcass and put the pieces in their bags—perhaps even gnaw on the food. They then go back to their card game, leaving the corpse.

FIRST WITCH

I'll call.

SECOND WITCH

All right.

SECOND WITCH lays out her cards.

SECOND WITCH

B - A - N - Q - U - O. Banquo.

THIRD WITCH

Got you beat.

(lays out cards)

D - U - N - C - A - N. Duncan. My king of Scotland beats your thane's ass.

FIRST WITCH

Got you both beat hands down.

(lays out cards)

M - A - C - B - E - T - H. Macbeth. Thane to become king.

SECOND WITCH

But you snuck in an extra card!

FIRST WITCH

The best always takes a little extra, doesn't it?

SECOND WITCH

But that's cheating!

THIRD WITCH

Look at us—does that make sense?

SECOND WITCH

But Banquo my thane is going to be a father of kings, which trumps you both!

FIRST WITCH

That's the uncertain future, my dear—
(sniff the air)
My thane Macbeth is already infected—smell.

They all sniff.

SECOND WITCH

He is wound up, indeed—and deep in already.

FIRST WITCH

So that's the story with which we go. Agreed?

THIRD WITCH

It's all the same to me.

FIRST WITCH

How true!

They gather up the cards and their bags, then clap three times. FLEANCE enters.

FIRST WITCH

Fleance—the latest to arrive. All hail Fleance!

SECOND WITCH and THIRD WITCH give half-hearted "hails."

SECOND WITCH

Hail.

THIRD WITCH

Hail.

FLEANCE kneels at the corpse of CHILD SOLDIER.

FLEANCE

What have you done?

THIRD WITCH

What we always do.

FIRST WITCH

And don't sound so righteous—

SECOND WITCH

Things have turned out very well for you since Banquo died.

FLEANCE

My father did not “die.” He was murdered. Assassinated.

THIRD WITCH

You have no reason to complain—

SECOND WITCH

About either your fate—

FIRST WITCH

Or our word-choice.

FLEANCE cradles CHILD SOLDIER, rocks.

FLEANCE

(to corpse)

Who would have thought—

SECOND WITCH

Nothing is but thinking makes it so—

FIRST WITCH

(sotto voce)

Good line!

FLEANCE

Who would have thought the old man—and the old woman, and the father and mother aching to shield their children, and the children themselves, both ripe and unripe, all reaped in the harvest of swords—who would have thought they had so much blood in them.

(to the WITCHES)

I never would have thought there could be so much blood.

(to THIRD WITCH)

There is every reason to complain.

THE WITCHES rub their fists in their eyes.

ALL WITCHES

Oh, boo-hoo-hoo!

FIRST WITCH

My young soul-pained Fleance, what does it cost to be a child in this world? Huh?

FLEANCE strokes the corpse's forehead.

FLEANCE

Let me ask.

(to corpse)

What does it cost to be a child in this world? Eh?

FLEANCE "listens" to the corpse.

FLEANCE

What was that? The price? Say it again.

THIRD WITCH

It says—

FLEANCE

It says that we all become Macbeth's children.

FIRST WITCH

Oh, this is stupid! Give him to us.

FLEANCE

No.

SECOND WITCH starts to push him aside.

SECOND WITCH

Shut up.

FLEANCE fights back. THIRD WITCH garrotes FLEANCE.

SECOND WITCH

Thank you.

THIRD WITCH

Always love to choke a bloke.

FIRST WITCH drags the corpse to one side, and FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH stand it upright. THIRD WITCH releases FLEANCE, who gets to his feet.

THE WITCHES use the corpse as a ventriloquist's dummy.

FIRST WITCH
So, Fleance—

SECOND WITCH
Son of Banquo—

FIRST WITCH
Son of murdered Banquo—

SECOND WITCH
Right—

FIRST WITCH
How did it feel to turn into one of Macbeth's children? How, exactly, did that work itself out? Inquiring minds want to know.

FLEANCE walks up to the corpse and caresses its cheek. The corpse as dummy caresses FLEANCE.

FLEANCE
(to corpse)
Let me tell you how.

WITCHES
Ooohhh!

* * * * *

Scene 2: England

The WITCHES announce the scene by using the corpse as a kind of ventriloquist's dummy.

FIRST WITCH
The exiles from Scotland at the Palace of Edward the Confessor, England. Facts in evidence—please keep score—it gets pretty tricky:

SECOND WITCH

Macbeth has killed Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's wife and son.
We now begin what you might call the play proper—

THIRD WITCH

—or the proper play. You decide.

THE WEIRD SISTERS exit, and the corpse of CHILD SOLDIER walks off with them.

This scene takes place just after Macbeth: 4.3, where MACDUFF has learned about the death of his family.

MACDUFF is sitting alone.

FLEANCE enters running, wiping his hands vigorously on a handkerchief, as if trying to clean off something dirty. There is also a streak of red on his face or cheek. When he shows the handkerchief, it is daubed with red, as if with blood. MALCOLM and DONALBAIN enter.

MALCOLM

Macduff?

MACDUFF

Yes.

MALCOLM

How goes your grief today?

MACDUFF

I am the cat's mouse: I am played with and still living.

MALCOLM

Our hearts go to you—yes, Fleance?

FLEANCE

(trying to clean his hands)

Yes, yes—honored Macduff.

DONALBAIN

What is the matter?

FLEANCE

I have cut my hand.

DONALBAIN

How?

FLEANCE
(embarrassed)

On my knife.

DONALBAIN
(mocking)

Practicing “gladiator,” hey?

MACDUFF
(to MALCOLM and DONALBAIN)

Our warrior.

MALCOLM goes to FLEANCE and gently wraps his hand in the handkerchief.

MALCOLM

At least he was doing something. What is it that we will do?

DONALBAIN

We each have hard cause against Macbeth.

MACDUFF

And that means only one thing, agreed upon, I hope: his swift and surgical and painful death. Edward will supply the men—all we need to do is supply the will. And so, the question: when do we return to take back what was taken from us?

FLEANCE

I have had enough blood.

MACDUFF

What are you saying?

DONALBAIN

What is the “warrior” saying?

FLEANCE

Just that—blood enough. He always treated me well.

MACDUFF
(to FLEANCE)

He unjointed your father for his table—and your every breath does not breathe “revenge”? What kind of son are you?

FLEANCE
My heart needs patience.

MACDUFF
(dismissive)
Patience.

MALCOLM
Macduff—

MACDUFF
What?!

MALCOLM
Be patient—

MACDUFF
(to FLEANCE)
You crave patience even though a towering falcon—your father! their father!—was by that mousing owl Macbeth hawk’d at and kill’d? The world cracks, and you say “Patience”?

MALCOLM
We are doing the best our best can do with what we do not have. A little more talk will not mar the time.

DONALBAIN
Always were one for talk.

MALCOLM
You forget, brother, that I go back not only as avenger but also as king—

DONALBAIN
(to MACDUFF, mockingly)
And ain’t I the good king’s servant—

MALCOLM

—and I do not want to be a traitor-hearted king like the king we now have. A better understanding of “why,” otherwise we lose sight of “when” and “how.”

(to FLEANCE)

Tell them about the encounter with the witches—you were there.

(to MACDUFF and DONALBAIN)

You have heard this?

MACDUFF

No.

MALCOLM
(to DONALBAIN)

You?

DONALBAIN

No.

FLEANCE

I do not want to remember this!

MALCOLM

You should—to better understand your understanding.

(to MACDUFF)

This is supposedly where began Macbeth’s fall from grace.

(to FLEANCE)

We have both lost fathers—speak this for yours.

FLEANCE

I wish my father could hold me now in his arms and with his voice.

MALCOLM

I have that same ache.

MACDUFF
(in disgust)

My God!

MALCOLM

Pour his voice from the chalice of your throat. I will be here.

FLEANCE

We were coming from the battle—I was attending my father, as I always do.

MACDUFF

A young boy's place in battle.

FLEANCE

And then we saw them.

* * * * *

Scene 3: The Witches' Brew

Lights and setting change: the heath. Thunder. Enter the WITCHES. BANQUO and MACBETH prepare to enter; FLEANCE prepares to join them.

FIRST WITCH

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

SECOND WITCH

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

THIRD WITCH

Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time.

ALL

'Tis time, 'tis time.

The drumming begins.

THIRD WITCH

A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

ALL

The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Enter MACBETH and BANQUO, with FLEANCE.

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen. Young Fleance, keep up with us! I would not want you lost.

BANQUO

He held himself well today.

MACBETH

He did, he did—I wish I had a son of my own to follow my feet.

BANQUO

There is always time and hope—

FLEANCE

Father—

BANQUO

What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't?

MACBETH

Speak, if you can: what are you?

FIRST WITCH

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

FLEANCE

(pointing to MACBETH)

Father, look!

BANQUO

Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?

MACBETH

Like the day itself, fair good news fouled with exhaustion.

MALCOLM

(interrupting, to FLEANCE)

What did you think then?

FLEANCE

Think? I could barely breathe! These witches—ugly, loud—

MALCOLM

Think, Fleance—

MACDUFF

This is a waste of time.

DONALBAIN

I agree.

MALCOLM

Did Macbeth seem just surprised or was he brimmed with fear?

FLEANCE

He looked—guilty, as if someone had guessed a secret.

BANQUO

(to the WITCHES)

My noble partner—

MALCOLM

A secret—

BANQUO

—you greet with present grace and great prediction—
to me you speak not.

MALCOLM

(to MACDUFF)

Planted early well before these witches. What happened next?

FLEANCE

My father wanted something from them.

BANQUO

If you can look into the seeds of time—

FIRST WITCH

Hail!

SECOND WITCH

Hail!

THIRD WITCH

Hail!

FIRST WITCH

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH

Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH

Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:

So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

FIRST WITCH

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

The WITCHES vanish. MACBETH and BANQUO pursue, then freeze.

FLEANCE

It was all very confusing.

MALCOLM

I can imagine. My father, Duncan, king—Macbeth, king—

BANQUO
(to MACBETH)

You shall be king.

MALCOLM
(to FLEANCE)

And you, Fleance, king.

MACBETH
(to BANQUO)

Your children shall be kings.

MACDUFF
(to MALCOLM)

And you, at that point—king-in-waiting.

(pointing to FLEANCE)

And him—king?

MALCOLM

Yes.

MACDUFF

Four kings.

DONALBAIN

And a leftover.

MACDUFF

One throne.

MALCOLM
(to FLEANCE)

It is very confusing.

FLEANCE

I do not want to be king. I cannot bear its edge against my heart.

MACDUFF

You are a coward, Fleance—shut up.

(to MALCOLM)

So, Macbeth had it early in his heart to kill your father. The baby verifies that. And only one course to the throne—Macbeth through a sea of blood, smile on his lips, his heart a crunch of coal without a seam of grace in it. What else is there to understand?

MACBETH breaks into the action.

MACBETH

There is more to me than that.

MACDUFF

The hollow man rings!

MACBETH

True, I had lusted to set Duncan's sun on my head—
But what the witches told me
Frightened me to the hollow of my bones....
Murder—to hear my thought, yet but fantastical,
Echoed back by the clappers of their tongues
Shook so my single state of man
And made my seated heart knock at my ribs...

MACDUFF

So, a touch of conscience—
(referring to FLEANCE)
—even this suckling—

MALCOLM

(referring to FLEANCE)

You need not insult him—

MACDUFF

—would feel as much. Much older, you should have felt it more.
More responsible, you should have cut your own throat then and
there.

MACBETH

I hoped if chance would have me king, why, chance might crown
me,
Without my stir.

MACDUFF

Add laziness!

BANQUO

(interrupting)

I tried to tell him
To be more careful of his soul,
That...the instruments of darkness tell us truths...
To betray us in deepest consequence.
But he did not hear me—stood wrapped in his own come-bloody
thoughts.

MALCOLM

Fleance, you can let the memory go. Enough.

FLEANCE walks to his father. MACBETH and BANQUO turn back.

FLEANCE

Look, how rapt he is, Father.

BANQUO

Yes, look, how our partner's rapt. Macbeth!

MACBETH

(whispering to himself)

Come what come may—

BANQUO

Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

MACBETH

Let us toward the king.
Think upon what hath chanced, and...
Having weigh'd it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

BANQUO

Very gladly.

MACBETH

Till then, enough. Come, Fleance, come be my traveling boy for
the tumbled trip to home.

FLEANCE

(asking permission)

Father?

BANQUO

Be to both of us our homeward son and bring us three good luck!

BANQUO and MACBETH exit.

FLEANCE

He joked with me all the way. Gave me coins. Praised my arm's
strength. Said he wished he had a son like me.

MACDUFF

A counterfeit heart.

FLEANCE

I liked him.

* * * * *

Scene 4

DONALBAIN

You liked him!

(to all)

He liked him! You are an idiot! We are wasting time!

MALCOLM

If I am—

(indicating FLEANCE)

—if we are—to measure out our lives against his, then I need to know his measure within an inch of my life.

DONALBAIN

Your life isn't worth an inch at the moment.

(to FLEANCE)

Nor yours.

MALCOLM

(to FLEANCE and DONALBAIN)

He treated our father well, too. He saved my father's kingdom—before corruption tasted anything of him.

Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding SERGEANT, played by ATHOLL.

DUNCAN

What bloody man is that?

MALCOLM

This is the sergeant
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
Say to king Duncan the knowledge of the broil—

SERGEANT

Doubtful it stood...

A stab of pain—then the SERGEANT continues.

SERGEANT

Fortune, on [the traitor] smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore: but...brave Macbeth--well he
deserves that name--
Disdaining fortune...carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave
And with his brandish'd steel
Unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

DUNCAN

O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!

MALCOLM comments to MACDUFF, DONALBAIN, and FLEANCE.

MALCOLM

See his manly, savage, graceful bravery. My father's love made
him gifts for that.

Enter DUNCAN, MACBETH and BANQUO.

DUNCAN

O worthiest cousin!
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me: ...only I have left to say,
More is thy due than more than all can pay...
My worthy Cawdor!

FLEANCE

Then why did he do it? I do not want to be a king! He had grace,
courage—why, why, why?! If he can have that grace and then
lose all grace, what hope for grace is there for any of us? What
hope is there for me?

MACDUFF
(to DONALBAIN)

Oh, this is rare!

DONALBAIN

Rare? Uncooked!

MACDUFF

Your joint and several purposes are blunted by “why”! You have enough cause to choke you, and yet you will not clear your throats!

(to FLEANCE)

Boy, what must I do to bake you hard?

(to MALCOLM)

And you should know better.

MALCOLM

I know better than you think I know.

DONALBAIN

You think better than you act, which is not hard since your act is nothing to think about.

MACDUFF summons the WITCHES and MACBETH and speaks to them.

FLEANCE

(fearful)

What are you doing?

MACDUFF

(directed at MACBETH)

Our devalued Scottish spawn is not the only one powered to call our worst forward.

(to them all)

Show them the real truth of this wicked world. Begin with me.

In this scene, FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH will double as murderers of LADY MACDUFF and ATHOLL, MACDUFF's son. MACBETH will speak the lines of the MESSENGER, then join the murderers. As the scene is set, MACDUFF speaks.

MACDUFF

(to FLEANCE and MALCOLM)

Let these coming wounds wound you back to your purpose.

(to the WITCHES)

You may begin.

The WITCHES circle MACDUFF.

FIRST WITCH

Macduff of Fife had a wife.

SECOND WITCH

Macduff of Fife had a son.

THIRD WITCH

Macduff of Fife left no message.

In the scene, it is clear that FLEANCE allies himself with ATHOLL.

* * * * *

Scene 5: Macduff's Castle

LADY MACDUFF

What had he done, to make him fly the land?

ATHOLL

You must have patience, madam.

DONALBAIN

There's patience again!

LADY MACDUFF

He had none:

His flight was madness...to leave his wife, to leave his babes,

His mansion and his titles in a place

From whence himself does fly? He loves us not...

(referring to ATHOLL)

Father'd he is, and yet he's fatherless.

FLEANCE

How "fatherless" rings in my ears!

MACBETH joins the murderers. FLEANCE stays near ATHOLL.

LADY MACDUFF

Sirrah, your father's dead...How will you live?

ATHOLL

As birds do, mother.

LADY MACDUFF

What, with worms and flies?

ATHOLL

With what I get, I mean; and so do they.

LADY MACDUFF

Poor bird! thou'ldst never fear the net nor lime,

The pitfall nor the gin.

ATHOLL

Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set [traps] for.

FLEANCE

Oh, yes they are.

ATHOLL

My father is not dead, for all your saying.

LADY MACDUFF

Yes, he is dead—

FLEANCE

If he is wanted dead, then he will be found dead.

LADY MACDUFF

How wilt thou do for a father?

ATHOLL

Nay, how will you do for a husband?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

ATHOLL

Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

FLEANCE

Fathers are cheap and used so cheaply.

ATHOLL

Was my father a traitor, mother?

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, that he was...one that swears and lies.

ATHOLL

And be all traitors that do so?

LADY MACDUFF

Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.

ATHOLL

And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

LADY MACDUFF

Every one.

FLEANCE

Then the world would be empty.

ATHOLL

Who must hang them?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, the honest men.

DONALBAIN

Young suckling Fleance—

ATHOLL

Then the liars and swearers are fools,
for there are liars and swearers enow to beat
the honest men and hang up them.

DONALBAIN

—you look green!

LADY MACDUFF

God help thee, poor monkey, poor prattler—

Enter a MESSENGER, who is actually MACBETH disguised. LADY MACDUFF's responses set him off balance.

LADY MACDUFF

Who are you?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

Bless you, fair dame!

LADY MACDUFF

Why are you blessing me?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

I am not to you known—

LADY MACDUFF

No, you are not!

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

Though in your state of honour I am perfect.

LADY MACDUFF

How did you get in?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

I doubt some danger—

LADY MACDUFF

How did you get in?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

I doubt some danger does approach you nearly—

LADY MACDUFF

Do you know or do you not?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

If you will take a homely man's advice,

Be not found here—

LADY MACDUFF

Why?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

Hence, with your little ones.

LADY MACDUFF

Why?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

Cruelty...is too nigh your person.

LADY MACDUFF

Why?

MESSENGER [MACBETH]

Heaven preserve you!
I dare abide no longer.

LADY MACDUFF

I abide you no longer!

The MESSENGER exits. FLEANCE and ATHOLL act almost as one. MACBETH tries to leave, but LADY MACBETH appears to force him to join the murderers.

LADY MACDUFF

I have done no harm.

FLEANCE

It doesn't matter.

LADY MACDUFF

But I remember now

I am in this earthly world—

FLEANCE

Ashes to ashes—

LADY MACDUFF

—where to do harm—

ATHOLL

Dust to dust—

LADY MACDUFF

Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence,
To say I have done no harm?

ATHOLL

We have done no harm.

Enter MURDERERS.

LADY MACDUFF

What are these faces?

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Where is your husband?

LADY MACDUFF

I hope, in no place...

Where such as thou mayst find him.

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

He's a traitor.

ATHOLL

Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain! Mother, I protect thee!

ATHOLL attacks the MURDERER.

NOTE: The death of ATHOLL and LADY MACDUFF should be done as stylized as possible.

FLEANCE

Don't!

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

What, you egg!

The MURDERER stabs ATHOLL. He falls into FLEANCE's arms.

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

Young fry of treachery!

ATHOLL

He has kill'd me, mother:

Run away, I pray you!

ATHOLL dies in FLEANCE's arms. LADY MACDUFF backs away from the MURDERERS, and as she does so, she backs into LADY MACBETH, who holds her. One of the murderers ties a red ribbon around her throat, and LADY MACDUFF collapses to the floor. A beat after LADY MACDUFF's murder, then both ATHOLL and LADY MACDUFF rise and exit, as if they are

leaving the stage after completing their scene. ATHOLL and FLEANCE take a beat to acknowledge each other before ATHOLL leaves.

MACDUFF
(to FLEANCE)

That would have been you. Young Atholl's body, my son's body, answers to the salutation of worms because you got away.

MALCOLM

That is enough.

MACDUFF

We have barely set sail.

(to FLEANCE)

Come on, weanling—do you see me crying any more over the death of my loves? I cried as was needed, then left off crying as was needed. You know what needs next happen. Listen to this man whom you “liked” so much.

DONALBAIN

Such great and scurvy fun!

The killing of BANQUO: this is an edited combination of 3.1 and 3.3. The FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH will again play the murderers. BANQUO now plays himself, as does FLEANCE. The THIRD WITCH will play the THIRD MURDERER. MACBETH comes over and leads FLEANCE into the scene by the hand, then stands by the MURDERERS.

MACBETH

Well then, now, my catalogue of dogs,
Have you gnawed on the scraps of my speeches?...
Both of you
Know Banquo was your enemy.

BOTH MURDERERS

True, my lord.

MACBETH

So is he mine...I could
With barefaced power sweep him from my sight...
yet I must not....
[So] I to your assistance do make love,
Masking the business from the common eye
For sundry weighty reasons.

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed that I am reckless what
I do to spite the world.

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

And I another
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my lie on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on't.

MACBETH

Your spirits shine through you. Within this hour at most
I will advise you where to plant yourselves...
it must be done to-night,
And something from the palace...
Leave no rubs nor botches in the work--
Fleance his son, that keeps him company,
Whose absence is no less material to me
Than is his father's, must embrace the fate
Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart:
I'll come to you anon.

BOTH MURDERERS

We are resolved, my lord.

Exit MURDERERS. MACBETH alone—these words come just before his meeting with the MURDERERS. As he speaks, he stands next to or close to FLEANCE. The WITCHES surround him.

MACBETH

Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep...
[t]here is none but he
Whose being I do fear: and, under him,
My Genius is rebuked....
He...bade [the sister] speak to him—

FIRST WITCH

Then prophet-like
They hail'd him father to a line of kings—

SECOND WITCH

Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe—

THIRD WITCH

Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding.

MACBETH

If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd...
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
It is concluded.

FIRST WITCH

Banquo, thy soul's flight—

SECOND WITCH

If it find heaven—

THIRD WITCH

Must find it out to-night.

FLEANCE shows some hesitation. The MURDERERS position themselves.

BANQUO

Come, son, this is the part we must play.

FLEANCE

I cannot—

MACDUFF

Think of Atholl—you owe it to him to know what he knew.

FLEANCE

I already know this.

MACDUFF

Not deeply enough. Not deeply enough in your manhood.

BANQUO

Come, son—it is what all men must bear to make their lives well-borne.

This scene comes from 3.3. Enter three MURDERERS—MACBETH actually pushes the THIRD WITCH, who does not want to do the deed. When she refuses, MACBETH joins the MURDERERS, in a quick disguise.

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

But who did bid thee join with us?

THIRD MURDERER [MACBETH]

Macbeth.

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

He needs not our mistrust...

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Then stand with us....near approaches

The subject of our watch.

THIRD MURDERER [MACBETH]

Hark! I hear horses.

BANQUO

Give us a light there, ho!

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

Then 'tis he—

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

A light, a light!

Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE with a torch.

THIRD MURDERER [MACBETH]

'Tis he.

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Stand to't.

BANQUO

It will be rain to-night.

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Let it come down.

They set upon BANQUO.

BANQUO

O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!
Thou mayst revenge. O slave!

BANQUO dies in a stylized manner. FLEANCE escapes, then stands by MACBETH, watching the scene.

THIRD MURDERER [MACBETH]

Who did strike out the light?

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Wast not the way?

THIRD MURDERER [MACBETH]

There's but one down; the son is fled.

SECOND MURDERER [SECOND WITCH]

We have lost
Best half of our affair.

FIRST MURDERER [FIRST WITCH]

Well, let's away, and say how much is done.

FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH exit. MACBETH puts a hand on FLEANCE while he speaks.

MACBETH

No son of mine succeeding—
To make...the seed of Banquo kings!

MACBETH shoves FLEANCE away.

MALCOLM

Enough.

MACDUFF

And you think you escape the visions?

MALCOLM

I know enough already.

Realizing that MACDUFF is going to recreate the murder of DUNCAN—pointing to DUNCAN.

FLEANCE
This?

MACDUFF
Of course.

FLEANCE
Enough!

(to DUNCAN)
There is no need!

MACDUFF
(to MALCOLM)
You wanted to know better the “why.”

(to ALL)
If we unite to fight against Macbeth, we cross ourselves on the
crucifix that blood nails us to—no other “why” will do.

FLEANCE
It is just blood now, isn't it? Not principle, not justice, not “greater
good”—but whose thirst is the first to be gorged!
(to MALCOLM)

Stop them!

DONALBAIN
(mocking)
“Stop them!” You have no choice—see what your manhood
makes it clear you cannot escape, ever.

*MACDUFF signals DUNCAN to take his place his place in his “bed,” a chair set stage center.
MACBETH and LADY MACBETH enter, as does BANQUO, who signals FLEANCE, who
reluctantly joins him again. MACDUFF signals to begin.*

Enter BANQUO and FLEANCE.

BANQUO
How goes the night, boy?

FLEANCE
The moon is down...

BANQUO

...A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!

Enter MACBETH.

BANQUO

Who's there?

MACBETH

A friend.

BANQUO

What, sir, not yet at rest? The king's a-bed....
I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:
To you they have show'd some truth.

MACBETH

...When we can entreat an hour...
We would spend it in some words upon that business...

BANQUO

At your kind'st leisure.

MACBETH

If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
It shall make honour for you.

BANQUO

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it...

MACBETH

Good repose the while!

BANQUO

Thanks, sir: the like to you!

Exeunt BANQUO and FLEANCE, but then FLEANCE turns away from his father and sneaks back to the scene as LADY MACBETH enters the scene. She has a knife in her hand. They will play a game of "hide-and-peek" all the way into DUNCAN's bedroom.

MACBETH

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand?

MALCOLM

Wait! You watched?

FLEANCE nods yes.

MACBETH

Come, let me clutch thee.

LADY MACBETH pulls just out of his reach, plays hide-and-seek with it behind her back.

MALCOLM

Wait! Why?

MACBETH and LADY MACBETH wait.

FLEANCE

Curiosity. To learn something good for my father, since Macbeth
had won gifts for doing only what my father had done.

MALCOLM

And then did nothing? Said nothing?

FLEANCE

Look at me—a child, not a man, but—
(indicating MACDUFF and DONALBAIN)
—according to them, a man nonetheless—then a weak man—

DONALBAIN

Weaky squeaky—

FLEANCE

—with no power to prevent, only buckle and bleach my eyes with
knowledge too soon seen, too little soothed.

(to MALCOLM)

And whom to trust?

MALCOLM

Your father?

FLEANCE

And put him in danger? If chance could find the murderers, then that same chance might save my father.

MACDUFF
(to MALCOLM)

Satisfied?

MACDUFF signals to MACBETH.

MACBETH

Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

LADY MACBETH pulls just out of his reach, plays hide-and-seek with it behind her back.

LADY MACBETH

[Oh, but I] do fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness—

MACBETH

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

LADY MACBETH

[Let me] chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round.

MACBETH

Art thou...fatal vision...but
A dagger of the mind...?

LADY MACBETH

Look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't.

LADY MACBETH laughs quietly and leads him into DUNCAN's bedroom. She places the knife in DUNCAN's hand.

MACBETH

I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.

MACBETH takes out his own knife. As he does, DUNCAN takes the knife in his hand and smears it with red coloring, to resemble blood. MACBETH is now in DUNCAN's bedroom.

MACBETH

And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before.

DUNCAN exchanges knives with MACBETH; MACBETH now holds the bloody one. DUNCAN bloodies the second knife.

MACBETH

There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes.

LADY MACBETH

Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire?

MACBETH

It is the bloody business!

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man...

MACBETH

I am still manned!

LADY MACBETH

But now too full o' the milk of human kindness!
I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

MACBETH

Bring forth men-children only
[As you have brought me forth];
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males.

LADY MACBETH takes the second knife out of DUNCAN's hand and puts it in MACBETH's hand. He now holds two bloody knives. He stands behind DUNCAN.

MACBETH

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

LADY MACBETH leaves the room. FLEANCE half-looks at MACBETH. MACBETH raises the daggers over his head and slowly brings them down until the tips touch DUNCAN's chest as the WITCHES speak.

FIRST WITCH

Now o'er the one halfworld
Nature seems dead—

SECOND WITCH

—and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep—

THIRD WITCH

Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings—

FIRST WITCH

—and wither'd murder—

SECOND WITCH

—alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf...

THIRD WITCH

—towards his design
Moves like a ghost....

The knives are against DUNCAN's chest. A bell rings.

MACBETH

...Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell

That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

MACBETH lays the daggers in an "X" on DUNCAN's chest. DUNCAN takes some of the red coloring he used on the knives and smears MACBETH's hands with it. MACBETH pulls the knives away. DUNCAN falls and dies.

FLEANCE

Murder!

MACBETH spins around but FLEANCE flies, and MACBETH does not see him. He immediately joins LADY MACBETH.

MALCOLM

God bless us!

DONALBAIN

Amen!

MACBETH

(looking on his hands)

This is a sorry sight.

LADY MACBETH

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

MACBETH

There's one...cried 'Murder!'

One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' another...

Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,'

When they did say 'God bless us!'

LADY MACBETH

Consider it not so deeply.

MACBETH

But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?

I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"

Stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH

These deeds...thought...these ways...will make us mad.

MACBETH

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep"—

MALCOLM

Macbeth murders all our sleep.

MACDUFF

—the innocent sleep—

FLEANCE

Enough pity!

MACBETH

—"Macbeth shall sleep no more."

LADY MACBETH

....Get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there: go carry them; and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

MACBETH

I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

LADY MACBETH

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil—

MACDUFF

(to FLEANCE)

Do you fear him?

LADY MACBETH

If he do bleed—

MACDUFF

(to FLEANCE)

Do you fear this painted devil?

LADY MACBETH takes some of the blood from the knives and smears his cheek with it.

LADY MACBETH

I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;
For it must seem their guilt.

LADY MACBETH exits, taking the daggers. She places one in FLEANCE's hand, the other in MALCOLM's. She returns to DUNCAN and smears her own hands. Meanwhile, MACBETH looks at his hands.

MACBETH

....What hands are here?...
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No.

Re-enter LADY MACBETH.

LADY MACBETH

My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white....
A little water clears us of this deed:
How easy is it, then!....
Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts.

MACBETH

To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.

MACDUFF motions to the WITCHES, and they gather the actors together. FLEANCE and MALCOLM (holding the daggers), DONALBAIN, MACDUFF, and MACBETH remain.

MACDUFF

'Twere best to know ourselves in order to know our deeds. Now,
knowing, what will we do? We have seen all we need to know.

No one moves.

DONALBAIN

Silence! We are no further along than when we started all this
"remembering." They stand there like blunted sheep. They will not
move in revolt against the revolt done to us, and we cannot move
without them moving.

(to MACDUFF)

As a good lord you will not move without—

(indicating MALCOLM)

—his consent, and this one—

(indicating FLEANCE)

—is the wild card that makes jokers of us all: not yet king but king to be. And I? I've nothing to give but spleen and malice, and they are rated common stuff—like me.

MACBETH

(to MACDUFF)

Look at them—upon them you rest your rebellious anger? Upon them you plant your siege? You have already lost, for I have powers and truths beyond any measures you can measure out against me. Come, witches, once again.

MACBETH motions for the WITCHES to enter. DUNCAN, LADY MACDUFF, and BANQUO will play the apparitions. From 4.1.

FIRST WITCH

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

SECOND WITCH

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

THIRD WITCH

Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time.

FIRST WITCH

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw....

ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

SECOND WITCH

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.

MACBETH

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!...
I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know [my future], answer me:

FIRST WITCH

Speak.

SECOND WITCH

Demand.

THIRD WITCH

We'll answer.

Thunder. First Apparition: a bloody Child.

FIRST APPARITION

Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

MACBETH

Then I will live...

MACBETH points at MALCOLM, MACDUFF, DONALBAIN, and FLEANCE.

MACBETH

—what need I fear of thee, all woman-born and women-fed?

Thunder. Second Apparition: a Child crowned, with a tree in his hand.

SECOND APPARITION

Be lion-mettled, proud...
For Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.

MACBETH

That will never be—Sweet bodements! good!...
Yet my heart
Throbs to know one thing more: tell me, if your art
Can tell so much: shall Banquo's issue ever
Reign in this kingdom?....

FIRST WITCH

Show!

SECOND WITCH

Show!

THIRD WITCH

Show!...

Third Apparition: a show of Eight Kings. BANQUO lays down eight crowns as MACBETH speaks.

MACBETH

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo: down!
And thy hair...is like the first.
A third! A fourth! Start, eyes!
What, will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?
Another yet! A seventh!...
Yet the eighth appears....
Horrible sight!...

BANQUO moves away from MACBETH.

MACBETH

What, is this so?

ALL WITCHES AND APPARITIONS

Ay, sir, all this is so....

The WITCHES and APPARITIONS vanish, taking the crowns.

MACBETH

(to MACDUFF)

So, you see—I am fortified, bolstered in blood against all coming blood. Every man is of woman born, every tree must stay within its roots. Fleance, you are the one mystery I cannot crack—but crack it I will to keep the golden round from squaring itself on you. Save yourselves your selves; Scotland is mine.

MACBETH exits. There is a long pause.

MACDUFF

(to MALCOLM)

Face it, my lord—for you are my lord, though not yet crowned at Scone—it is upon him—

(indicating FLEANCE)

—that Scotland's fairness hangs.

DONALBAIN

But the apparitions?

MACDUFF

I will be the one to set the conditions of Macbeth's death.

DONALBAIN

Your mother was not of this world?

MACDUFF

Try not to exercise thy charm...
Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MALCOLM

Thou opposed, being of no woman born?

DONALBAIN

And I suppose you can coax trees to engage in close formation?

MALCOLM

(understanding what MACDUFF is thinking)

Yes, he can.

DONALBAIN

Oh?

MALCOLM

Let every soldier hew him down a bough
And bear't before him: thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host and make discovery
Err in report of us.

DONALBAIN

If two can be fulfilled—

(looks at FLEANCE)

Then surely three will be our lucky number.

MALCOLM

Lucky for some.

MACDUFF

(to MALCOLM)

Your luck will be to king our kingdom for the term of your heart's
length—but the health of our body politic rests on this young
prate's friable bones.

(to FLEANCE)

Well? The decision is yours—rebellion or exile.

MALCOLM
(looking at FLEANCE)

You are my rival, now, you know.

DONALBAIN

And you are both now mine.

FLEANCE

I don't want to be anything to anyone but son to my father.

DONALBAIN

Too late for that.

MALCOLM

And I must add my weight on your friable bones.

MACDUFF

As I said, Edward has pledged 10,000 men, Fleance. Plus what we raise in arms at home. But we need your word. We need the man's word, the word of the man today and the man to come.

FLEANCE
(to MALCOLM)

What should I do?

MALCOLM

There is no real choice here. What is soft must be baked hard; what is already hardened must shatter in service. That is your path. From now on political bread feeds your daily plate.

FLEANCE looks at them all, looking very much like a frightened child. He indicates for MALCOLM to give him his dagger, which he does. Then, putting one blade against another, he scrapes them together, as if he were sharpening one blade against the other.

FLEANCE

This is how my soul feels.

The rest of the actors, except MACBETH, take up their weapons. They circle FLEANCE and say the following as they slowly crowd in on him.

DUNCAN

Fight.

Fight.	ALL
Kill.	MACDUFF
Kill.	ALL
Prove it.	BANQUO
Prove it.	ALL
Rebellion or exile.	FIRST WITCH
Rebellion.	ALL
Revenge is sweet.	LADY MACDUFF
Revenge.	ALL
When you durst do it, then you were a man.	LADY MACBETH
Be a man.	ALL
Avenge your father.	ATHOLL
Avenge.	ALL
Be a warrior.	SECOND WITCH

ALL

Warrior.

THIRD WITCH

What kind of son are you?

ALL

Son.

DONALBAIN

Be a faithful son.

ALL

Faithful.

ALL WITCHES

To be a hero—

(looking out to the audience)

—or not to be.

FLEANCE crosses the daggers on his chest, then raises them over his head and yells as loudly as he can.

FLEANCE

YES!!!

Everyone stops, faces the audience, as the lights come to ghost light. Everyone exits except the WITCHES and FLEANCE.

* * * * *

Scene 6

The WITCHES grab brightly colored backpacks and run forward to speak to the audience. They speak in the giddy rushed speech of very young children. From the backpacks they pull out papers that are their “book reports” on the action.

SECOND WITCH

Okay—okay, okay!—stop it!—okay, here we are. “Up. Date.”
(to THIRD WITCH)

Go on!

THIRD WITCH

Foul whisperings are abroad -

FIRST WITCH

Unnatural deeds—

SECOND WITCH

Do breed unnatural troubles—

FIRST WITCH

Infected minds—

THIRD WITCH

—to their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets—

SECOND WITCH

(indicating FLEANCE)

More needs he the divine than the physician.

ALL WITCHES

God, God forgive us all!

FLEANCE

I think, but dare not speak.

FIRST WITCH

(brightly)

So we'll speak for you, Flee-ance!

(to WITCHES)

Right?

SECOND & THIRD WITCH

Right!

Using their backpacks and any other objects and movements the director wishes, the WITCHES update the audience on the action.

FIRST WITCH

(reading)

So Malcolm and Donalbain and—

SECOND WITCH
(interrupting)

And Macduff—

FIRST WITCH
I know! It says right here! So Malcolm and Donalbain and
Macduff—

FIRST WITCH stops, and FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH look at THIRD WITCH, who is supposed to chime in to continue. But THIRD WITCH is stage-frightened, a stupid grin fixed to her face.

FIRST WITCH
(stage whisper)
Come on!

THIRD WITCH
What?

SECOND WITCH
Come on—your turn! “Malcolm and Donalbain and Macduff—”

THIRD WITCH glances with fright at FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH, at FLEANCE, at the audience, then back around again.

FLEANCE
It’s all right—it’s all right. Tell the story as it must be told.

THIRD WITCH gives FLEANCE a grateful look, turns to FIRST WITCH and SECOND WITCH.

THIRD WITCH
Okay. Malcolm and Donalbain and Macduff came back.

SECOND WITCH
They brought 10,000 men to spring the attack.

ALL WITCHES
Sprrriinnngg!

FIRST WITCH holds her paper in front of her face.

FIRST WITCH
They cut branches down for camouflage.

SECOND WITCH and THIRD WITCH do the same, peeking out from behind.

FIRST WITCH

This faked out Macbeth when they launched their barrage.

SECOND WITCH

And Lady Macbeth used a hundred brands—

THIRD WITCH

—of soap to scrape the blood off her hands.

The WITCHES mock-wash their hands while mock-saying the phrase.

ALL WITCHES

Out, out, damn spot! Out, out, damn spot! Out, out, damn spot!

They break into a childish giggle.

SECOND WITCH

And when she couldn't wash them clean—

THIRD WITCH

She killed herself—

FIRST WITCH

End of that scene.

They grab their backpacks and move to FLEANCE. From their backpacks they pull a variety of articles that they use to dress FLEANCE as a “warrior”—but because of what they pull out of their bags, he looks more like a clown warrior than a “real” warrior. [NOTE: It is director’s choice about what to pull out and put on FLEANCE.]

FIRST WITCH

And now it's time for Fleance to dress.

SECOND WITCH

Now it's time for him to confess.

THIRD WITCH

He wants to be strong, not show any fears—

FIRST WITCH

Make hard his heart, deafen his ears—

SECOND WITCH

Show the adults he can be killingly wild—

THIRD WITCH

And never think twice that he was once a child.

The WITCHES step back to admire their work. FLEANCE looks the fool, but he doesn't protest. The other actors enter, "dressed" for war.

SECOND WITCH

Macbeth waits for you.

FLEANCE

The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

WITCHES

Uh-huh—right.

Without hesitation, FLEANCE rips off his "armor" until he holds nothing but his "sword." The WITCHES back off but keep smiling.

FLEANCE

To-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow—

MALCOLM

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day—

MACDUFF

To the last syllable of recorded time—

DUNCAN

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools—

DONALBAIN

The way to dusty death.

LADY MACDUFF

Out, out, brief candle!

BANQUO

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player—

LADY MACBETH

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage—

ATHOLL

And then is heard no more—

MACBETH

It is a tale told by an idiot—

FLEANCE

Full of sound and fury—

MACBETH AND FLEANCE

Signifying nothing.

FLEANCE

(to WITCHES)

Do not mock me. Do not make little or light of me.

FLEANCE speaks to the COMPANY.

FLEANCE

You will all see. What are you waiting for?

(points to ATHOLL)

Go.

A SERVANT (ATHOLL) steps forward.

MACBETH

Thy story quickly.

SERVANT [ATHOLL]

As I did stand my watch upon the hill,

I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought,

The wood began to move.

MALCOLM AND WITCHES

"Fear not, till Birnam wood

Do come to Dunsinane."

MACBETH

And now a wood

Comes toward Dunsinane.

MACDUFF

Arm, arm, and out!

MACBETH

I gin to be aweary of the sun,

And wish the estate o' the world were now undone.

SOLDIER [DUNCAN]

Ring the alarum-bell!

SOLDIER [BANQUO]

Blow, wind! come, wrack!

ALL (EXCEPT FOR FLEANCE AND MACBETH)

At least they will die with harness on their back!

* * * * *

Scene 7: Dunsinane

Drumming begins. The COMPANY performs THE FIELD OF BATTLE, and FLEANCE fights. From the pack come MACBETH, MACDUFF, and FLEANCE. The company continues the choreography, but now in slow motion and in silence.

MACBETH

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course. What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none.

MACDUFF comes up behind MACBETH. FLEANCE stands to the side.

MACDUFF

Turn, hell-hound, turn!

MACBETH

Get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already—
(seeing FLEANCE)
—and thine in addition.

MACDUFF

My voice is in my sword.

MACBETH

Thou losest labour—
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.

FLEANCE

Despair thy charm—
Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so—

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,

MACBETH

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
Nor honor [indicating FLEANCE] his eight-fold continuous crown—
I will try to the last. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

A short, choreographed fight between MACDUFF and MACBETH, but MACBETH is defeated, thrown down. The COMPANY forms a half-circle around MACDUFF, MACBETH, and FLEANCE. MACBETH waits to be killed by MACDUFF. He is on his knees with MACDUFF's his sword across his throat.

MACDUFF
(to FLEANCE)

Come here. Come here.

ALL

Go.

FLEANCE walks slowly to MACDUFF.

MACDUFF

This is what you must do.

ALL

Must do.

FLEANCE

I cannot.

ALL

You can.

MACDUFF

The death for traitors is beheading.

ALL

Decapitate.

MACDUFF

Macbeth is a traitor nonpareil. Therefore—

MALCOLM

Fleance, you have no choice.

ALL

No choice.

(beat of the weapons)

No choice.

(beat of the weapons)

The choice—

(beat of the weapons)

—is made.

Beat of the weapons.

MACDUFF

This is what you must do to complete yourself.

ALL

Complete yourself.

MACDUFF

This must happen if your spirit stays strong enough for eight generations.

ALL

Eight. Generations.

MACDUFF

This is your second baptism—

ALL

Baptism—

MACDUFF

Your first sting of redemption.

ALL

Redeemed.

MACDUFF urges FLEANCE to grab the other end of the sword and pull up on it, thus completing the beheading.

FLEANCE reaches, then walks away to talk himself into doing the deed.

FLEANCE

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts...
Fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose—

FLEANCE hesitates while the company recites the same lines in a hoarse whisper to urge him.

COMPANY

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts...
Fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose—

FLEANCE finally grabs the other end of the sword. Just as they are about to complete the act, the company bangs their weapons on the floor. With a slight jerk upwards, MACDUFF and FLEANCE complete the act. To indicate the beheading, MACBETH simply drops his head over the sword: the movement should be clean and simple, with no melodrama.

* * * * *

Scene 8

There is a very slight pause, and then all the actors, one by one, act as if they have just awakened from a dream.

The actor playing ATHOLL slips offstage—he will re-enter as CHILD SOLDIER.

MACBETH remains with his head bowed. THE WITCHES remain THE WITCHES.

FLEANCE

Our revels now are ended.

WITCHES

Yes.

BANQUO

(pointing to MACBETH)

Look at what we have done.

MACBETH raises his head.

ALL (EXCEPT WITCHES)

Yes.

LADY MACDUFF

We have destroyed the life of someone—

DONALBAIN

But he destroyed the lives of others—

ALL (EXCEPT WITCHES)

Yes.

DUNCAN

So we had reasons to make it right—

LADY MACBETH

More than reasons enough.

MALCOLM

More than “more than enough”—remember, all those “reasons” he killed had names—

BANQUO

Faces—

ATHOLL
Family—

DONALBAIN
Friends—

MACDUFF
And all who kill others should die themselves—

DONALBAIN
Eye for an eye—

LADY MACDUFF
Heart for a heart—

DUNCAN
Vengeance and revenge.

ALL (EXCEPT WITCHES)
Yes. Yes.

A moment of silence. FIRST WITCH clears her throat.

FIRST WITCH
And does this execution bring you peace?

A moment of silence.

SECOND WITCH
And is your world better off?

A moment of silence.

THIRD WITCH
(indicating MACBETH)
And what does doing that make all of you?

FIRST WITCH
We thought—

SECOND WITCH
We'd just ask you—

THIRD WITCH

These questions.

FLEANCE

I have a feeling—

Everyone looks at FLEANCE.

FLEANCE

(to MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, MACBETH)

I have a feeling that this is where the end begins.

The COMPANY exits. THE WITCHES remain. CHILD SOLDIER enters and falls into THE WITCHES' arms as the ventriloquist's dummy. THE WITCHES manipulate CHILD SOLDIER. Lights and staging as in Scene 2.

FIRST WITCH

So, that's the story?

SECOND WITCH

That's it?

THIRD WITCH

It ain't over, is it?

ALL WITCHES

What about you?

Without ceremony or warning, THE WITCHES fling CHILD SOLDIER at FLEANCE, who catches the body and lowers it to the ground.

FIRST WITCH reaches into her bag and gets the string, SECOND WITCH the tape measure, THIRD WITCH the scissors. They measure a length of string for CHILD SOLDIER, cut it, then wrap it around the corpse's throat. With appropriate flourishes and dazzle, they remove the string (perhaps with the motion of how one starts a pull-cord engine), and CHILD SOLDIER comes back to life.

FLEANCE

You can do that?

THIRD WITCH

"Un-doing" is also a kind of doing that we can do.

FIRST WITCH

Reverse polarities.

SECOND WITCH

Polar reversals.

THIRD WITCH

Not that hard.

FIRST WITCH

We thought—

SECOND WITCH

That you, Fleance—

THIRD WITCH

Now that you are Macbeth's child—

SECOND WITCH

Might want to put together your own army.

FIRST WITCH

It's a gift.

SECOND & THIRD WITCH

Of sorts.

THE WITCHES retreat into the shadows. CHILD SOLDIER stares; the weapon dwarfs the body.

FLEANCE

Put your weapon down.

CHILD SOLDIER does not put it down.

CHILD SOLDIER

I am my weapon.

FLEANCE

How old are you?

CHILD SOLDIER

I don't know. The army took me one night, plucked me out of my family like this. Do you have a problem with that? Stand back.

FLEANCE

I have no problem with that at all.

CHILD SOLDIER

Because I would just as soon kill you and rip out your pockets.

FLEANCE

I have nothing in my pockets.

CHILD SOLDIER

So what?

FLEANCE

Do you have a name?

CHILD SOLDIER

I have the one they gave me.

FLEANCE

And it is—

CHILD SOLDIER

Why should I tell you? What will it get for me? How do I know you won't kill me?

FLEANCE

I had my father killed in war.

CHILD SOLDIER

So what? I killed my best friend. "You have to kill the best friend you have," they said. They do it to see if they can trust you. If you don't kill him, your friend will be ordered to kill you. So I killed him.

FLEANCE reaches into his pocket. CHILD SOLDIER bristles, but FLEANCE cautions him to be patient. FLEANCE pulls a sweet out of his pocket.

FLEANCE

I did have something in my pocket after all.

CHILD SOLDIER lowers the weapon just slightly as he gazes at the dangling candy.

CHILD SOLDIER

Is that a—

FLEANCE

It is.

CHILD SOLDIER stiffens, but the thought of, the taste of the candy, makes that hard to keep up.

CHILD SOLDIER

Is that for me?

FLEANCE

I don't know. But if you put the weapon down, we might be able to find out.

CHILD SOLDIER carefully, reluctantly, lays down the weapon.

FLEANCE

Sit.

CHILD SOLDIER sits. THE WITCHES move into the darkness behind the pair, squat, watch.

FLEANCE sits.

FLEANCE

I think this could be yours.

CHILD SOLDIER

Give it to me.

FLEANCE

When you give me something.

CHILD SOLDIER

I don't have anything to give you.

FLEANCE

Do you know Macbeth?

CHILD SOLDIER

Of him. I was on the other side—"kill Macbeth" was all we were told. Give it to me.

FLEANCE

I killed him.

CHILD SOLDIER

Who cares? I didn't know him. Give it to me.

FLEANCE

When you say "please."

WITCHES

He has learned well.

CHILD SOLDIER struggles with this, finally gives in.

CHILD SOLDIER

Please.

FLEANCE

Good—we're getting there.

CHILD SOLDIER

(angry)

Give me—

FLEANCE

You touch that weapon, I will hurt you.

ALL WITCHES

A slap a day and a kiss at night, and the heart is moved.

CHILD SOLDIER

What do you want?

FLEANCE

Macbeth isn't dead.

CHILD SOLDIER

You just said—

FLEANCE

Body is dead, but the heart still beats.

CHILD SOLDIER

That's a riddle, right?

WITCHES

Like all of life.

FLEANCE

Beats in the body of man named Malcolm. Know him?

CHILD SOLDIER

No—please, can I have—please—

FLEANCE leans into CHILD SOLDIER.

FLEANCE

If I give this to you, what will you give to me?

CHILD SOLDIER stares at FLEANCE, then reaches over and slaps a hand down over and over on the weapon.

CHILD SOLDIER

Right? Right? Right? Right?

FLEANCE hands over the candy, which CHILD SOLDIER snatches.

FLEANCE

Right.

CHILD SOLDIER, torn between desire and hoarding, finally gives in and rips the candy open, devours it, even licks the paper, perhaps even eats the paper. FLEANCE watches.

CHILD SOLDIER

Is there any more?

FLEANCE

There will be.

CHILD SOLDIER

What do I do now? Do you want me to attack? I can attack—

FLEANCE

Sleep. Go ahead and sleep for now.

CHILD SOLDIER collapses to the ground, asleep as he falls. FLEANCE leans over, strokes CHILD SOLDIER's hair.

FLEANCE

Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

(to WITCHES)

What it costs to be young in this world.

FIRST WITCH

You could give it all up.

FLEANCE

And what "it" would that be?

SECOND WITCH

The wasting of Malcolm—you know that we know it's set in your
mind.

THIRD WITCH

And then there will follow brother Donalbain—yes, him, too, of
course, to slog your way to the throne—

SECOND WITCH

Through the multitudinous seas incarnadine. You, boy-man, have
a lot of blood to get through before you get to the prize of the
crown.

ENDING #1

The COMPANY slinks onstage, now all dressed as CHILD SOLDIERS with oversized weapons. They sniff the air—they smell the candy. They move to circle FLEANCE and CHILD SOLDIER.

FIRST WITCH

You could give it up.

FLEANCE

You all told my father that I would be king. Unless it's a lie, in which case none of this—

SECOND WITCH

You'll just have to find that out for yourself.

THIRD WITCH

You do, however, have the start of a beginning—

(indicating CHILD SOLDIER)

—your army of one.

SECOND WITCH

And the others.

FIRST WITCH

Let's hope it's for a good cause.

FLEANCE

Is there such a thing when it comes to a war?

FIRST WITCH

What a silly question!

FLEANCE

Yes, what a silly question.

WITCHES walk away. FLEANCE and CHILD SOLDIERS recede into dimness but still visible.

In their own light, WITCHES takes something out of their bags to eat. Then FIRST WITCH grabs the string, SECOND WITCH the tape measure, and THIRD WITCH the scissors, and they measure and cut a length of string.

SECOND WITCH ties the length into a big loop. THIRD WITCH sets it on her hands to begin "cat's cradle," and FIRST WITCH makes the first figure. Taking turns, WITCHES play cat's cradle as lights go to black.

FIRST WITCH

The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land—

SECOND WITCH

Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine—

THIRD WITCH

And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Blackout

ENDING #2

CHILD SOLDIER collapses to the ground, asleep as he falls. FLEANCE leans over, strokes CHILD SOLDIER's hair.

FLEANCE

Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

(to WITCHES)

What it costs to be young in this world.

FIRST WITCH

You could give it all up.

FLEANCE

And what "it" would that be?

SECOND WITCH

The wasting of Malcolm—you know that we know it's set in your mind.

THIRD WITCH

And then there will follow brother Donalbain—yes, him, too, of course, to slog your way to the throne—

SECOND WITCH

Through the multitudinous seas incarnadine. You, boy-man, have a lot of blood to get through before you get to the throne.

The COMPANY slinks onstage, now all dressed as CHILD SOLDIERS with oversized weapons. They sniff the air—they smell the candy.

FIRST WITCH

And you're going to take them through it with you.

SECOND WITCH

And you're going to go through them as you go through it—use 'em and then lose 'em.

THIRD WITCH

That's the nature of a slog to the throne. But—he could give it up.

FIRST WITCH

He could indeed give it up.

THIRD WITCH
(to FLEANCE)

Because nothing we ever measure out is ever measured out in stone.

The COMPANY approaches FLEANCE, stops short.

FIRST WITCH

Here come your cripples.

SECOND WITCH

Look at them hard, King-to-be Fleance—

THIRD WITCH

These damaged ones are the scraplings of your new kingdom.

DUNCAN

We will do whatever you tell us to do.

FIRST WITCH

And what do you want to tell the desperate—

SECOND WITCH

The dusted-down—

THIRD WITCH

The dispossessed to do?

LADY MACDUFF

Tell us. Because we get confused.

ALL

Yes. We get confused.

DUNCAN

We get very confused by the world—

MACDUFF

The older ones around us have created—

LACY MACBETH

We get confused when so many really good people—

BANQUO

Get abbreviated.

MACBETH

We get confused when we're told—

MALCOLM

To be kind and loving and considerate—

LADY MACDUFF

And then look out upon the world—

DONALBAIN

And see almost everything done in opposite.

LADY MACBETH

We get confused why adults birth children—

MALCOLM

And why they go around and make such a fuss—

DONALBAIN

And then set up a world that—

ALL

Efficiently—

FLEANCE

Very efficiently gets rid of us.

DUNCAN

We are so confused. Tell us what to do.

Everyone waits. CHILD SOLDIER wakes up, sees the others, becomes instantly alarmed and grabs the weapon. FLEANCE restrains him.

DUNCAN speaks again, this time with more belligerence.

DUNCAN

Tell us what to do.

FLEANCE
(to CHILD SOLDIER)

Put the weapon down. Put out your hands. Just put out your hands.

FLEANCE empties candies into CHILD SOLDIER's hands.

FLEANCE

Pass them out.

CHILD SOLDIER passes them out. Each member of the COMPANY does exactly what CHILD SOLDIER did: inhale the candy, even eat the paper. CHILD SOLDIER then picks up his weapon.

FLEANCE

Why would you want me to tell any of you anything? What makes you think I know anything worth telling? I had my father ripped from me—but that doesn't gift me with anything that I can gift to you. I helped delete a murderer—but my mind is as unenlightened dark as it ever was.

DUNCAN

So you're giving up on us.

FLEANCE

Go home.

LADY MACDUFF

We have no homes.

FLEANCE

Go back to your families.

MALCOLM

What families?

DONALBAIN

Like it or not, we're yours.

MACDUFF

You called us—we came.

MACBETH

You are where we are supposed to be.

BANQUO

Now find something to say to us, or we will kill you.

FLEANCE

You would kill me.

DUNCAN

What do we have to lose? Or you, for that matter.

The weapon falls from CHILD SOLDIER's hands; the crash catches everyone's attention. A look of astonishment crosses CHILD SOLDIER's face.

CHILD SOLDIER

When I was asleep.

DUNCAN

What?

CHILD SOLDIER

When I was asleep I saw.

LADY MACBETH

Saw what?

CHILD SOLDIER

When I was asleep I saw.

Home.

I.

Saw.

Home.

DONALBAIN

Home?

CHILD SOLDIER

I saw.

All.

Of.

You.

MALCOLM

You are so full of it.

MACDUFF

Shut up.

MALCOLM

Don't tell me to—

CHILD SOLDIER

Ssshhh! Quiet—

CHILD SOLDIER speaks directly to the audience. Lights change.

CHILD SOLDIER

The weeping ache of seeing
all of them so shattered
so torn tilt upward
their faces and drain
the scars away their
original eyes made whole
the dark sun made clean
Who would not ache to have
such peace rap lightly
on the doorframe step away
from the desert's hunger into
the cool dim kitchen sit
drink water and prepare
to stay where a body is wanted
Who would not want to abide
in such a sweet forever
forever

CHILD SOLDIER turns back to the COMPANY.

CHILD SOLDIER

That is what I saw. See. Seek.

DUNCAN drops his weapon.

DUNCAN

How sweet the moonlight—

DUNCAN looks startled, as if the words had forced themselves out of his mouth.

DUNCAN

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this place!

All of the CHILD SOLDIERS drop their weapons, astonishment on their faces.

LADY MACDUFF

Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears—

MACDUFF

—soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

MACBETH

Sit, lost ones. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold—

MALCOLM

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings—

BANQUO

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins—

DONALBAIN

Such harmony is in immortal souls—

LADY MACBETH

But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in—

FLEANCE

We cannot hear it.¹

CHILD SOLDIER

All of that was in my dream's eye as well.

WITCHES

(to FLEANCE)

What now, boy-man? Boy-king? They wait.

FLEANCE

To be one kind of man, I should kill Malcolm and any one else
who keeps from me what was promised to me and my murdered
father. To be another kind of man, I should take all of you and

¹ Merchant of Venice, Act V, scene 1

protect you from that first man, who would throw you away as he uses you up. Which man is the man to be? Which man is the man I am?

CHILD SOLDIER

You could come back to being one of us again.
(to the others)

He could, couldn't he?

FLEANCE

(to FIRST WITCH)

Is that possible?

FIRST WITCH grabs the string, SECOND WITCH the tape measure, and THIRD WITCH the scissors, and they measure and cut a length of string.

SECOND WITCH ties the length into a big loop. THIRD WITCH sets it on her hands to begin "cat's cradle," and FIRST WITCH makes the first figure. Taking turns, WITCHES play cat's cradle as they recite.

FIRST WITCH

The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land—

SECOND WITCH

Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine—

THIRD WITCH

And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up.

Whichever WITCH ends with the cat's cradle hands it off to FLEANCE. Half the COMPANY take out loops of string and start a cat's cradle with a partner. Each exchange should be done between differing pairs of actors, so the exchanges will have to be well-choreographed as partners change.

As the partners change, they chant the following in unison.

COMPANY

The child soldiers, hand in hand,
Rejected by the sea and land—
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine—

The WITCHES pull from their bags a small disk of red make-up. As they circulate, they dab spots of red on the actor's cheeks, so that they look like dolls. The COMPANY continues to hand off patterns until the lights come down to blackout.