

Lady Macbeth

The night is eerily still. Shadows flit about the walls and a candle flickers from the bedside table. The flame is mesmerizing: swaying softly, leaping upwards, piercing the darkness and spreading through the black. Wax drips slowly from the candle, collecting itself in a drop and climbing down the candle's edge. She sits up suddenly.

She steals from the bed and grabs the candle in her silent haste. Around her shaking shoulders, she wraps the dressing gown: tattered and flimsy. It billows behind her like a veil. The closet creaks ominously as she opens it, and the lock, once removed, falls to the floor with a clatter.

It's hard to see inside. The candle illuminates only her own hands: rough, spotted hands so white and pale. As she bends, she glimpses the messy stack of paper and removes one from the pile: a single sheet that flutters in her grasp. She places the paper on the old oak desk and writes.

The words pour from her. Her fingers tremble as she empties herself eagerly onto the page. *Ink. More ink.* She dreams of oceans of ink, and yet it would not be enough... not enough to wipe away the words already spoken. She writes. She'll tell them everything.

And yet it will not be enough.

She reads the letter once, then twice, moving the candle closer before reading through once more. Her signature is scrawled and messy: *Lady Macbeth.*

The sigh harrows her soul as she seals the scribbled words. *So much blood. Who would think? Who could know? Pools of blood.*

She places the letter on the corner of the desk and breathes quickly. *What's done is done. What's done cannot be undone. Think no more. No more thoughts. You think too deeply.*

The knocking shatters her thoughts of not thinking. Harsh, loud, aggressive knocking. Someone banging to get in, then footsteps coming closer, hurrying down the hall, then the door groaning open and someone standing behind her, breathing roughly on her neck. She turns and suppresses her scream.

No one there.

She sees him anyways, somehow, in the corner of her mind. He lies in peaceful sleep, hands folded across his chest, as though he lay already in the casket. His smile is etched onto his face, perhaps a reflection of pleasant dreams. The lines around his eyes look so familiar.

Now she sees her father. She remembers waking him with a kiss planted on his cheek; his eyes would open slowly and then dance with joy. *This is not your father.* She looks at the king and then at the dagger in her hand, gleaming strangely in the darkness. He could be just awaking, but she knows he never will.

She returns to the dreary chamber and the candle in her hand. No one there. Only the weight of what cannot be undone. Her nightgown sweeps behind her as she passes through the narrow corridor. When the cold water first meets her skin, the sensation is blessed relief. But the smell of blood lingers. She wrings her hands and massages them beneath the water. Still blood. Always blood. *Will these hands never be clean?*

She returns to the chamber and removes the letter from the desk. The bed is untouched and cold as she lies down upon its surface. So cold and quiet. She lies there, but her eyes remain open. *No more sleep. The time for sleeping has passed. But there was a time. Before.* The letter is clutched in her hands, already frayed at the edges, and with unusual tenderness, she places the paper on her chest. *Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.*

The candle goes out.