

# LADY MACBETH'S WILL

A three act comedy

“Oscar the wild” and “Willie the skull” in memoriam.

Written 2016/2017

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**Introduction:** Lady Macbeth is celebrating her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on a sunny Friday evening in august. She lives alone in a small castle near the coast and the city of Brighton. Twenty years ago her husband, a famous actor, died at the age of 80. Because he was rewarded a knighthood late in life, mostly owing to his brilliant interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, he changed his name from Brown to Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth's three sons and their wives come to celebrate her, without knowing that she has a written will, and is about to inform them this birthday-evening. Is it true that none of her sons has any shortage of money? Jealousy and rivalry makes them (and their wives) react and act anyhow. It comes to a race between them, some kind of poison is involved, and that doesn't result in a very happy ending...

## **Actors:**

**Lady Macbeth** is a 70-year old woman and former actress, with an exam in economics. She is slender, physically fit and well dressed for every occasion. She has inherited a small fortune after her husbands' death, and has three sons:

**Earl** is the eldest, 42-years old, educated at Cambridge. He holds a degree in art, and teaches that subject at the university.

**Ernest**, one year younger than Earl, is the middle brother, vice president at an engineering-company, he himself is an engineer.

**Ronny** the youngest son is 31-years old, has a degree in economics, and made a fortune as car-salesman, but lost it. He now works comfortably at a bank.

**Fanny**, Earls' wife, is a wealthy countess living without children in a very impressive castle with a considerable number of acres around it, close to Lady Macbeth's minor one.

**Felicia**, Ernest's wife, is a rich American widow with two children from her earlier marriage. She lives in a manor nearby with lots of land and a stable full of horses.

**Juliet** is Ronny's strikingly beautiful wife and a celebrated English fashion-designer. She has no children, and owns her company which has economical problems.

All three wives are about the same age as their men. Lady Macbeth has one male servant who appears in the play.

(Lady Macbeths' dead husband had a French mother and a British father. He grew up in Britain after his parents divorce. Since his youth he had ambitions to become an actor. He fought for Britain in the second world war, got wounded and was shipped back home. He first met his future wife as an amusing and fascinating young girl living in the same block as he did. When the second world war ended, he applied for a job at a theatre in London. To his surprise she worked there as an actress, and after some years they were married.)

Act 1, scene 1

(Lady Macbeth stands waiting with her two sons Earl and Ernest at the entrance-stairs of her small castle. This hot Friday-evening in August the setting sun has turned red. Multicoloured flowers glow along the driveway, all lawns are perfectly trimmed, and a few trees here and there look like they've been cut out of a postcard. A shining black SUV is coming towards them on the driveway. Ronny, Lady Macbeth's youngest son, steps out of the car, wearing a dinner-jacket, and so does Juliet, his newly wed wife. She is a beautiful woman wearing a lovely cream-coloured dress. Ronny takes Juliet's hand, and introduces her to his mother and brothers. Ronny walks back to the car to fetch the flowers he brought for his mother's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Everybody but Earl and Ronny disappears into the castle.)

**EARL**

Very nice car you have there Ronny. But isn't it a little slow? (He looks at his wristwatch.)

**RONNY**

Oh no, three hundred foxhunting horses can't match this one! It has four hundred built in!

**EARL**

But it seems a little bit lazy anyhow. Is it a used one that you bought recently?

**RONNY**

You know I don't buy used things: It's brand new.

**EARL**

Hm. Lovely wife you've got there. Hmmm. It's a pity we were not invited to your wedding.

**RONNY**

I'm sorry, dear brother. Sometimes opportunity forces you to act quickly. It's like catching a sunbeam, I mean when it comes to marrying extraordinary women. So we rushed to the Bahamas for our wedding and honeymoon. And with a lot of a romantic moon-starring too... All the rest was inclusive, of course!

**EARL**

I see. Well I guessed that you had your reasons: Nice of you two to pop up anyhow, at our mother's birthday.

**RONNY**

Earl, don't play that big brother thing with me! I don't buy it anymore, I'm too old. By the way, it's Juliet's car. I gave it to her, as a wedding gift.

**EARL**

Really? I thought it was a van that you needed for transportation. I've seen many carpenters use vehicles of this kind... (He walks around the car and kicks one wheel.)

**RONNY**

Don't be rude, Earl. You know perfectly well that I've got my job at the bank's head-office. You can stroll around out here doing nothing, because your wife owns most of the land. I don't mind. But get off my back, please!

**EARL**

Yes, my wife owns her land nearby, many more acres than mother's! But I have got nothing for free. By the way: How much did you have to pay for a car like this?

**RONNY**

With the living conditions you and your wife have, you aren't allowed to ask about money. Especially not on a day like this!

**EARL**

Ho ho ho! Hold your horses. You know as well as I do, why you came here.

**RONNY**

We came to celebrate mother's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday! And I wanted to introduce my wife to you all.

**EARL**

Well, I guess it's an American car. It looks expensive. Even for a carpenter in this country.

**RONNY**

I bought the car here, almost three months ago. So it is practically brand new, as I told you.

**EARL**

Well, let us see: Your car looks like it is... about three years old. You have been fooled when you bought it! Any car-salesman can make it shine like it was made yesterday!

**RONNY**

I try to maintain it well. We don't use it very much.

**EARL**

So you're going to be a carpenter now: Good for you!

**RONNY**

No I am not! I've still got my desk at the bank.

**EARL**

You don't have to be ashamed: I know when I see a lorry. This one is precisely what every carpenter dreams of, I think I know them.

**RONNY**

I'm sure Juliet's car doesn't meet a carpenters needs.

**EARL**

I'm not trying to embarrass you: I understand that your job at the bank doesn't work out that well. And why your lorry looks like it was brand new. Very good marketing, very good indeed!

**RONNY**

**But you're wrong: it's a SUV!**

**EARL**

**That's ok with me. You can call it anything you like. I will not tell anybody that you might be out of a job soon. You can even borrow some money from me and my wife if you need!**

**RONNY**

**My car is a Sports Utility Vehicle!**

**EARL**

**You really say so? Never heard of it! Such is the truth...**

**RONNY**

**No, for Gods sake, It's not a S-U-C-H, I said it's a S-U-V, damn it!**

**EARL**

**Is it? Yes it is! Of course, if you insist.**

**RONNY**

**(He sighs.) Let's step inside and have dinner now. And give mother one birthday she will remember!**

**EARL**

**Lovely flowers you got there. Not many roses like that around here. Mother will be very happy. (He looks at the flowerbeds beside the driveway.)**

**RONNY**

**Shut up, will you?! Juliet and I brought her a present too. Juliet chose it. (He pulls out a small gift from his pocket and shows it, when they start walking up the stairs.)**

**EARL**

**Small but expensive I suppose. That's right! Mother doesn't care about money. You really know how to make her happy!**

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Act 1, scene 2

(Earl is serving everyone a drink of their choice in the library. Lady Macbeth is the only one not present. Three high windows let in the evening sun. A few paintings here and there interrupt the bookshelves around the walls. The library is tastefully furnished with a mix of modern and 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture. Above the mantelpiece hangs a magnificent portrait of a young man, but it is very soiled by age. The painting is presumed to be Lady Macbeth's late husband, possibly painted by Claude Monet.)

EARL

Juliet, lovely! What a splendid dress you wear! What would you like to drink?

JULIET

I have designed it myself. The dress I mean... (She laughs. Ronny approaches them with two drinks in his hands.)

RONNY

Juliet, darling, here you are. (He hands her one drink.) It's your favourite, made as you have taught me.

EARL

How handy of you. Juliet and I were just talking about her lovely dress.

JULIET

And I explained that I have designed it myself.

RONNY

(He smiles affectionate.) You look gorgeous in everything, darling. And without anything too!

JULIET

(She smiles back.) Ronny, be careful, watch your tongue! (To Earl.) I run a designers studio at Mayfair. Perhaps you have heard of it? Actually we have won some international prizes for our collections.

RONNY

I'm so proud of you! (He kisses her cheek.) And you just watch my tongue!

JULIET

Are you trying to crush our marriage already, sweetheart? (She gives Ronny a glance.)

EARL

(To Juliet.) That is absolutely not his business-idea, my dear. When you arrived, he told me that his crush is for SUV:s only: I understand that is your car.

RONNY

(He gives Earl a glance.) Excuse me, I have to find mother. I wonder why she isn't here at the beginning of her birthday-party. (He leaves the room.)

JULIET

What was all that about... about cars?

EARL

Oh nothing! Younger brothers... They often try to impress their elder ones.

JULIET

Older, or perhaps bigger... or both? (She smiles.) I was introduced to your lovely wife Fanny earlier. Do you really live in a castle nearby? Is it larger than this building?

EARL

A castle, yes it is, and in the neighbourhood... It has a few more rooms, I guess. But it is definitely two hundred years older.

JULIET

I'm impressed! I'm sorry, but my experience is quite limited when it comes to real estate. (She gives Earl a glance.)

EARL

My dear, you shouldn't blame yourself! I treat every lady as equally informed as any man.

JULIET

That's very good of you. It means you are a true democrat. And your wife is a genuine lady: Lovely!

EARL

(He glances at Juliet.) I couldn't sleep well, if I knew that a lady thought that I used her appearance against her.

JULIET

But if she's beautiful, isn't that something you are affected by?

EARL

Oh no... On the other hand I can see why your husband has kept you away from us.

JULIET

Excuse me, I don't understand: Are you talking as if you were trying to employ someone? Ronny has told me that you are an engineer and vice president of your company.

EARL

No I'm not. Our brother Ernest, he is an engineer, and I teach art at Cambridge.

JULIET

Forgive me! I apologize for mixing you up!

**EARL**

Never mind my dear. Beauty is an excuse for many mistakes. (He smiles.) I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to question your intelligence... Oh my tongue, sometimes it just slips. But if you say so... there are similarities... I mean if you compare dining with a woman... a lady... that you are attracted to, with an interview for a job... there are undoubtedly similarities.

**JULIET**

You're not very romantic, are you?

**EARL**

Oh, yes of course I am. I'm very romantic! But that depends on the woman I'm trying to...

**JULIET**

Trying to employ?

**EARL**

Yes... oh no. When I'm interested, well perhaps suddenly a little bit in love... that's another thing. At least that goes for me!

**JULIET**

I'm so happy then, that you have your lovely lady, and live with her in your own big castle. (She pats his arm and turns to the entrance-door, where she sees Ronny escorting Lady Macbeth into the room.)

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**ERNEST**

(He hurries towards his mother, looks her up and down. She is wearing an exclusive, but rather discreet 19<sup>th</sup> century evening-gown in pink.) Mother, what a smashing outfit! Happy birthday to you! (He hurries to fetch a glass of champagne for Lady Macbeth.)

**RONNY**

Don't hurry, Ernest. We are here to stay. At least for the weekend.

**LADY MACBETH**

Be quiet, Ronny! He is just trying to be nice.

**RONNY**

And what am I then?

**LADY MACBETH**

You are still an unpolished young man. (She gives him a quick glance, and then takes the glass that Ernest brought her.)



**ERNEST**

Dear mother, I wish you a happy 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. (He raises his glass nervously, and then speaks louder.) Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and wives, let us make a toast for Lady Macbeth! (Everybody raises their glasses.) Long live Lady Macbeth, hip, hip... (Cheers.)

**LADY MACBETH**

I know this is my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday-evening, Ernest, but could you be a little bit discreet anyhow?

**ERNEST**

Don't be embarrassed, mother. I'm not ashamed, I'm proud of you!

**LADY MACBETH**

Don't you agree that I am a younger person than anyone of you? And older only compared to those who are dead?

**ERNEST**

Everything has an end. And so does a human life. But the challenge is to be happy as long as you can. (He raises his glass, but Lady Macbeth doesn't.)

**RONNY**

Ernest, you are disgusting. Why don't you work as a journalist? They know a little about everything. But sometimes all about nothing!

**LADY MACBETH**

Boys, please! Nothing good comes out from being childish.

**ERNEST**

(To Lady Macbeth.) You know I wish you the very best, especially on your birthday.

**EARL**

(He approaches Lady Macbeth with his wife Fanny.) Here is a small gift for you, delivered with the warmest of congratulations. (Fanny hands over a small parcel.)

**FANNY**

It is not easy to give something to a person who has everything. I must say your collection of paintings is magnificent. That is Earls' opinion too. And he knows what he is talking about, as an art-professor at Cambridge. Congratulations! (She bows her head slightly and hands over the parcel.)

**LADY MACBETH**

As you know, my beloved husband was an actor, and I must admit that you have some talent too. (She points at the painting above the mantelpiece.) Look at that portrait on the wall! It reminds me of him every day. We were so young...

**FANNY**

Earl likes that painting very much. It is a superb reminder of his father. And I am sure he would like to have it some day, as a memory.

**EARL**

Fanny, please, it is my mothers' birthday!

**LADY MACBETH**

(She places the unopened parcel on the mantelpiece, and turns to Ronny and his wife Juliet, as they are coming close to her.) So you were married, Ronny, without inviting me. I can see why... And I can not.

**RONNY**

Here is a small gift for you. (He hands Lady Macbeth a parcel. She opens it right away.) It is a crystal from the mountains at Bahamas. Where we got married... Juliet loves mountain-climbing and I had to come along. (He sighs and smiles.) But I carried a hammer, and thought of your birthday, when we decided to carve this crystal out of the mountain.

**EARL**

The truth is he could not afford anything more valuable. Exactly like his car at the driveway... Shining but without inner quality.

**LADY MACBETH**

(She picks up Earls parcel from the mantelpiece and opens it. She holds up an antique medallion, tastefully decorated with precious stones in different colours. She opens the lid and sees a picture of herself and her dead husband.) Those were the days... Thank you Fanny, thank you Earl! (Then she turns to Ernest.) Excuse me Ernest, but where is my birthday-gift from you? (Ernest blushes and speaks a few unheard words to Felicia. Then they hurry out of the room.)

**EARL**

(To Ronny.) You had to crystallize your feelings for mother, isn't that obvious? (Lady McBeth laughs damped.)

**RONNY**

(To Earl.) Your wife s' name is Fanny, very funny... (He smiles.) Juliet is my wife: When he was young, father acted in a play with a girl bearing the same name. (He turns to Juliet and holds her hand.) That should tell you something about relationships.

**LADY MACBETH**

Boys, my boys, I know how old you are. But do you? Please behave, at least this very evening! Or is it too much to ask for?

**EARL**

Our father, Sir Macbeth acted in so many plays written by that Stratford-guy, that he was awarded a title late in life. In other words there is hope for you too, dear Ronny.

**RONNY**

His name was Brown from the beginning. I can see what you are getting at!

**LADY MACBETH**

Stop it at once! Don't you have any respect for your father and his memory?

FANNY

You are really amusing, Ronny. You may even kiss my hand. (She stretches out her hand which Ronny kisses with a bow.)

JULIET

Ronny, what have I told you about courting attractive ladies? And we have not been married for a year yet. (They all laugh. Ronny kisses her quickly, and whispers something in her ear.)

FELICIA

(She and Ernest enter the room holding a nicely decorated parcel. It is heavy and difficult to handle. Ernest hurries towards Lady Macbeth, takes the parcel and puts it on the floor beside her.) You have everything: three lovely sons, a famous husband, and this splendid home. So we had to come up with something that suits your life.

ERNEST

What Felicia is trying to say, mother, is that we found a gift you surely can take to your heart: This comes from our heart, not our wallet!

FELICIA

(She puts her hand on Ernest's arm.) Ernest, it's not nice to talk about how expensive our gift is!

ERNEST

(He gives Felicia a troubled smile.) I certainly didn't do that, my dear! (He turns to Lady Macbeth.) It's a sculpture of our dear father! We found it at an antiques shop in London. It has a significant weight, it's made of bronze!

LADY MACBETH

How very considerate of you. You almost make me cry! This will be the centrepiece of my birthday! (She opens the parcel. Ernest and Earl place the sculpture on the mantelpiece.)

RONNY

Well I guess everybody can find more material in that gift... Than in what Juliet and I gave you.

LADY MACBETH

You have to understand when to keep quiet, Ronny!

EARL

Mother, may I suggest that we give our dear father a toast before dinner? (He raises his glass, looks mostly at his brothers, then at the painting on the wall, which is said to be a portrait of the late Macbeth.)

ERNEST

Excellent idea, Earl! Here's to our father! (All seven of them take a sip from their glasses, then leave for dinner. Lady Macbeth is the first one out of the room.)

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Act 1, scene 3

(In the dining-room everyone is seated for dinner. Only one servant attends to Lady Macbeth, her three sons and their wives. Five high-rising windows let in the setting evening sun. The room is tastefully furnished in the same way as the library, with a mix of modern and 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture.)

**RONNY**

Let's celebrate our mother and father! (He salutes with his wineglass.) Mister Brown was a man full of will as you are milady. (They all drink to that.)

**LADY MACBETH**

You handle things so beautifully, Ronny... Today I have a will of my own. Your father ran away from his, almost twenty years ago.

**RONNY**

Well, mother, you are seventy fresh years today. With your experience you might imagine how Juliet has to deal with me. As you handled mister Brown.

**EARL**

Please be quiet Ronny! Don't you see that you made mother upset? And on her birthday! Calling our father "mister Brown"!

**RONNY**

(He turns to Lady Macbeth and then back to Earl.) Mother has a smile on her lips. But isn't it true then, Earl, about father and why he changed his name? He was mister Brown as an actor, before he got his knighthood. Why do you behave as facts are not wanted?

**EARL**

Our father got his title after many years, as a well known interpreter of nothing less than Shakespeare's plays!

**RONNY**

But he chose to change his name from Brown to Macbeth when he got his title. Vanity is all, and comes with success and money... or the other way around... or whatever. Juliet, don't you agree? (He turns towards his wife.)

**EARL**

Ronny, please show some respect, and remember why we are here! You're not a car-salesman in love at this very dinner! Save the flirtation to your second wedding day with your wife.

**LADY MACBETH**

I have nothing against some romance!

**EARL**

**Mother!**

LADY MACBETH

Love with a hook is everything for a crook, as they say.

EARL

(He blushes.) Mother, I don't understand what you are talking about.

LADY MACBETH

Now I will embarrass you all and bring myself a toast. (She raises her glass, looks around at the others.) No one of you can imagine how proud I feel, looking at each one of you, my three sons and your lovely wives. So that's a good reason for me to celebrate my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday! Cheers! (Everyone sips some wine.)

RONNY

You are so up to date, milady!

LADY MACBETH

You have seen nothing yet, Ronny. (She stands up and rips of her 19<sup>th</sup> century gown and displays a very modern slimed frock in yellow. She turns around and everyone sighs impressed, but Juliet laughs.)

RONNY

But... but that is one of the dresses Juliet has designed!

LADY MACBETH

Exactly! I had to phone Juliet's shop twice, so she wasn't there when I bought it. (She takes her seat again. The others stare at her in different ways.)

ERNEST

Ingenious buttons on your dress: May I have a look at their construction? My company is searching for a new kind of safety-pin. I mean a product that nobody knew they needed, until it came out on the market, and was a success.

LADY MACBETH

Of course, Ernest, not one person knows what they really want. Until they stumble on it... And if I can help an engineer to find new ways, I would gladly be of assistance.

ERNEST

Many big discoveries and inventions are made by accident!

LADY MACBETH

Life itself is an accident to be discovered. But managed well it can be held together. And sometimes develop and become a legend worth listening to. As the life and tale of my beloved husband, mister Macbeth.

RONNY

Mother! I didn't intend to hurt your feelings.

## LADY MACBETH

After coming this far in life nobody can injure me. (She smiles towards Ronny and gives Juliet a glance.)

## ERNEST

(To Lady Macbeth.) Was that dress made by Juliet too? The one you took off? (Lady Macbeth shakes her head. He stands up from the table, picks up her dress from the floor, examines it, and then places it carefully on an armchair nearby. He returns to his seat.)

## EARL

Have you forgotten all manors, Ernest? You mustn't leave your seat when we are eating, like some foreigner from America!

## ERNEST

Felicia has her roots in America and she has survived perfectly well in this country! New blood has never killed the cat... isn't that what they say?

## EARL

Ernest, you should be able to separate classy people from classmates.

## RONNY

I smell newly cut down trees disguising an approaching army... Is that a reminder of mister Macbeth and his work?

## EARL

Please Ronny, shut up! Achieve your goals without denouncing father!

## RONNY

He was an actor, but you don't act in his spirit! Is that because he is dead?

## LADY MACBETH

Earl, remember that you were born before Ronny: That gives you some obligations. And I'm the oldest one at this table. So please, you have better following my birthday-will!

## EARL

Certainly mother: I get the picture, as an American would put it...

## RONNY

(To Earl.) Would you be so kind and leave Ernest's wife out of your misery. We all know why you constantly look at the painting of father! It has nothing to do with memories of his spirit.

## EARL

Its surface must be restored, if that's what you're suggesting.

## RONNY

Earl, you are the art-teacher. And I'm not a car-salesman!

**EARL**

(He laughs scornfully.) A car-dealer denies his origin!

**RONNY**

I bet you have to inherit father's painting so you can appreciate his value for real!

**LADY MACBETH**

(She gives Earl and Ronny a stern glance.) You are my sons, and this is my birthday: I have no wish to understand your wit, but not because I'm seventy years old! I have my will, and my husband belongs to me as long as I live! Even as a reminding picture on that wall, he is mine.

**EARL**

I'm sorry mother! I would not upset you for the world.

**RONNY**

Your world...

**LADY MACBETH**

Please, gentlemen! My feelings' for your father has always been alive, especially when I see the portrait in my library. But it is shop-soiled now! (She gives Juliet a quick glance.)

**ERNEST**

Are you talking about that picture made by mister Money? You told us our father was very young when he met him. And got his portrait made when he was a drunken soldier.

**RONNY**

Ernest, dear brother, enjoy your meal! This dish taste's wonderfully! (Everyone continues eating and talk as before, but unheard of by the audience.)

**ERNEST**

(He says after a while.) I can not mobilize any deeper interest in art, but at least I've heard about Money: Wasn't he a rather well-known figure in his branch?

**RONNY**

Absolutely! And as a poor young artist he had to eat canvasses when he was hungry.

**LADY MACBETH**

(She laughs.) Your father would have loved giving him money for real food instead. That is the short story behind the painting. Now, forget about the past for a moment: I have chosen the desert! (The single servant enters with a tray full of exclusively-looking sorbet.)

**EARL**

Mother, as I have many contacts among art-experts, you can hand over the painting to me. It really needs to be reconditioned, after so many years on the wall. I will make it shine as your living memories of father!

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Act 1, scene 4

(The four women remain in the dining-room after dinner, while the men has left and gathered in the library. Juliet is walking around the room looking at the interior, while Lady Macbeth, Fanny and Felicia small-talk, sitting down.)

LADY MACBETH

(The servant pours champagne for the ladies into every glass around the table. She raises her glass and sips.) Welcome to my death, ladies! (Fanny and Felicia stare at each other. Juliet stands looking out a window without any reaction.) Was that comment upsetting to you? Time has passed for me, but I'm fighting it! And my mind works as good as ever.

FELICIA

How can you talk about leaving this world? Everyone knows that our days are numbered, but the figures are disguised.

FANNY

I think your statement could be used in a film, Lady Macbeth. "Welcome to my death", I have never heard those words before! I know you hate movies, but they would catch the attention of any audience!

FELICIA

(To Fanny.) You are not very polite: We are here for a celebration, without any dancing on some future grave.

FANNY

There may be witchcraft in words! Ask any actor! Our lady, the mother of my husband, has a right to be frank.

FELICIA

Look at Juliet: She is indifferent to what you say! And that goes for me to.

LADY MACBETH

Ladies, you are far from facts. I'm still in control of my life, and nothing shall ever change that!

JULIET

(She turns around from the window.) Ronny has told me that you, Lady Macbeth, has a very strong character, and he appreciates it.

LADY MACBETH

In some ways your husband is still a confused child. I'm not responsible for that. He is the last one I had the opportunity to breed. Look at you: One of the most beautiful women I've ever seen. With a career as a designer! He is spoiled, definitely spoiled...

JULIET

(She blushes.) He has stronger feelings for his mother than for me sometimes!



LADY MACBETH

Juliet, there is no tragedy to be found here. It's just a comedy for spectators to laugh at.

FELICIA

Is Ronny your favoured son, Lady Macbeth? Has he got some hidden talent?

LADY MACBETH

(She looks at all three ladies in turn, with a calm smile.) No-one has changed my life-schedule up to this very day: I'm playing tennis three times a week. This evening makes no difference. I have to leave you with the champagne for an hour and a half. Then I will be back to continue my birthday-party!

FANNY

How old is your tennis-partner, Lady Macbeth? (She stutters.) Excuse me I didn't want to seem impertinent. But there are circumstances that should be recognized.

LADY MACBETH

You should know that I've been playing with my tennis-trainer for five years now. He is thirty-three years old, by the way. Don't you worry Fanny, he's in good shape! (She leaves the room. Fanny and Felicia sips champagne while Juliet wanders around, without touching her glass at the table.)

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FELICIA

Our lady of the day has discipline and routines, especially at her age.

FANNY

If it was my 70-teenth birthday, I would have cancelled every ordinary doings.

FELICIA

I should have done the same. How about you, Juliet? (Juliet doesn't answer.) Have some of this wonderful champagne!

JULIET

(She turns around from the view outside the window.) Never mind me! I'm just looking at all the flowerbeds along Lady Macbeths driveway, and I feel embarrassed: All those flowers are so beautifully planted with bravely mixed colours that has both contrast and harmony. I wish I was a painter...

FANNY

You have nothing to feel sorry for, Juliet! Lady Macbeth is proud and happy that we all are here.

JULIET

Ronny and I should have brought her a tennis-dress or something, instead of roses. I hope she liked our birthday-present anyhow.

**FANNY**

Earl was so inspired by Monet's portrait of Macbeth! He has started gardening and planted flowers of many shapes and colours. He even plans to build a pond for water-lilies!

**JULIET**

The portrait hanging in the library... the colours are so bleak compared to Lady Macbeths' flowers out here.

**FELICIA**

That is why it has to be cleaned! Ernest calls Monet for Money, but I don't think that is very funny. (She glances at Fanny.)

**JULIET**

If it wasn't a picture of Lady Macbeths' husband I would consider it dull.

**FANNY**

Earl says that nowadays people pay crazy money for paintings like that. But to our family it has just a sentimental value.

**FELICIA**

I understand your feelings!

**JULIET**

But why did Lady Macbeths' husband get his portrait made? I can't imagine anyone sitting still in front of an artist without being restless. (She returns to the table, takes a seat, but doesn't touch her champagne-glass.)

**FELICIA**

Lady Macbeth has told me that when she was newly married, they went to France on their honeymoon. Somehow artists recognize each other, and apparently Monet liked Macbeths' company. So the painting was made as a gift.

**FANNY**

Do you believe that? (She smiles at Felicia.) Anyhow, Earl says it has a remarkable quality, hidden behind the dust. And by the way: It was after the first world-war they met in France.

**JULIET**

But if Macbeth was so fond of Monet, couldn't he have asked for more colours?

**FANNY**

Take a look at the background of the painting, Juliet! Earl has analysed it. He says it so typical for Monet's other paintings from that period, with multi-coloured flowers! And it has a perspective reminding of how important artists created their work several hundred years earlier. But Monet developed it in his own personal way!

**JULIET**

I prefer pictures in fashion-magazines, with a fan blowing air in the models hair.

FELICIA

(She laughs and then listens for a sound outside the house.) I think the birthday-party is going to continue: Lady Macbeth is returning from her tennis-lesson!

JULIET

I don't think she needs lessons after playing for five years. I am sure she has reached her level a long time ago.

FANNY

Why is she doing it then, at her birthday?

JULIET

For regular exercise of course: Some habits will just die with her!

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LADY MACBETH

(She enters the room in a discreet tennis-outfit, designed by Juliet. When Juliet notices her clothing she looks away.) How are you doing ladies? You have to try more of that champagne while I have a quick shower.

FANNY

Don't hurry, Lady Macbeth. We are not going anywhere, especially as the champagne is so excellent. (All ladies laugh slightly and smiles.) But what a tasteful tennis-clothing you're wearing! Where did you find that?

LADY MACBETH

Oh it's nothing. I found it in a shop by accident, at Mayfair as a matter of fact. (She gives Juliet a quick glance.) It was a real bargain, they called it a sale. (She turns around, displaying her clothes.)

FELICIA

You are too modest. It suits you perfectly: Discreet and classy, with a novel design.

LADY MACBETH

Never mind, this dress will be worn-out soon enough. I will change clothes and return in a minute! (She leaves the room.)

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FELICIA

I'm really surprised: She still has a fine feeling for style, and at her age!

JULIET

Do you really think that taste disappears when people get older?

## FELICIA

That portrait of Lady Macbeth's late husband as a young man... It's dusty and soiled, nailed to the wall in the library. And then the lady seems to be in such a good shape...

## FANNY

(To Felicia.) The conflict between history and the present demands a clean-up of dirty images. Earl has tried for years to persuade his mother to refresh the painting, but she refuses. Despite his many competent colleges at the university! But his mother says the painting will never leave this house.

## FELICIA

I think she has begun to lose her senses! Ernest is amusing: He has always behaved like an engineer. He says that we all should let her have her husband on the wall, until death do them part.

## JULIET

(She smiles.) Isn't it obvious? Why would lady M have a painting of her husband restored, when it shows a person much younger than herself? She prefers to remember him at the time the picture was made! When they both were so much more alive!

## FANNY

The past has no surviving-potential for me today... (They continue talking while sipping some champagne. Juliet strolls around the room calmly, without her glass, stopping here and there.)

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## LADY MACBETH

(She returns and opens both door-halves to the dining-room, but doesn't close them. She wears the same 19<sup>th</sup> century gown as before. Sounds of talk, mixed with laughter, is heard from Lady Macbeths' sons in the nearby library. The servant appears, and she speaks to him.) We will have coffee now, with some of that cake you and I composed. (The servant makes a nod and checks the glasses and two bottles of wine in the coolers, before leaving the room.) It's my birthday for Gods-sake. I almost forgot about it, when I played tennis! (She smiles at the ladies and takes a seat at the table.)

## FANNY

To forget is necessary for a life in shape... and forgive! Happy birthday once again, Lady Macbeth! (All three stands up while Lady Macbeth is sitting down. They sing a short birthday-song in beautiful counterpoint. Juliet is singing, standing turned away from the others.)

## LADY MACBETH

I have forgotten nothing but will forgive you for that singing. (She smiles and carefully looks around at Fanny, Felicia and Juliet.) You should know that I have made up my mind and my will, so any future surprise is overruled. Listen to me, please! (She rises from the table. She pulls out a paper from her dresses wide arm, and starts reading loud, after looking at the others astonished faces. She finishes her short words, unheard of by the audience, and takes her seat again.)

**JULIET**

Lady Macbeth...

**LADY MACBETH**

Call me Diana, if you don't mind!

**JULIET**

Thank you, Lady Macbeth... Diana. But I'm curious about your dress. I think it is catchy, if I may say so, especially for the moment... I mean your birthday... Oh no, don't misunderstand me... (She blushes, and Lady Macbeth gives her a stare.)

**LADY MACBETH**

Well I most certainly didn't buy it in your shop, Juliet. I wore this dress when my husband and I were in France looking for the painter Monet. Sorry to say we never met him.

**JULIET**

Of course, Lady Macbeth... Diana, I work with colours too. By the way, Monet painted some pictures of a lady in the same style as you are presenting now.

**LADY MACBETH**

So you have seen them! It's absolutely not me on those canvases. He had his life, and now I am beginning to have had mine.

**FANNY**

Excuse me, Lady Macbeth, wouldn't it be fair to leave the painting of your husband to someone who can appreciate the work of a prominent artist?

**FELICIA**

(To Fanny.) Nobody understands the quality of a painting better than after an auction!

**LADY MACBETH**

(Lady Macbeth shakes her head and turns around from Juliet.) Felicia and Fanny, I'm neither deaf nor dead! You two live in houses bigger than this! Therefore I have decided to leave my belongings to Ronny: Juliet and Ronny has nothing more than a small apartment in London. They need a spacious and decent living more than Earl and Ernest!

**JULIET**

(To herself.) The unexpected good sometimes comes with a bourdon,

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Act 1, scene 5

(Lady Macbeth's three sons are sitting or standing in the library. They all have something to drink. Books fill every shelf, and a few paintings hang on the walls. A very delicious-looking cake stands untouched on a table.)

**RONNY**

(To Earl and Ernest.) Why is mothers' birthday-cake standing here? We have to join the ladies and let mother serve us. It looks delicious!

**EARL**

A very good idea: Even the youngest of us can have considerable thoughts.

**ERNEST**

Stop teasing Ronny, Earl! You are the eldest and should know better. Look at the picture on the wall instead! It was Money who held the brush, wasn't it?

**EARL**

No Monet did.

**ERNEST**

Monet was a Frenchman, but in English his name is Money.

**EARL**

Has it ever crossed your mind that our language is fantastic when it comes to far fetched misunderstandings? It must have influenced people all over the world, not only Americans!

**ERNEST**

Well, Money it is here in Britain! And elsewhere, well... I don't care. The painting... it's so old and dirty. Has mother ever done anything about it?

**EARL**

Your language is too influenced by your American wife! Mother has left the painting untouched as it was from the beginning.

**ERNEST**

I guess it fits her memories of father. Under the dust he looks even younger than we are today!

**RONNY**

Beauty is the best memory from the past. The present is a brutal judge of its shortcomings. Let us bring mother her birthday-cake when it's still fresh!

**EARL**

Don't you recognize mothers' joke? She is very fit physically, and treats us like the children we were. You and Ernest and I gobbled every sweet thing whenever we had a chance!

**RONNY**

**Memories behave like winds: Sometimes you feel them, but they never satisfy any hunger.**

**EARL**

**(Suddenly he says.) I have a proposal: Let's challenge mother for a run in the park tomorrow! (To Ronny.) That is if you still can move your body? And don't suffer after leaving your comfortable car-dealing business.**

**RONNY**

**How many times do I have to repeat that I work at my bank nowadays? And I work out with my wife three times a week... at the gym of course! How often do you meet or speak with mother? After all you live next door in your castle. I talk to her every other day on the phone.**

**EARL**

**Then you are more familiar than us, with her tennis-trainer folly...**

**RONNY**

**It's no folly, not even a joke... or anything else. She likes the game! Period!**

**EARL**

**It's settled then: We take mother for a run tomorrow morning, after breakfast. And Ronny, you have to move your car, it stands in our way.**

**ERNEST**

**I feel like the portrait of father: Dusty and old, but young under the surface. (He picks up the birthday-cake and is about to carry it away. Ronny sighs briefly, all three of them get ready to leave the room.)**

**\*\*\***

**FELICIA**

**(She is on her way to the bathroom and meets Ernest in the hallway between the two rooms, when he is carefully carrying the cake. Earl and Ronny has vanished into the dining-room.) What are you doing, Ernest?**

**ERNEST**

**What are you doing?**

**FELICIA**

**I have to go to the bathroom. We have tasted that cake already, it's superb! (Ernest looks at the cake but it's intact.) Your mother treats you like hungry boys even today: She gave you one birthday-cake to eat by yourselves! (She laughs and lays her hand on his arm, then with a whisper.) Now listen to me: Lady Macbeth told us that she has consulted a lawyer and written her will: She leaves this house to Ronny!**

**ERNEST**

**Good for him and Juliet. Both of them really need decent circumstances.**

FELICIA

Is that fair to you and Earl?

ERNEST

You and I have more than we need. And by the way, don't forget your children. Both of them!

FELICIA

You're absolutely right Ernest, I am thinking about them! But the principle concerns me most: Why should you be so unfairly treated by your mother, compared to Ronny?

ERNEST

I don't care about man-made principles! (He grabs Felicia's hand clumsily, balancing the cake on his other hand.) Why is my mothers' will so important to you?

FELICIA

(She starts crying, but damped) You are doing this to me because you're not the father of my two girls!

ERNEST

Please Felicia, be silent! I'm just an engineer trying to handle life. So it runs smoothly...

FELICIA

Follow me to the bathroom, and I will show you what to do with your mothers' cake! (She leaves Ernest hurriedly. He turns around and enters the dining-room slowly.)

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Act 1, scene 6

(Ernest places the birthday-cake beside the other one on a sideboard, after entering the dining-room. That cake has only a few untouched pieces. Earl and Ronny stands beside Juliet at a window, Fanny and Lady Macbeth are sitting silently in a group of four antique armchairs, a distance from the dining-table. Felicia is still at the bathroom.)

LADY MACBETH

(She notice's the untouched cake, then turns to Ernest.) I expected you boys to eat it all!

ERNEST

But... but it is your birthday, and your cake, mother. (Everyone in the room turns their attention to Lady Macbeth and Ernest.)

EARL

(He smiles.) Maybe they shall write about this in the local paper too. (He raises his voice.) Mother was interviewed last week, when they paid attention to her coming birthday.

RONNY

(He smiles at Earl.) Don't be rude! Ernest has always tried his best. Besides, journalists know a little about many things. But sometimes they write everything about nothing! So there is no need for more gasoline on their fire!

EARL

That reminds me of your car: Perhaps it has a diesel engine... You have to move it, for our race! (To Lady Macbeth.) When we had our coffee in the library, we decided to run for life tomorrow morning. (He turns grave.) Aren't we a very well trained family? And that certainly goes for you too, mother! We can combine our morning exercise with a playful competition, can't we?

ERNEST

I have been thinking about your idea, Earl: I don't want to participate. (He takes a seat in one of the armchairs.)

EARL

Why? It's just for fun, combined with your regular run!

ERNEST

The thing is that I am not in a very good shape. And besides I have nothing suitable to wear.

EARL

Come on! I have seen you running almost every day from our windows: Far away in our fields... I've checked you out with my looking-glass. And don't worry: We have every outfit you can dream of here. Including shoes!

RONNY

It is silly to have a race in the morning. Juliet and I go to the gym after work. Training is more efficient for the body in the early evening. (He walks over and stands by Lady Macbeth.)

**EARL**

(To Ernest and Ronny.) So you're both scared of running with your mother and brother?

**RONNY**

Don't make this a challenge Earl! If you have a problem with me, turn to Juliet, my better half, for comfort!

**EARL**

(He turns to Juliet, who puts out her tongue towards Ronny and shakes her head, unnoticed by everybody but Ronny.) What would you like to drink, my dear? (Juliet makes a questioning gesture with her forearms.) Well then, let me get you a fire-starter. (He leaves for the bottles on a sideboard, Ronny approaches her.)

**RONNY**

Juliet, they say that men and women in the right or proper age look for someone to marry. But when they are lucky enough to find that person, she or he transforms to be the only one. Peculiar, isn't it?

**JULIET**

Emotions are unreasonable! Ask Earl about the logic in that!

**RONNY**

I never dreamt of getting married. My life couldn't be better, why change it? Then you came into my bank and wanted to lend some money for your business. Later you ended up with a SUV as a wedding-gift from me, and you completed my luck with our marriage!

**JULIET**

Your point only proves that a fool can be fooled by a fool with folly! (Ronny shakes her both upper arms gently.)

**RONNY**

Life contains a lot of humour but is it funny? (Juliet gives him a quick kiss on his mouth. He joins Ernest close to one window in the dining-room as Earl arrives with two drinks.)

**EARL**

(He hands Juliet a glass.) Life is a fluid, waiting to be fully tasted. In the right company, of course: Cheers! (He raises his glass.)

**JULIET**

Men and women are land-bourn mariners with more water than substance in our bodies. Here is to you! (She raises her glass towards Earl, and drinks quickly.) But why have humans become so earth-bound that we like wearing fashionable clothes?

**EARL**

Why is the answer to everything!

**JULIET**

I would be out of business as a designer if mankind had not crawled up on land from the shoreline many thousand years ago and developed. (She smiles.)

**EARL**

(He scratches his forehead,) For many years...when I teach art at the university... I have been thinking about the ultimate test for painters: You just show them a landscape, with or without people anywhere around the world... then many of them would lay down their brushes and never return to the canvass.

**JULIET**

But every person needs clothes to wear.

**EARL**

Nobody desires art without attraction!

**JULIET**

What about the portrait of Macbeth? Why?

**EARL**

That is a very interesting "why": Several hundred years ago, painters used an opening behind or beside portraits they made. Although Macbeth's canvass needs restoring, underneath there is a fine summary of his life with some play-writers he admired at the time, pictured in that window. Partly in disguise of course! But the artists view is innovative and great, no matter if it's just playfully done or intended instinct... or both. (He smiles.)

**JULIET**

And that makes the painting worth a lot of money?

**EARL**

I wouldn't say so for sure. (He looks at Juliet's empty glass.) That was your fire-starter. Here comes the firecracker: Can I get you one? (Juliet nods and he leaves her with two empty glasses. Ronny notice that and returns to Juliet.)

**RONNY**

What are you doing? Are you trying to get drunk?

**JULIET**

You're the only one who can satisfy my thirst...

**RONNY**

Juliet, you are drunk already! Beware of my family! (Earl returns with two large drinks and Ronny leaves her again.)

**EARL**

There you are my dear! (He hands her one glass.) Beauty before age! I have a few more years behind me than you...

**JULIET**

Even a fitting compliment can be worn out! I consider myself as an art-practitioner, especially when I design my clothes.

**EARL**

Well, you're the centrepiece at this family-exhibition anyhow.

**JULIET**

I have no intention to make any impression, if that's what you mean. I would never dream of being an impressionist!

**EARL**

But I'm impressed! Everyone who works with art is familiar with the currents and labels used for different periods in the history of painting. Those labels are rightly misunderstood or wrongly used, so be it...

**JULIET**

(She swallows a large amount of her drink.) Never mind me, I'm just talking.

**EARL**

But Juliet, your feeling for colour is extraordinary. I have noticed your dresses that mother bought. Male artists are often known for their brilliant use of colour, but you give them a match. I'm blown away, to be frank!

**JULIET**

You are talking like a windbag right now, if that's being blown away?

**EARL**

I teach my students that the content of a picture matters most. Handling the brush-strokes comes second, because it is only a question of simple training. (He pauses.) Never mind, we are here for mothers' birthday. Bottoms up Juliet, good luck with the rest of your drink: It's called the blowjob.

**JULIET**

I will have nothing more of this! (She throws the rest of her glass' content in Earls' face.)

**EARL**

I was just kidding!

**JULIET**

Kidding? I don't want kids with anyone right now, dream on! (She leaves him and goes to Ronny at the window. Lady Macbeth notices the incident and walks over to Earl.)

**LADY MACBETH**

Are you having an early shower Earl, before the event tomorrow?

EARL

We were just discussing art and its influence on common life. I told Juliet that the portrait of father is unusual and forever young in many ways. Despite the tainted surface!

LADY MACBETH

I will tell you a secret, Earl, as you are the art expert: The painting is not a picture of your father. But it has always given me a dear reminder of him. When your father was in Paris after the first big war, he found it in a small antiques shop, bought it, and stored it at his mothers place. Later gave it to me. It became a combined birthday-present and a wedding-gift, with his great humour included.

EARL

That has been obvious to me for many years! But the similarity is breathtaking! Anyhow, the painting itself is probably genuine, made by an artist in his prime.

LADY MACBETH

Everybody does foolish things in their lives. But I wanted you boys to believe in your father and his memory, as I do.

EARL

It has worked perfectly, mother! No one has ever mentioned anything.

LADY MACBETH

I trust you, Earl: Take care of the picture and restore it. This agreement is between you and me!

EARL

Of course, mother, you have my word.

LADY MACBETH

Now I'm going to bed, and prepare for the run. (She waves good night to everybody and leaves the room.)

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Act 2, scene 1

(A rising sun is shining from a cloudless sky the next morning. Earl arrives in a hurry to the front-door on his way out, carrying a wrapped up parcel. Ronny stand there, and has opened the door. He is about to leave the house and move Juliet's car for the morning-run. It's obvious that Earl's parcel contains a painting.)

**EARL**

So you are an early bird? Going for a walk before breakfast?

**RONNY**

No, I have to move Juliet's car, because you talked mother into that stupid running-thing.

**EARL**

She has her free will. But... oh yes: Your Suburban Utility Vehicle is blocking the way for people. Even out here in the country.

**RONNY**

Your age and the champagne yesterday stands in the way for remembering that "S" stands for "Sports", dear brother. (He pats Earls' shoulder.)

**EARL**

Yes, yes certainly, now I recall what you said: You bought a nearly new car for a lot of money. But of course it's no problem for a banker like you to finance it!

**RONNY**

(He sighs and makes a gesture for Earl to pass thru the open door.) A car on four wheels is as easy to move as money between buyer and seller these days. I really like the Internet for that. But my personal troubles remain from when I was a sales-manager at the car-company.

**EARL**

How is that possible? I have always looked upon you as a success in business-life!

**RONNY**

Well... one of my co-workers sold too many expensive cars without proper security... without my knowledge. In the end I was made responsible as his superior! All my savings went down the drain, so to speak. That's why I quit and started at the bank instead. But the dept is still there!

**EARL**

Then you are forced to win our little race! If I were you, I'd hope that mother bail you out with her, shall we say, good will! (He shows his teeth in a grin.)

**RONNY**

Don't make jokes about what might happen after mothers' death! I can't even imagine the loss of her! By the way, what have you got there? It seems to be very properly wrapped up. (He points at the painting which Earl carries.)

**EARL**

It's just one of mothers' paintings. I promised her to restore it, and I want my colleges' final judgment. I'm not one hundred percent convinced about its background.

**RONNY**

Mmhm, she has decorated the walls here with a lot of paintings, since fathers' death. They were so deeply fond of each other. She started filling the house with colour-full pictures when she was left alone. And there are a lot of walls in here to hang them on.

**EARL**

I always gave her my advice, as you know. There is no truth if someone doesn't observe it! That is why I want to hear my colleges' view of this painting. (He makes a gesture with the parcel.)

**RONNY**

You're amusing, Earl: Every new truth has to be put into words. (He smiles.) Preferably by experts, otherwise it doesn't exist.

**EARL**

I'm convinced you are right: No truth is accepted if it isn't put into words first!

**RONNY**

(He laughs.) You could fool me!

**EARL**

Not with a truth that hasn't been heard of before.

**RONNY**

Please Earl, be silent! Everything you and I can lay hands on is a truth. The rest is words, even if they might inspire action... If proven genuine by experts! (He smiles again.)

**EARL**

You move your car, and I will put this painting in mine, on the backside of the house. Then we can join the others for breakfast. (He and Ronny leave the house.)

\*\*\*

Act 2, scene 2

(In the dining-room: Lady Macbeth is standing up stretching her body. She wears a slim colourful outfit that reveals her well trained figure. Ernest, Fanny, Felicia and Juliet are about to have breakfast, sitting at the dining-table, with a small glass of champagne in front of them.)

ERNEST

(To Lady Macbeth.) Please mother, have a seat and some breakfast! Exercise in the morning is nothing for anybody... for anybody's body!

LADY MACBETH

At my age I have to warm up properly, so I can beat you all. (She smiles.) If one of you finishes before me, I might change my written will so the victor gets it all! Do you believe in my running capacity?

ERNEST

Mother, running for life is one thing, but finishing first when you are dead means nothing.

LADY MACBETH

Your thoughts are deeper than I could imagine, Ernest. But the run is on, and I have declared my personal conditions for the winner.

ERNEST

To be frank: I'm not fit like Earl and Ronny, and I'm not interested in competing for whatever...

LADY MACBETH

That makes you a winner in the armchair, Ernest! But who celebrates you there? (She stops stretching her body.) I'm going upstairs now for a change of clothes.

ERNEST

You don't have to! You're splendid as you are. Take a seat and have something to eat!

LADY MACBETH

There are more important things than daily routines. Give my love to Earl and Ronny, when they appear! (She intends to leave the room, but Ernest's words make her stop.)

ERNEST

I have a feeling that you are wrestling with your will!

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean by that?

ERNEST

Running and will, you said there was some connection...



LADY MACBETH

Certainly!

ERNEST

But mother, why can't you tell everyone that this crazy idea about a useless competition in the morning is nothing for you?

LADY MACBETH

You boys planned it yesterday, and I can't disappoint you by saying no!

ERNEST

We are here to celebrate your birthday!

LADY MACBETH

Ernest, this is not a chicken-race. But if anyone of you is uncomfortable with it, you can freely back off. (She kisses his cheek.) Please follow me upstairs now and help me choose running-clothes! (They both leave the room.)

\*\*\*

FANNY

Our dear lady has a point! We have to do something.

FELICIA

(She sighs.) Ernest is right about running around in the morning, but his mother has made up her mind.

FANNY

That's exactly what I'm getting at: Lady Macbeth has her will. And it comes with her confused personal judgment!

FELICIA

Ernest and I don't care, even if there was witchcraft involved. Or some spellbound business! She is doing what her heart tells her. That absurdity is fine with us!

JULIET

Every person has a right to their own body and belongings. No bystander should interfere as long as fraud is not involved!

FANNY

But her confusion reaches far beyond her own life. She is 70-years old, and by any statistic's we will outlive her. There comes our responsibility!

FELICIA

I've always thought that running for the sake of it is childish! But running for anything else is dull self-appreciation.

FANNY

We have to make her sober up. She can't leave this life being a catastrophe!

FELICIA

Sober up? Then you should have left the glass of champagne untouched at the breakfast-table!

FANNY

I'm not running for anything this morning!

FELICIA

But your husband is a runner up in this stupid competition. For his mothers' painting!

JULIET

Heritage is the only legacy that is important. If you use your heritage well, any legacy is not interesting at all!

FANNY

Heritage and legacy are the same thing... for Felicia's American roots!

FELICIA

A child is born with a heritage, but when somebody dies you enjoy the legacy.

JULIET

Felicia, Fanny! (She twists her hands.) My husband is slower than a snail, so you two have nothing to worry about. Earl has convinced his mother about restoring the painting of his father. He has nothing more to chase! (Fanny and Felicia give her a stare.)

FANNY

Are you suggesting that Earl has thoughts beyond winning a jokers birthday-run?

FELICIA

(To Fanny.) Juliet knows very little about art. Especially paintings made before her birth!

FANNY

Curse you both! My husband is an honest academic and would never under any circumstances dream of using that against his mother! A race for nothing, that's what this lousy morning will see.

JULIET

(She sighs.) The snail will win... or the turtle...

\*\*\*

Act 2, scene 3

(In the dining-room: Earl and Ronny arrives together, dressed for running, and takes their seats at the table. Lady Macbeth and Ernest are not present. Everyone is having breakfast.)

EARL

(Spotlights focus on him and Ronny. To Ronny, next to him.) Lovely cucumber-sandwich this is! (He chews on a sandwich and drinks some tea.) Aren't you educated at Sandwich? Or is it Sandhurt... it's some kind of prep school for military men, isn't it?

RONNY

Yes, at Sandhurst, but I wasn't allowed to stay there, because of my physical condition.

EARL

That is too bad, but everyone can't be a success in everything they do.

RONNY

My superiors decided to send me to the Special forces' for training.

EARL

But weren't you dismissed from there too?

RONNY

I wouldn't say so. After a couple of boring years, when I did my duty, I voluntarily decided to take my leave. Then, unfortunately, I started to work as a car-salesman.

EARL

It's nothing to be ashamed of! I mean if you're not fit for the job as a soldier or a car-salesman...

RONNY

I prefer my work at the bank. You don't kill anyone there, even if some people are bleeding financially now and then.

EARL

But wasn't it interesting to learn how to shoot people?

RONNY

As a marksman, yes, but I decided that in practice, taking a human life is nothing for me. No matter the circumstances.

EARL

I think I understand... And you were generously discharged from the military, as a captain if I remember right!

RONNY

Yes, generosity is the future for mankind, not killing.

**EARL**

I'm sure everyone in the armed forces understood when you left them.

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**JULIET**

(Spotlights focus on her, Fanny and then Felicia. To Fanny seated beside her.) Would you hand me the butter, please? (She gets a knife in her hand with butter.) Thank you.

**FANNY**

I had a dream tonight about the race.

**FELICIA**

(She is sitting on a chair opposite Fanny.) This vanity-run will have no winner!

**FANNY**

(To Felicia.) Have you slept well? Your husband is an engineer, but perhaps not designed for outdoor activities like this. (She smiles.)

**JULIET**

(She hastily looks at Felicia, then Fanny.) I slept very well, thank you, and I had no dreams. Our men are equals to Lady Macbeth and shall finish together for sure. They are her sons!

**FANNY**

My dream was for real, and you have an illusion, Juliet. I got a vision: The one and only winner took a dive into a sea of troubles. And appeared at the surface with an oil-painting! Sweat and water was dripping down all over his face!

**FELICIA**

(She laughs.) A timeless face with streaming water... I don't like that painting of Ernest's father. It doesn't give me any feelings and looks outdated, without anything to tell about today.

**FANNY**

Art for the sake of art and self-made trouble for Gods sake...

**JULIET**

Can we agree over something for breakfast? I imagine how the colours shall come alive when the dust is removed from the painting of Lady Macbeths' husband! (She smiles back at Fanny.)

**FANNY**

Earl knows everything about art. To him his mothers' painting is more worth than this entire house!

\*\*\*

## LADY MACBETH

(Lady Macbeth is wearing a colourful outfit as she enters the room. Her hair is newly done after a quick shower, and she's holding Ernest's hand.) Ladies and gentlemen, are you ready? (She turns around, displaying her outfit and well trained figure.) This is not the running for life, it's for the sake of it! (She laughs.) I hope you are frightened!

## ERNEST

I suggest we should have a seat and think about that over breakfast! (He zips once from his small glass of champagne, and sits down at the table.)

## LADY MACBETH

(She observes Ernst's drinking.) So I see you have been served, Ernest.

## ERNEST

Mother, you have been watching too many "funny" American series on television.

## FANNY

(She stares at Ernest.) Did I hear you mention my name, Ernest? I'm not from America.

## LADY MACBETH

Please, please! Why can't you be civilized to each other? I smell bad vibes from every corner in this room!

## ERNEST

Have a cup of tea and something to eat! It will alter your mood for the rest of the day... the morning after your 70-tenth birthday, mother!

## LADY MACBETH

I had almost forgotten, Ernest thank you! But time is forgettable, life is worse, and prejudices overcome them both.

## ERNEST

(He shakes his head gently.) Don't exaggerate the return of vanity, dear mother! You favor Juliet's clothing, and Ronny as the last born of us. But please leave it there!

## LADY MACBETH

Your judgment is failing sometimes, Ernest! At first I had no other intention than leaving everything in three equal shares to you boys. But a couple of years ago I gave it a thought, and a lawyer helped me write down my will: I decided to give away this house and my land to a charity organization for children. But things inside here shall be yours and a reminder of your father and me.

## ERNEST

(He rises from the table and hugs Lady Macbeth, gives her a kiss on her cheek.) What a lovely planning! As usual my mother does the right thing!

FANNY

What about your art-collection, Lady Macbeth? We don't want any fighting among friends and relatives.

LADY MACBETH

The future is yours, the past is mine.

ERNEST

Felicia and I don't care. We are happy enough living in the present. Art is something done yesterday but with a forgotten language. We will never have time to listen and understand it today!

LADY MACBETH

(She sighs.) Some painters remain forever young. But most people never mature!

FANNY

Yes, you are right, and mankind's previous achievement mustn't be underestimated!

LADY MACBETH

(To Fanny.) When I bought my paintings, I was ready for them that very day. I don't mind if they have something more to give after that, looking back at their history. But every time I see them they awake my feelings, every day, everyone!

FANNY

That is exactly why Earl and I love the painting of your husband!

RONNY

(He stands up from the breakfast-table.) Has everybody finished breakfast? May I suggest that we get ready for the run, so it might be over and done with? (Everyone except Earl and Earnest rises after finishing what they have been eating and drinking, and leaves the room.)

\*\*\*

EARL

(He is sitting opposite Ronny's empty chair. and drinking orange-juice, while Ernest finishes some small amount of champagne. They are alone in the room. He leans across the table.) Did you know that Ronny has economical reasons for being mothers favourite?

ERNEST

Money is nothing to strive for. In the long run it's just a waste of time! Everyday life is short enough.

EARL

You and I we both know that, but Ronny?

**ERNEST**

I'm sorry, Earl. I have never been interested in finding out other peoples' inner life. I have to manage my own, and that is a full time job!

**EARL**

Ronny told me about his big debts. He is a poor fellow and has to win the race, so mother can favor him!

**ERNEST**

I couldn't care less about Ronny's personal problems. I feel sorry for him anyhow. But he looks like a winner to me: His wife is the most beautiful creature I've ever seen.

**EARL**

Juliet is a potential bomb for any man to come running for. And explode together with.

**ERNEST**

Your imagination leads you on the wrong path, Earl!

**EARL**

How can any man be sure of his wives fidelity? No one! It's an inner thing, Earnest... Look at wildlife's facts: Many females get pregnant with other males than their regular companion!

**ERNEST**

My wife could never even think of being unfaithful to me.

**EARL**

You can't be sure about that!

**ERNEST**

It's impossible!

**EARL**

Such things occur more often than in your fantasies!

**ERNEST**

Perhaps, but if my wife would even think of being unfaithful to me, then she must be unfaithful to her own personality first. And that, I am sure, will never happen!

**EARL**

Congratulations, it has to be wonderful for a man to know a woman that well! (He stands up from the breakfast-table.) It's time for us to join the others outside the house! (They both leave the room. Lights on stage fade away.)

\*\*\*

**INTERMISSION**

Act 2, scene 4

(Ernest, Earl and Ronny are standing below the entrance-stairs leading up to Lady Macbeth's minor castle. They wear shorts, t-shirts and running-shoes. Their wives are as they were at breakfast, standing beside them. A lightly shaded sun is rising. Lady Macbeth steps out from the castle in a tasteful body-dress with shorts. Ronny meets her halfway down the stairs. The single servant stands ready with an old shotgun.)

LADY MACBETH

Look at me: The empress' new clothes with a spell! Aren't they made by some kind of witchcraft? (She turns smiling around and displays her outfit.)

RONNY

Juliet makes clothes with style to bewitch her customers.

LADY MACBETH

Then you have nothing to worry about! I'm looking forward to meet your children.

RONNY

Mother...

LADY MACBETH

Yes I know I'm premature, but the future is obscure. Even an architect has to make plans.

RONNY

(Ronny shakes his head.) Everyone comes from the past, but live in the present. I don't have anything to bring forward to the future.

LADY MACBETH

(She pats Ronny's cheek quickly.) My grandchildren and your children, Ronny, will have everything after me. So get to work!

RONNY

Mother!

LADY MACBETH

Don't be grateful, it's my pure selfishness. But the painting which looks like your father in his younger days, that picture ought to move into Earls' house. Because Fanny and Earl seem to be fond of it!

RONNY

Mother?

LADY MACBETH

I've got it all written down. I have executed my will!



**RONNY**

**But you told us that you would donate everything around here to a children's home!**

**LADY MACBETH**

**Isn't that exactly what I intend to do? Let's get ready for our morning run!**

\*\*\*

**RONNY**

**(Juliet steps up to him, while Lady Macbeth hurries down the stairs to have a few words with the servant, who is going to start the race. To Juliet.) I have no intention to win today.**

**JULIET**

**Why should you? There is nothing to gain if you finish first. (She gives Ronny a quick kiss.)**

**RONNY**

**You're wrong: If I win I'd be the first one back here to see you. (He returns Juliet's kiss.)**

**JULIET**

**Charm has never triumphed over anything everlasting.**

**RONNY**

**I have no desire to take part in this stupid thing!**

**JULIET**

**I know. That's why my feelings for you will be victorious. (She gives Ronny a hug.)**

\*\*\*

**ERNEST**

**(To Lady Macbeth.) It's not right to force you into this, after a bright birthday-evening.**

**LADY MACBETH**

**You boys took the initiative. I just have to stand up for it!**

**ERNEST**

**The idea wasn't mine: It was Earl who talked us into it.**

**LADY MACBETH**

**You have always blamed your elder brother.**

**ERNEST**

**The origin of a fire is less important than how it's spreading. Just like bad ideas!**

LADY MACBETH

And once a fire has started, you have to control the flames. Come on now Ernest: You must be able to match a 70-year old lady. (She smacks Ernest on his back.)

ERNEST

(In a low voice.) Successful foolishness always comes in a good looking shape.

LADY MACBETH

You were not always wrong, when you and Earl blamed each other as boys. (She puts her arm around Ernest's shoulders.) Come on, lets' have some fun! (She starts stretching her legs and prepare for running.)

\*\*\*

FANNY

(She is standing beside Earl with both arms crossed over her chest.) Hold back the first leap, but don't let the leader disappear too far! Then, when the second begins, you're in control of your forces, and will reach the goal first.

EARL

I don't know why I'm running. Especially at this hour of the day!

FANNY

You're running for the painting! It has to be yours.

EARL

I'm not sure that physical efforts will bring me closer.

FANNY

Everyone has an obligation to get to the top of their lives, but you are far from it!

EARL

You should be the one who is running, instead of me: I know when there is nothing more to do, to improve my chances.

FANNY

Nobody remembers the second best.

EARL

This time I have nothing to gain.

FANNY

Do it for me, for us, for eternity... as long as you can hold out!

\*\*\*

## LADY MACBETH

(Lady Macbeth and her sons line up, ready for the race. The servant fires a shot in the air. They start running rapidly, but talking during the first lap. Fanny, Felicia and Juliet stand watching on the entrance-stairs. The servant stands below, now holding a black and white racing-car flag for the finish. She shouts when passing.) I want to see some speed!

FELICIA

Oh I'm so proud of Ernest! He keeps up the pace with his brothers.

FANNY

Don't be silly, Felicia! (Juliet silently looks the other way.)

FELICIA

I am not!

FANNY

Your husband runs regularly. My husband has seen him running across our land, almost every afternoon.

FELICIA

Yes, but not in the morning! Ernest hates waking up with any physical activity outside our marriage.

FANNY

Are you trying to make me blush?

FELICIA

(She blushes.) Oh no, not at all... I was only saying...

FANNY

Never mind, let's be curious spectators. I wonder how this is going to end...

FELICIA

(In a low voice.) No winner takes it all. There are always losses on the way.

FANNY

... there are undisputable victories for those who really are alive before they die!

FELICIA

You are so full of thoughts Fanny, I admire that. Now I understand why Earl and you united in your marriage. It suits me perfectly that Ernest is such a genuine engineer. I understand his logic, and he respects me when my calculations are wrong.

FANNY

(She ignores Felicia and looks intensely at the castles corner.) I want to know who comes first and what it's going to lead to!

FELICIA

Ernest mustn't get hurt when he's running in the morning.

\*\*\*

JULIET

I sincerely hope Ronny doesn't win. He has to keep his mother's feelings in good condition.

FANNY

So it's true what Earl says, that Ronny needs money? (Juliet stares at her.)

JULIET

Isn't it worse when someone who has everything wants artistic value worth a lot?

FANNY

Earl will ask for his colleges' confirmation that the painting is genuine, and then refresh it. As an art-teacher he is just careful with his judgment!

JULIET

How clumsy of me! I beg your pardon...

FANNY

It is not easy for a fashion-designer to be able to separate art from money, or Monet. (She glances at Felicia and laughs to herself.)

JULIET

Money and art are unknown territory for me and my dresses.

FANNY

You have to excuse me, Juliet: I did not intend to be un-polite!

JULIET

Politeness with ambition can never be heartfelt.

FANNY

Earl's ambition is to help his mother!

JULIET

I recognized that from the beginning. People draw such unmotivated conclusions just because a person has the knowledge and opportunity to gain something from a situation.

FANNY

You're absolutely right!

**JULIET**

Suspicion lies in our human nature: We could never ever have survived during thousands of years without it. Nowadays this instinct is unnecessary, but often turns against innocent and competent people. Is this some kind of witchcraft?

**FANNY**

(She nods.) Sometimes it reminds me of a pure spell!

**JULIET**

And like some kind of witchcraft! What makes Lady Macbeth act as she does? Running with her sons, in the morning after her birthday! At her age! But Ronny accepts her folly. Exactly as Ernest does!

**FANNY**

Well, I guess he has his reasons, as anybody else... when life is executed...

**JULIET**

Look, here they come! (She points at Lady Macbeth running with speed beside Ronny, talking and making gestures. Earl is behind them looking exhausted. After a while Ernest comes walking and running.) I wonder who reaches the goal first.

**FANNY**

This is just the first lap, let's see what happens after the second one.

**JULIET**

Earl seems to be exhausted! (She smiles at Fanny.)

**FANNY**

Oh, he's very philosophical as a person. I guess he is thinking about his work right now.

**JULIET**

Distraction is a destiny in itself...

**FANNY**

You just wait and see. Something is going to happen after the second lap! It's obvious when they come around the corner for the finish! (Lady Macbeth and her sons have been running up the driveway and back, and then circled her small castle. They are about to run around the building for the second time.)

**JULIET**

(She smiles.) I would put my money on Lady Macbeth.

\*\*\*

**FELICIA**

(She is approaching Juliet and Fanny.) My husband is totally lost! How can he earn his mothers respect after this?

FANNY

This race is for Lady Macbeth only. Her sons have nothing to run away from.

JULIET

(She smiles again.) Perhaps she has bewitched them?

FELICIA

It is not pleasant when you're making fun of serious things, Juliet. Every person is living with some kind of a spell, it doesn't matter if it's for real or not. The challenge is to get rid of it. Sadly, most people can't even imagine their curse.

FANNY

Lady Macbeth owns a lot of pictures, but the only one that interests Earl is the reminder of his father. Why can't he have it? He has been advising his mother on every modern painting she bought. But Earl doesn't really care about those.

FELICIA

(She talks in a spooky voice.) There is a head coming up from a boiling kettle, and it looks like Lady Macbeth's husband. But it has transformed into a portrait that never ages, because of all the dirt on its surface!

JULIET

Is that witchcraft or just some kind of spell for bystanders?

FELICIA

Every head counts as in the military. As a former officer your husband should know.

JULIET

Ronny left the military because he wanted to call himself his best friend.

FELICIA

That should be you!

FANNY

There are no romantic feelings in this world anymore...

JULIET

Even if I'm second to none for him, I've never dreamt of being the first one. (She gives Felicia and Fanny a quick glance, then points excited at the incoming running competitors.) Here comes Lady Macbeth!

FANNY

Your witchcraft apparently works!

\*\*\*

LADY MACBETH

(She finishes the race first of all. Earl is a few meters behind her. The servant waves the black and white racing-track flag. She walks comfortably up to the three wives. Earl stands behind on the ground with hands on his knees, struggling for breath.) That was a piece of cake, a late birthday-cake!

JULIET

Where is Ronny?

LADY MACBETH

I talked to him during the first lap. Suddenly he bored me, so I left him behind. (Ernest and Ronny is seen coming around the corner of Lady Macbeths' minor castle. They are jogging and walking while they have a lively conversation.) There they are. Not much stamina in those two boys.

JULIET

You're unfair, Lady Macbeth, Ronny is a gentleman.

LADY MACBETH

Gentle to whom?

JULIET

Gentle to me, of course! But it doesn't work in a chicken-race. (The others laugh.)

LADY MACBETH

You seem to be the perfect wife for Ronny, dear Juliet.

RONNY

(When he arrives he gives Juliet a quick kiss and Lady Macbeth a hug.) Congratulations, mother! Your fighting spirit was too much for Ernest and me. (Lady Macbeth shakes her head. Then he raises his voice.) Come on Earl let's have a shower and some sauna! (Earl and Ernest follow him inside. After a short moment all ladies follow them indoors.)

\*\*\*

Act 2, scene 5

(In the castle's spacious combined shower- and sauna-room. It has a discreet interior with marble on the walls and a few tasteful decorations, reminding of a roman bath. Earl, Ernest and Ronny are undressing for a shower before they enter the sauna.)

RONNY

So you let mother win the race, Earl? How very thoughtful of you.

EARL

You talked her into whatever, when you were running beside her!

RONNY

No one talks mother into anything! When we were her puppets she constantly decided for us! Have you forgotten? (He smiles gently. Ernest listens carefully but discreet.)

EARL

But you and Ernest didn't try your best!

RONNY

We adapted to the situation and transformed our forces to maximize the situation!

EARL

Your well-wishes are misguided!

RONNY

Mother deserves to be happy in every way. Not only on her birthday.

EARL

That is a tender loving sons' remark... or ambition in disguise.

RONNY

Do you think it has something to do with the painting by mister money-Monet you're trying to rescue?

ERNEST

(He interrupts Ronny's and Earl's discussion.) What I said was a joke about money and Monet! Earl always tries to misunderstand me! (He leaves and goes into the sauna.)

\*\*\*

RONNY

Earl, what are you going to do with the painting?

EARL

Clean it up, and return it to mother, of course.



**RONNY**

And hope for what? (He sighs.) It has been hanging on the wall as long as I remember. And now, auction-sites on the net say that paintings by Monet might be more valuable than the rest of mother's and father's belongings.

**EARL**

Father has never been more alive to me than right now. But after his death I helped mother to buy more paintings for this house.

**RONNY**

I know. You always put mothers' interests before your own!

**EARL**

Perhaps it comes with economical independence. But that subject is nothing for you!

**RONNY**

You're absolutely right. Lets' go into the sauna, and take some heat. (Earl follows him.)

\*\*\*

**ERNEST**

(He is sitting on the highest level in the sauna. Earl and Ronny takes seats on the lowest of three levels. Ronny is silently listening. To Earl.) How many years do you think mother has left?

**EARL**

From ten to twenty years, or one day or two. (He grins.) It might depend on her tennis-trainer.

**RONNY**

Shut up both of you! Mother just won the race in front of all of us. Fantasies about her death are disgusting! This is too much! You both know that I'm in a financial limbo. I don't want anything from her because at least I definitely fancy her as my mother.

**EARL**

Hear, hear! Ronny, you act like a comedian, trying to conceal your mistakes.

**RONNY**

(To Earl.) I went away with Juliet on our honeymoon, and you don't have a clue what it cost me! Two months at the Bahamas and all that spending. But she is worth it!

**EARL**

True love is expensive, especially if it has a lack of partnership.

**RONNY**

Juliet has a financial fight for her designer-company, so I took a loan at my bank. And paid for our trip, without saying anything to anyone!

**ERNEST**

You ought to have come to us! I'm sure Earl and I could have helped you. I would gladly have contributed!

**EARL**

(He hesitates.) Yes, you should have relied on our good intentions!

**RONNY**

(He pours water from a bucket on the sauna-heaters stones so steam is released. To Earl.) If you advised mother to choose her modern paintings, isn't it too modest then to be interested only in the eldest one?

**EARL**

You have seen our walls at home. They are crowded with many older paintings. Fanny and I thought that we could make room only for the so called portrait of father. But if Earnest wishes otherwise, then...

**ERNEST**

You can have it as far as I'm concerned. It is a proper reward for assisting mother. Ask Ronny for his opinion, but don't disturb my lady with our views!

**RONNY**

I don't mind, Earl. As long as you get mother to tell everybody the true story behind the portrait. I have more living feelings for father than I get from a stiff look-alike picture.

**EARL**

(He raises and is on his way out of the sauna.) The heat in here makes me dizzy. I guess I'm not used to sauna-sitting. See you both at lunch, brothers. (He leaves for a shower.)

\*\*\*

Act 2, scene 6

(In the dining-room: Lady Macbeth's sons and wives are small-talking, sitting at the table until she enters. They stand up and sing "The winner takes it all, the loser standing small..." but she interrupts them by a dampening gesture. She is wearing a mint-coloured dress that ends above her knees, exposing her well-trained legs. Juliet looks away after quickly recognizing that the dress is one of the slim frocks she has designed.)

## LADY MACBETH

Thank you very much for yesterday! (She makes a young girls gesture with a bow.) Age is nothing but a figure, have a look at mine! Now let's have some lunch! (Everybody takes their seats, Lady Macbeth at the middle of the table. The servant enters with starters and offers wine or mineral water.)

## RONNY

(He raises from his chair at the table, holding his glass.) I had a fortunate childhood mother. Earl and Ernest were sometimes bigger than their little brother and used it, but you were greater than them! And now you're the winner of your 70-tenth birthday: Congratulations again my lady! (He bows and raises his glass. Everyone stands up toasting Lady Macbeth, who remains seated. Then they return to their seats.)

## LADY MACBETH

(Everybody's small-talking when eating. The main course is served. After a while Lady Macbeth raises from her chair and there is silence.) A bird sang something in my ear just before lunch, so I decided to specify what will happen when I've run away from you all: In the future everything here goes to Ronny, including this house and its interior. That has nothing to do with my feelings for anyone of you my boys: You Earl and you Ernest with your lovely wives... you both have everything you need and more, but Ronny should have a decent living in these surroundings as you do! (She takes her seat again. There is silence for a moment when everyone stares in front of them, without looking at each other.)

## ERNEST

(He breaks the silence after a while.) An excellent decision mother! You are always so very wise! (He raises his glass with mineral-water towards her.)

## RONNY

(To Lady Macbeth.) May I have a word with you after lunch?

## LADY MACBETH

You don't have to be grateful!

## RONNY

It never crossed my mind. The future is for living humans, not the dead. And you are alive.

## LADY MACBETH

Oh dear Ronny, let's do something foolish: Let's enjoy eating. (The stage-light is slowly shaded into complete darkness. Conversation is heard but not recognizable, together with low eating-noises. After a short while lights are on again to mark that the lunch is over.)

LADY MACBETH

It's coffee-time in the library! (She leaves her chair, so does the rest.) Ronny would you help me with the zipper at the back of my dress: It gives me itches. Perhaps I'm too old for a tight one like this. (Everybody but Lady Macbeth and Ronny leaves the dining-room.)

\*\*\*

RONNY

Why did you buy Juliet's dresses then, if they don't fit you? (He walks around to Lady Macbeth's back.)

LADY MACBETH

You have always been blue-eyed, Ronny: My zipper works perfectly.

RONNY

Earl and Ernest are blue-eyed too!

LADY MACBETH

I bought some of Juliet's dresses because she is an outstanding designer. I have followed her carrier despite the fact that you haven't introduced us until now. Take care of her and this house after I'm gone.

RONNY

Mother, I can't live with that talk!

LADY MACBETH

You heard me: When I leave you, everything after me is yours. Now I have to tell you the genuine story behind the portrait you believe shows your father. (She pauses.) That is not him! Your father and I joked about it all these years, but never explained why to you boys.

RONNY

(He shakes his head.) Mother... Mother!

LADY MACBETH

He bought it in France after the first big war, and his French mother kept the painting for him. Then we met and he realized that the similarity to a portrait of him was funny. He gave it to me as a wedding-gift with a laugh!

RONNY

I searched for the painter on my mobile this morning: If your painting is genuine, it certainly has aged with grace.

LADY MACBETH

Earl shall sort that out, he is the professional. I'm not interested in academic things.

RONNY

That is good news mother: If you give him the painting he will gladly accept it.

LADY MACBETH

You must fight for your standards, Ronny!

RONNY

I give a shit about it... forgive me my words milady. I have to live my life so I can sleep well!

LADY MACBETH

With your wife you must be able to sleep well every night, Ronny. Or not... (She pats his shoulder.) I'm so proud that you got Juliet as your companion!

RONNY

You are off limits now: Please leave my private life without interference!

LADY MACBETH

Are you really worthy of Juliet's talent?

RONNY

Spring and summer would be lovely, if autumn didn't introduce winter...

LADY MACBETH

You have to pick flowers when they are blossoming!

RONNY

Why are you so angry? Is it because I've never brought Juliet here before, when I came to visit you? She's working so hard to save her company!

LADY MACBETH

Beauty fades away, and leaves nothing but burdening memories!

RONNY

Leave that to me: In the end I will reach the lasting essence!

LADY MACBETH

Everything has it's time, Ronny! Your father and I had... we had our opportunity, took it and managed it well.

RONNY

Let me have my moment then, dear mother!

LADY MACBETH

You have no gratitude! I have to change my will!

**RONNY**

Do it! You are reliving me of a burden I never wanted to bear. Every heavy message has to be carried forward with ease. Otherwise it may crush tender toes! (He sweeps gently over Lady Macbeth's forearm.) Let us join the others for coffee! (On their way out they meet Earl, who has overheard Lady Macbeth's and Ronny's conversation outside the open door. He grabs Ronny by the arm and leads him back into the dining-room, while Lady Macbeth walks away to the library. )

\*\*\*

**EARL**

What are you up to? (He shakes Ronny's arm.)

**RONNY**

I'm acting as father would have done.

**EARL**

Are you crazy? You just spoiled your future economy!

**RONNY**

I have a carpenter's car, don't you remember? And I will use it as such! As a SUCH, if it's all right with Juliet.

**EARL**

I know it's a SUV, damn it, not a SUCH, but can't you play your little-brother roll better?

**RONNY**

My wife loves me and my failures, that's enough.

**EARL**

You have to act properly with mother! She said she might change her will again. But that painting of father should stay in our family!

**RONNY**

By all means Earl, you can have it: Forget or delay the return, after your colleges' examination!

**EARL**

(He scratches his chin.) I think mother is unpredictable, and... Oh, just forget it!

**RONNY**

(He stares at the floor in deep thoughts.) When we were young, I read a story about a portrait that aged as the years passed by. It was visible! And the painted person lived on, forever young. Until something happened... I don't remember what, death perhaps...

**EARL**

Nothing is going to happen here!

**RONNY**

... and then suddenly that portrait went young and fresh! Exactly as it was made many years before!

**EARL**

That will be the case, when I let my colleges take away dust and examine the painting father bought. Haven't you heard: Some painters remain forever young. But most people never mature!

**RONNY**

... no, I think the story was...The portrait got older but the living man on the canvass remained young, and then... I have lost my memory.

**EARL**

(He interrupts Ronny.) It is impossible to fight time, Ronny, at least not today! But a will can be changed as long as anyone lives. You have to stop mother!

**RONNY**

(He looks up from his staring at the floor and smiles.) Lady Macbeth has her own will and it's free for her and us. At least in this country!

**EARL**

(He pats Ronny's back gently.) Let it be then, don't worry! Follow me, let's join the others! (They leave the room together.)

\*\*\*

**EARL**

(In the library, to Lady Macbeth, after he and Ronny have entered the room.) Here is your son, my brother Ronny. He was lost in transportation, but I brought him here for you.

**RONNY**

I've never ever vanished! I was abroad to get married! I was born after you, that is a fact, but it didn't make me lost. (He smiles at Lady Macbeth and gets a stiff glance back from her.)

**LADY MACBETH**

(To Ronny.) When you were my youngest, your elder brothers sometimes talked you into doing silly things. And you did it, without any reflection, with blind trust.

**ERNEST**

(He is sitting around a table with the others. To Lady Macbeth.) That is because Earl and I are trustworthy in general: Sometimes we could not help doing things contrary to that!

**RONNY**

(He takes a seat beside Juliet, and they briefly show signs of affection to each other.) You should never play too hard on strings of trust!

ERNEST

Is your childhood still that loaded?

EARL

What's done in the past is dead and buried, but has to be built on anyhow. It's today's decisions that shape the future.

RONNY

You have to admit that even if a worm has no mother, most other creatures do.

ERNEST

(To Earl.) When the future backfires, I wouldn't like to stand in harms way.

LADY MACBETH

My dear boys, are you grown up enough to see through what you're doing right now?

RONNY

Certainly mother, that's why we are here! Would you like some more coffee? (He tries to pour out more coffee for Lady Macbeth, but the can is empty, then he rises.) I'll go and get some more. (He leaves the room, while the others, except Lady Macbeth, stand up talking, looking out the windows and so on. When he returns everybody takes their seats and Lady Macbeth gets her empty cup filled by him.) There you are. Your servant gave me a quick hand.

ERNEST

Always mothers' little helper, always... (To Lady Macbeth.) Here is your glass of water. (He hands Lady Macbeth a glass full of water.)

RONNY

(He smiles at Ernest and later Juliet.) Some people are loud speakers, but most of us prefer small talk.

LADY MACBETH

(She drinks some coffee then stands up. To Ernest and Ronny.) Thank you, Ernest for remembering! (She drinks half the glass of water.) You remind me of my motherhood... (She faints, everybody reacts astonished, and tries to help her up then lie her down on a sofa.)

EARL

She is breathing: This morning has been hard on her. She will recover.

RONNY

(To Earl.) Perhaps you and Ernest hope her will shall recover too?

EARL

I think you're the man to follow her upstairs and put her to bed!

\*\*\*\*\*



Act 3, scene 1

(At the breakfast-table the next morning: Everyone has had a good night's sleep. They are dressed in casual clothes, except Lady Macbeth, who wears a kimono-like gown designed by Juliet. Coffee and tea is served with newly baked bread.)

RONNY

(To Juliet in private. Bleak spotlights mark him and Juliet while the general light is a little bit faded.) Every morning is the same no matter what the weather is like, when I look at you.

JULIET

You are the perfect nerd, Ronny!

RONNY

When I love and respect a person, she can name me anything.

JULIET

(She laughs.) Perhaps you know that my name is Juliet? You are my chosen nerd and... like me for God's sake! (She takes Ronny's hand hidden below the table.)

LADY MACBETH

(She has her seat opposite Juliet and Ronny. Another spotlight is focused on her.) Juliet, I have been looking into your companies finances. You are bleeding! I would like to do something about it.

JULIET

(She blushes.) Ronny has told me that you got an exam in economics, before you went to the theatre.

LADY MACBETH

I have been searching for a talented business-partner, and right in front of me I found you! Your husband has always been relying too much on feelings, not knowledge.

JULIET

I am very flattered, Ronny thinks...

RONNY

(He interrupts Juliet.) Mother, you are interfering in our private life!

LADY MACBETH

(She gives Ronny a faint smile.) Politics is forbidden in my house!

RONNY

Please... Let us have our breakfast!

LADY MACBETH

You are still a chicken, Ronny, but now you have a chance to become a rooster!

JULIET

(She smiles and shows her teeth.) And I'm just a hen looking for some place to lay my eggs.

RONNY

This is really breakfast!

LADY MACBETH

If I buy 49 percent of your company's shares, that will take care of all your loans.

RONNY

We are having breakfast...

JULIET

(She raises, stretches her hand across the table, Lady Macbeth shakes it.) Our deal is done!

ERNEST

(The spotlights fade out and the general light increases. He has overheard Juliet and Lady Macbeth. To Ronny beside him.) Isn't your marriage made in heaven?

RONNY

Indeed, but for some years we are earthbound. And must catch what is flying by.

ERNEST

Mother was terribly ill yesterday, now she acts like she was crazy!

RONNY

Not at all: She suggested that I wasn't going to get this house and everything after her. What a relief!

ERNEST

Don't try to be ironic, Ronny. Well... if you try... do it better!

RONNY

Irony is a shy person's frankness.

ERNEST

(He smiles.) If you were to inherit mothers belongings, that would absolutely make us equals. Her acting is definitely brilliant sometimes.

RONNY

Mister Brown was a splendid actor until he got his knighthood. Perhaps she got sick over him yesterday, and let Earl take away his portrait.

ERNEST

(To Ronny, in a dubious voice.) Father, oh father, what have you done to me?

**RONNY**

He started your life some years ago! It wasn't a religious act I guess.

**JULIET**

(She has been talking to Earl and Fanny, seated beside Lady Macbeth, and now turns to Ronny.) Aren't you happy that you and I have a new business-partner? (Ronny nods, she whispers.) Your mother is a remarkable woman!

**RONNY**

My brothers were beaten yesterday, and she is still running away from them.

**JULIET**

You have always done your very best, isn't that true?

**RONNY**

That's why I got you to marry me. (She leans her head on his shoulder.)

**EARL**

(He stops talking to Fanny, to Juliet.) Look at that sweet couple! Mother got her birthday-toast the other day. Now it's time for the newlywed. (He raises his teacup.)

**JULIET**

We have known each other for one year, so we didn't rush. (She looks at Ronny.)

**EARL**

How unfortunate then that this is the first time you are here: I love quick decisions!

**JULIET**

The problem with wittiness is that it lacks a long term effect.

**RONNY**

Juliet, aren't you a little un-polite now? Or just un-political...

**JULIET**

Don't you see what Earl is trying to do with me?

**EARL**

(He smiles at Juliet.) There are men and men, and women for them. But every God laugh at their choices.

**LADY MACBETH**

(She has overheard the conversation and rises slowly from the table.) I think I'm done with breakfast. Let's have a second cup of coffee in the library! Or tea, if you like. (Everyone follows her out.)

Act 3, scene 2

(In the library: A bright spot on the wall above the mantelpiece marks the place where "Macbeths' portrait" was hanging. Lady Macbeth is having coffee in a 18<sup>th</sup> century sofa, between Ernest and Earl. Fanny and Felicia rest in classical armchairs opposite a round mahogany table. Juliet and Ronny stands by the window intimately talking.)

ERNEST

(To Lady Macbeth.) Where is father's portrait? Why doesn't it hang on its usual place?

LADY MACBETH

Earl has promised to update it for me. He's colleges at the university is going to help him.

ERNEST

I hope they handle it with care. He's not the only son! And Felicia says the painting is worth a lot.

LADY MACBETH

(She stares at Ernest.) Can't you imagine how I value it? After the first world war, when your father was in France visiting his mother, he bought it. Later he gave it to me as a wedding-gift, with some humour included: It's not a personal portrait of him, but the resemblance has always been remarkable!

ERNEST

But... but we have believed... all these years...

LADY MACBETH

Not Earl, he is too professional: He has told me that he understood everything long ago.

ERNEST

But why didn't he tell Ronny and me?

LADY MACBETH

He didn't even say something to his mother about it!

EARL

Ernest, haven't you noticed that reality is a dream, with illusions that may last forever, even as a blessing!

LADY MACBETH

(To Ernest.) As the years went by, I kept the story to myself, so you should have a good memory of your father!

ERNEST

I remember when I was ten and saw him playing a ghost craving for revenge: That memory means a lot more to me than a lousy picture!

**EARL**

He had a deep sense of humour our daddy: Isn't that what they would call him in another country across the sea? (He glances at Ernest.) I really like how he met mother: First as a child living in same building during the second world war, when he got wounded and shipped back here. Then several years later, as mother was an established actress and he unexpectedly came to her company, looking for a job.

**LADY MACBETH**

It was I who insisted that they should hire him at the theatre!

**ERNEST**

He saw the chance to change his name from Brown to Macbeth from the beginning!

**LADY MACBETH**

After one year, when we were deeply in love and planning to get married... He was acting brilliantly but unsophisticated... But I got pregnant, and at the same time we had an opportunity to play king and queen together on stage.

**ERNEST**

What was the name of that play?

**LADY MACBETH**

Be my guest and have a guess, Ernest! Your father was seriously funny. At that time I thought he was perfect for his role: Ambitious and easy to lead, owing to an unclear judgment.

**ERNEST**

(He shakes his head.) The sole of acting is betrayal!

**LADY MACBETH**

We acted out on stage and had a very quiet life at home. For many years, all those years... You, my three boys, are the evidence of that!

**EARL**

Mother may I have a word with you in the dining-room, after you finished your coffee? There are some practical things I want to ask you about, when handling the portrait.

**LADY MACBETH**

Yes Earl, I'm ready right now. (She finishes her coffee, raises and joins Earl out of the library.)

**ERNEST**

Just leave the rest of us here, looking at an empty spot on the wall!

\*\*\*

Act 3, scene 3

(Lady Macbeth is sitting at the table in the dining-room. Earl walks around, looking out the windows etcetera.)

LADY MACBETH

Come to the point Earl!

EARL

If the painting is genuine, what would you like to do with it?

LADY MACBETH

I don't care about more than the memory of your father.

EARL

But you have to realize that if it's made by Monet, it has a very significant value!

LADY MACBETH

I'm not going to sell it anyhow. When you guided me into the art-world... the other paintings in this house: Aren't they worth something?

EARL

I guess they are. But someone outside the family should not benefit from the portrait father gave you!

LADY MACBETH

(After a while.) I shall not change my will, Ronny gets it all. Felicia and Fanny have their fortunes to back up for Ernest and you, but Ronny and Juliet have financial troubles. (She stands up from her chair, while Earl takes a seat at the table.)

EARL

I think we must insure the painting, so nothing happens when we handle it at the university. It is the most valuable thing you own... and in the end you have to leave it behind.

LADY MACBETH

I don't worry. As they say in the United States: I give a shit about it! When I'm gone, the rest is silence, you know: At least for me!

EARL

Mother! What has become of you?

LADY MACBETH

Your father was a better actor than I am. When he was alive I missed him more often than now. That portrait is nothing else than used paint on a canvass!

EARL

I will make it fresh as new for you!

LADY MACBETH

Claude bought the painting partly because he was christened with same forename as Monet. And he fell in love with me... and wanted me to remember the day of our marriage with a person looking like him.

EARL

Was it fathers' French mother that came up with his name?

LADY MACBETH

Of course! As a child he was teased for that, growing up here on the east-coast with his British father, after his parents divorce. Among other things, he was called the canal-swimming frog. That hurt him badly, especially when he fought for this country in the second big war.

EARL

It must have been some sort of late-coming triumph for him, when he became a successful actor!

LADY MACBETH

Art may grow from mistreatment, but talent will not!

EARL

Why do you favour Ronny then? His handling of money is not very successful. He doesn't even care about how much your painting of father might be worth, if it's genuine!

LADY MACBETH

He has nothing compared to you and Ernest and isn't even aware of it! That's why your mother must act and make things right.

EARL

He hasn't even understood the full meaning of what is coming to him!

\*\*\*

RONNY

(He enters the dining-room through the open doors. To Lady Macbeth) All the ladies in the library miss you!

LADY MACBETH

And now they're missing you and Earl.

RONNY

Mother, you had your 70<sup>th</sup> birthday the day before yesterday... (He smiles.)

LADY MACBETH

Forgive me, Ronny: I've already forgotten about it. Was I older yesterday than today?

**EARL**

(To himself in a low voice, looking out the window.) That explains many things: Dementia has arrived and will be worse. (He turns around, looking at Lady Macbeth and Ronny, smiling at each other. To Lady Macbeth.) You have to protect your belongings mother: I'm going to insure the painting for you, when I bring it to the university.

**LADY MACBETH**

I am certain nothing can insure me from life running away. I will leave the painting as it is, without safety-guaranties. (Ronny laughs, but not loud.)

**RONNY**

I understand why Claude hated it, when he was mentioned as a greater actor than you!

**LADY MACBETH**

Was he? (She sobs.) I feel welcome to my death.

**RONNY**

Let it be for a while: You're in better shape than all of us.

**EARL**

Come on mother, let's run over to the library!

**LADY MACBETH**

Ronny and I will follow, you can take the lead. (Earl leaves the dining-room, without shutting the doors.)

\*\*\*

**LADY MACBETH**

(She sighs, after sweeping away a few tears.) Do you know how many times I tried to be unfaithful to Claude?

**RONNY**

Three times, mother. You have told me that you didn't succeed. The first time, you complained to father that you couldn't go through with it. He laughed and said that it was a nice try... The second time, I think you even kissed the poor fellow you choose, but then it ended. Father's reaction was that you must try harder, and leave your feelings behind. After the third time, you gave up, and father concluded that now you have some knowledge about yourself.

**LADY MACBETH**

Have I told you that? Life is but a saga on stage, performed by script-reading failures!

**RONNY**

If you ask any philosopher, life is barely an opportunity...



LADY MACBETH

I admired him so. He became a first class actor without any illusions. He just took parts from his own inner life and used it at the right moment.

RONNY

First hand knowledge is always better than speculations, even on stage.

LADY MACBETH

Fantasy, Ronny, you deny fantasy its necessary and right place. That is precisely why you shall have everything after me. That is absolutely my final will!

RONNY

Don't change your mind again! You have already given Earl the painting of father...

LADY MACBETH

I did not!

RONNY

... so let's hope you carry on, and get many more years from today. But don't forget Ernest!

LADY MACBETH

You're not even misguided, Ronny!

RONNY

Juliet is a dream I never want to wake up from. She is everything I didn't know I wanted. Like the safety-pin Ernest is looking for! So I have no space for your belongings in the future. If you don't ask me for help right now, then... that is my will. (They look at each other and smile. Lady Macbeth raises from her chair at the dinner-table, puts her arm under Ronny's and they leave the room.)

\*\*\*

Act 3, scene 4

(In the library: While Earl is gone to fetch Lady Macbeth, Ernest has made excuses to leave the room for the toilet. Felicia, Fanny and Juliet are alone.)

FELICIA

What does that bright spot on the wall really mean? (She points.) Has Lady Macbeth decided to sell the portrait of her husband?

FANNY

I am sure she keeps all things unchanged in this house.

FELICIA

I have looked at it so many times. I often think about the handsome man she married!

FANNY

Qualified paintings are mostly more than look-alikes under the surface.

FELICIA

He seems so young and fresh, and he is beautifully painted! Mister Brown, Sir Macbeth...

FANNY

Like every truth it has to undergo maintenance regularly.

FELICIA

I think the condition is no problem: All of us will be bitten by the years. Why shouldn't it show?

FANNY

Earl and his mother agreed otherwise.

JULIET

(She has been looking at the books on the shelves in the library, reading a bit here and there. She turns to Fanny and Felicia.) I think Lady Macbeth loves that portrait as the crowning of her husbands memory. It started their life together and became a very dear celebration of their unification.

FELICIA

What a blessing for you to understand our dear lady! And that she has bought so many of your clothes!

JULIET

Yes, isn't it? Sometimes lucky coincidences happen! The bad ones are too many.

FELICIA

Did I hurt your feelings?

**JULIET**

**I admire your intention!**

**FELICIA**

**Isn't there some kind of witchcraft that makes Lady Macbeth deliver what you and Ronny are longing for: This house with all of its content?**

**JULIET**

**I'm celebrating the living to the end! And Lady Macbeth is included.**

**FANNY**

**But what happens if the lady leaves us, and there is nothing said about the painting Earl is about to clean?**

**JULIET**

**I'm not invited to that dance...**

**FELICIA**

**If the painting is genuine, it's worth more than this whole estate!**

**JULIET**

**No-ones fortune lies in a grave!**

**FANNY**

**(To Felicia.) She has bewitched our lady with designed clothes!**

**FELICIA**

**It's better to be bewitched than condemned. Anyhow both spells shall vanish into thin air.**

**JULIET**

**What are you talking about?**

**FANNY**

**Secrets of the family are here to be kept...**

**FELICIA**

**... no outsider with witchcraft can intercept!**

**JULIET**

**You are crazy! Do you know what century we live in?**

**FANNY**

**(She and Felicia, both.) The future, the future! (They leave the room laughing. Juliet stays.)**

(Lady Macbeth and Ronny enter the room. Juliet is reading one of the books from the library's shelves.)

LADY MACBETH

Where is everybody? Where is Earl, Ernest and their wives?

JULIET

They went out looking for the missing painting of your husband. I think Earl put it in his car.

LADY MACBETH

Why are you standing here then?

JULIET

I like to stare at that empty space on the wall. (She smiles.) To me art stands for creative visions ending up in seductive illusions.

LADY MACBETH

Ronny, let's go hunting for those two who cannot run! (She takes Ronny by the hand and drags him out of the room. After a short while Earl enters.)

\*\*\*

JULIET

I hope your car was locked, and Fanny has got a key?

EARL

Of course she can get into our car.

JULIET

Why are Felicia and Fanny so curious about the painting you shall restore? (She glances into the book she's holding in her hands.) Isn't it enough that it is full of meaning for Lady Macbeth?

EARL

Time is some kind of paradox when people grow older: We are all approaching eternity. But nobody survives in there.

JULIET

You have a poets view! As far as I know only female beauty fades away and dies.

EARL

If you treat your beauty well, you shall find a growing economy in that!

JULIET

Are you implying that I might have a career as a prostitute? Some art for the sake of... what?

EARL

Most artworks I handle have a value that increases when they get older. You my dear definitely belong to them!

JULIET

I'm not that old yet. And I rarely use make-up! (She gives Earl a quick smile.)

EARL

I was talking about the coming years!

JULIET

The portrait of Lady Macbeth's husband... Has it aged with beauty, or even valuable grace?

EARL

Absolutely both, but anything benefits from refreshment: May I serve you an early drink before lunch?

JULIET

Only if you find me some sherry! (Earl opens a cupboard and hands her a sherry. After that he pours out a whiskey for himself.)

EARL

(He raises his glass.) To the eternal beauty!

JULIET

Thank you for your feelings! (She salutes Earl with her glass.)

EARL

Some women aren't recognized as beautiful until after their death. Because alive and in their prime they are dangerously attractive.

JULIET

Your words fly up... Or do they just fly by? Words without thoughts never to heaven go! (She puts back the book she was holding on the shelf.) I'm sure you have listened to many lines from your parents acting.

EARL

My father interpreted that sentence in his own way, so do I!

JULIET

And then he got famous for his seduction of the audience?

EARL

Juliet, you are very beautiful... my dead father used to explain that actor's difficulties by nature are different from play-writers: The egg is presented on stage with the hen standing outside, incapable of doing anything to bring it forward to its birth.

**JULIET**

(She embraces Earl.) Do you have a problem with those things? (Earl stays in her arms and starts caressing her back.) Don't push my sympathy too far!

**EARL**

You want this, I take that. I'm going to divorce my wife... You're the first one to know!

**JULIET**

(She loosens Earls embrace and looks intensely at him.) Seriously, do you see me as the first woman after your divorce?

**EARL**

Art is filled with betrayal, especially on stage. It's full to the brim of misinterpretations! But life is worse. On stage, actors at least try to play their part well.

**JULIET**

So that is why you love your fathers' portrait! And want to handle it with care.

**EARL**

My life hasn't been designed very well. You know more about colours and cloths than I about anything like that.

**JULIET**

But you worshiped your father!

**EARL**

When I saw him acting... many times... I got a very deep feeling of happiness, because he seemed so genuine. But at home he was just boringly kind. He took us out everywhere! He introduced us to the sea or some forest, with food in a basket. I hated that well managed calmness!

**JULIET**

But it is obvious that the portrait means something to you!

**EARL**

He is definitely not seen anymore, because he is dead! (He scratches his forehead.) Then crazy people pay anything for brushstrokes from the right hand. It is my life's mission to detect those foreign tracks. Amusing, isn't it?

**JULIET**

(She takes Earl in her arms again, caressing his face.) Aren't you a poor soul, looking for some fortune?

**EARL**

(He puts his hands on Juliet's hips.) Life has been hell. But I fought it well. We ought to do something about that together!

**JULIET**

**But what shall I tell Ronny then?**

**EARL**

**I can handle him. I've always done so. He is my little brother! Look at the sunbeam on the floor: You can't see that it moves. But if your eyes just leave it alone for a moment, the change is obvious. (Juliet looks at the floor, then steps forward to a window, searching for the sun.)**

**\*\*\***

Act 3, scene 5

(Lady Macbeth, her sons and their wives are seated around the table in the dining-room, ready for lunch. The servant comes and goes with different dishes while they chat. Everybody has changed cloths. Lady Macbeth wears a slim, modern and colour-full frock. Her three sons are clad in dark suits, and their wives are dressed in modern, well-cut frocks in different shades of grey. It's obvious that Lady Macbeth's sons and their wives are about to leave this Sunday afternoon.)

ERNEST

(To Lady Macbeth.) Have you recovered from yesterday's illness?

LADY MACBETH

Yes, thank you. Old girls shouldn't try to run away when younger boys follow.

ERNEST

But what happened?

LADY MACBETH

I just gave you my diagnosis, Ernest.

ERNEST

I'm sorry, mother. I didn't want you to try too much.

LADY MACBETH

Age is just for figuring out your shape. I can handle myself, especially at the tennis court...

ERNEST

Why don't you lead a laid back life? You have all the opportunities there is.

LADY MACBETH

A drunken poet once sang: you must leave life with a bang!

ERNEST

(He smiles.) I've always seen and remembered you as my only heritage.

LADY MACBETH

Then you have inherited something from your father: He was more than a stiff canvass.

EARL

(Spotlights are on him and Ernest, the general light is slightly faded. He bends over from the opposite side of the table to get closer to Ernest.) He was the canvas-man indeed, always on a picnic out in the woods with his boys.

ERNEST

Do you mean that he wrapped us up in canvass? So we would be calm as children. (He laughs.)



**EARL**

He was a colour-full person, with lots of nuances!

**ERNEST**

And you are going to refresh him, using the painting that is just a resemblance?

**EARL**

Every man... and woman... has their time in life: When we are dead, no memory has any meaning to us. But instead some living people work like hell, just to be remembered long after they are gone.

**ERNEST**

They fear being dead, and are fighting it! That is not vanity!

**EARL**

Sometimes you're wrong when you are right: Vanitas it is called in the art-world. (He smiles at first, but then gravely.) A few artists will be remembered forever, without their intention! It's our fault, we the living... I fear my childhood more than getting old: But we are all approaching eternity, and no one can survive in there.

**JULIET**

(Spotlights now focus on her and Earl. She has overheard Earl and Ernest. She speaks close to Earl's ear on her right side.) I hate theoretical discussions! Why can't you see what there is to see and be satisfied with that?

**EARL**

I see you, you see me, what else is there to feel?

**JULIET**

Are you playing the hound-dog, Earl? Looking for a bone?

**EARL**

Two pair of legs, dear Juliet! Two pair of legs...

**JULIET**

Running for bones or legs, isn't that for younger guns? A mature man should prefer catching paintings on a wall! They do hang around steadily. That suits them!

**EARL**

You sound like a shooting star!

**JULIET**

Rapidity does not fit a mature man, when his body becomes weaker. And he can't conceal it with his mouth!

EARL

Juliet, you attract men of all ages!

JULIET

(She smiles.) Wittiness without talent is unbearable: Doesn't that go for every artist?

EARL

My knowledge about that is below zero. But you have smashing legs, Juliet!

JULIET

Please, don't try to be a watchdog...

EARL

(He glances at his wife Fanny on the other side of the table.) I am going to divorce Fanny, and you are the reason why!

JULIET

(She stares Earl stiffly in his eyes.) You are out of your mind! Or madly, confusingly in love with an unreachable fable...

EARL

Vanity is all, but never worthy of fair play.

JULIET

You should hold on to your wife, Earl! Who else would ever be able to give you a position like yours? A professor teaching art can't live in a castle at the university.

EARL

Only emotions can stop life from being practical. Misguided emotions may explode in your face.

JULIET

Watch out then!

\*\*\*

JULIET

(Spotlights now focus on her and Ronny. She leans towards Ronny on her left side.) I must confess: I have been unfaithful to you.

RONNY

(He is astonished.) Then I have to kill you... Tell me, when did it happen? How many times?

JULIET

I can't explain the details.

RONNY

I wish not!

JULIET

It happened right now, in front of you! That's unforgivable, but the last time forever, I promise!

RONNY

Then I will have to kill you slowly, so I can enjoy it enough. A mans honour has to be defended!

JULIET

(She laughs and gives him a quick kiss.) You're so conservative...

RONNY

And so are my feelings for you!

\*\*\*

LADY MACBETH

(She looks around the table and notice that everyone has finished their lunch.) Ronny, would you please stay here for a moment, when the others leave for the library?

RONNY

Of course, I will gladly be of assistance with your itching zipper! (Lady Macbeth smiles. Everyone else leave the room slowly, talking. Ronny remains standing after following Juliet to the door, Lady Macbeth is seated.) Are you feeling well after your dizziness?

LADY MACBETH

I'm perfectly restored, thank you. But why are you so jealous of your brothers? I've noticed it for years.

RONNY

No I'm not... but perhaps... because they let you win the race today.

LADY MACBETH

I don't want to express what I mean, because then I may sound mean!

RONNY

I'm here to celebrate an old, but fit woman who thinks she is out of time, and always wins every race. And then I must butter it up by calling her my mother!

LADY MACBETH

Ronny, I hated the sight of you from the first day you were born: Your father told me that you were a late accident in our lives. And he left it to me to decide if you were ever to see this world.

RONNY

I've seen and heard enough already! So it's overdue for you to regret anything now.

LADY MACBETH

You will taste my revenge for that, when I'm leaving this house and everything here to you!  
And your brothers have to respect my decision!

RONNY

Oh no! Can't you at least give Earl the so called painting of father, so I get rid of one pain? I don't know what to do with it.

LADY MACBETH

No, never! I leave that problem with delight to you. (She tries to stand up, but sits down again. Ronny rushes to her side.)

RONNY

Come on now! Let's join my wife and the others.

LADY MACBETH

You have to excuse me. I must visit the bathroom first.

RONNY

Take my hand! I will guide you.

LADY MACBETH

Your father and I have owned this house since you were born. I'm used to find my own way.  
Stomach troubles are only temporary. (They both leave the dining-room.)

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Act 3, scene 6

(In the library: Lady Macbeth and Ronny are absent, the others have their coffee after lunch, standing and sitting while talking.)

**JULIET**

(She stares intensely at the so called portrait of Sir Macbeth, now hanging on the wall again, on its former place. To herself and Earl who is standing beside her.) To be or not to be, that is the question...

**EARL**

Wasn't it the serpent who said so, when he got stung in his arse, by a bumble-bee?

**JULIET**

(She turns to Earl.) But a serpent has no butt!

**EARL**

No, and there are no bees in your quote either: My father told me of his personal interpretation long ago. Now I gave you my alternative view!

**JULIET**

The funny thing is that you're not funny! I like your "fathers" look. (She glances at the portrait again.)

**EARL**

I was surprised when mother confessed to everyone that it's not our father. And that he gave the painting to her as a wedding-gift with a twist of humour, because of its similarity.

**JULIET**

So that's why you put it back on the wall, without cleaning it!

**EARL**

Don't misunderstand me! (He hesitates.) Juliet, you're the reason why I finally can put my divorce from Fanny behind me!

**JULIET**

Because I am younger than her and different? Oh, come on Earl! You know that many works of art get their proper value when they come of age. That goes for certain people too.

**EARL**

You're the loveliest creature I've ever seen! And your dresses fit in perfectly as an expression of your personality. Art for Gods' sake, art!

**JULIET**

Every painting gets older, and gathers dust... to dust.

**EARL**

But it was fresh from the beginning! And can inspire growing memories.

**JULIET**

Love and attraction doesn't work like that!

**EARL**

It could... it must... it should...

**JULIET**

When Ronny and I got married, we had the best of no reasons at all!

**EARL**

Any marriage becomes a sleeping-pill sooner or later. Let my words wake you up!

**JULIET**

My reality is a sober dream I will never wake up from! Even if it gets stiff as a painting on canvass!

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**LADY MACBETH**

(Lady Macbeth and Ronny enter the library, she holds his hand.) Ernest, would you be so kind to put that chair in front of my painting? (She points and seems a little bit weak.)

**ERNEST**

Certainly, but why do you want to watch a picture that just happens to look like father? It hasn't even been refreshed.

**LADY MACBETH**

Why is the answer to everything!

**ERNEST**

I'm concerned about your health. You look a little bit frail. Was it something you ate? Food-poisoning is nothing to play with.

**LADY MACBETH**

Age is such a poison. It starts working slowly from birth, and finally brings you to the end when you haven't the stamina to resist it!

**ERNEST**

But you won our running-competition!

**LADY MACBETH**

A victory that weakens the victor is hardly won!

ERNEST

(Ha laughs heartily.) Seriously milady, I can take care of that painting for you and shape it up. Earl, the expert should help you, but if he doesn't I will!

LADY MACBETH

It has aged with me, that's the reason why I told him to leave it alone.

ERNEST

(He raises his voice, turns to Earl.) Has mother decided to keep the painting as it is? And told you to put it back? (Earl shakes his head and continues talking with Juliet and Ronny.) Is it all right if I take it away?

LADY MACBETH

Sometimes people with knowledge don't listen to what they hear. But that helped me to understand in what way I love my picture. Let me rest here for a while!

ERNEST

(He stands silently, but when Lady Macbeth turns her head and smile at him he speaks.) I've had a lot of things to chew, even if it didn't stop my hunger...

LADY MACBETH

You're not behaving like a sensitive person Ernest, you're better than that!

ERNEST

Not in the long run: I lost it to you the other morning.

LADY MACBETH

(She smiles at Ernest) You have inherited one thing at least... or at last. Look at him on the wall: It is your father and not. It holds my view of him and not. It is very much like him but with age covering its surface. That is how memory works: Fresh under a surface of dirt!

ERNEST

If no one else wants that picture to stay alive, I must be allowed to take care of it.

LADY MACBETH

The painting has its place on this wall, because it goes with the house when I'm gone.

ERNEST

You're too romantic mother. Be practical instead! You have three sons who must manage whatever you leave behind.

LADY MACBETH

There is only room for romantic actions when the stomach is empty and the bills are not paid! I am younger than anyone living today and older than those who are dead. But my stomach gives me a problem right now. (She holds her hand on her belly.)

**ERNEST**

Have some water! (He gets a glass and gives it to Lady Macbeth.) It is my glass but I haven't touched it.

**LADY MACBETH**

Thank you. (She drinks some water,) You and Earl have a stable economy. So I will make all three of you even in my will. It has nothing to do with my feelings. You have to understand that!

**ERNEST**

Very considerate of you, mother, but not sensible... Finish your glass, you need it!

**LADY MACBETH**

(She drinks, and hands Ernest the empty glass.) That was helpful. (She stands up. To her three sons.) Will you follow me please gentlemen? Your ladies have to excuse us for a short while. I want to straighten out some things in the dining-room. And I am not talking about the tablecloth!

**ERNEST**

You have always been a joker, milady! (He joins Lady Macbeth, Earl and Ronny, and they all leave the room.)

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**FELICIA**

What was all that about?

**FANNY**

The picture on the wall! Don't you see? Earl told me he wouldn't have anything to do with it and hung it back.

**JULIET**

He paid respect for Lady Macbeths' memories!

**FANNY**

No painting fares well if it hangs untouched for decades! No matter if it is genuine or not. Earl could have engaged his colleges.

**FELICIA**

Earl told Ernest long ago that he is pretty sure it's genuinely made by Monet... or mister Money as Ernest likes to call him.

**JULIET**

Memories fade away, but kept pictures create new ones... as time goes by: Let Lady Macbeth own her views!

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## LADY MACBETH

(After entering the dining-room she stretches the table-cloth, before taking place at the table. She makes a gesture and Earl, Ernest and Ronny takes seats opposite her.) I remember your first days at school, when I went there hand in hand with each one of you. Your father was at the theatre, working as a director with many actors, and I was supposed to join him there later.

## RONNY

You had a yellow striped dress and it was raining. I refused to go under the umbrella. But you forced me to hold your hand. I liked to be wet on my head! Raindrops ran down my cheeks like tears. We laughed at each other!

## EARL

I don't recall my first day at school. Life has carried me along my way this far anyhow. I've talked to Fanny, and you might know it as well: We are getting divorced this autumn.

## ERNEST

Are you serious? But that's why you hung back the painting! Very honourably done...

## RONNY

(He laughs gently.) You can pee on a tree but it will remain standing.

## ERNEST

(To Ronny.) He is just trying to manipulate mother to feel sorry for him!

## RONNY

Half of the kingdom is his: I have seen his marriage-licence and its appendix.

## EARL

I don't want anything! I gave Fanny a written note where I regret it all and just like to be free. And the same goes for what you believed was fathers portrait. I can't sleep when I think about it.

## ERNEST

So you imagine you are going to survive as a single professor, teaching art? When this story is out among your students, that you refused to have your share of a painting by Monet, they will laugh and not listen to you any more!

## LADY MACBETH

My exit-time hasn't come yet. I can still make up my mind. (Her sons are silently watching her.) Ronny, you are the youngest, flamingly poor as a devil, without strong character like your father. That's why all my belongings shall go undivided to you: This is a challenge for the rest of your life! I just wanted to confirm that to you all. Let us join your wives now. (She raises but puts a hand on her stomach.) Ernest, please follow me up to my room. I have to rest for a moment. I shall give you my farewell later, when you all leave! (She seems weak. Ernest helps her when they leave the room. Earl and Ronny stand up, looking at each other.)

\*\*\* The End\*\*\*