Act 1 Scene V - Lady Macbeth’s soliloquy

She has just received a letter from Macbeth explaining the witches’ prophesies. She has heard that the King (Duncan) is to visit their castle. She has decided to kill, or get Macbeth to kill Duncan. Here her soliloquy (speech on her own) shows her desire to be “more male” and “less female” so she can kill Duncan.

Exit Messenger

The raven himself is hoarse
   The raven has a sore throat
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
   Because it has called out that Duncan is coming
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
   To stay in my castle. Come dark spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
   And make me less female/take away my femininity,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
   And from head to toe fill me
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
   With awful cruel intentions! Make my blood thick;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
   Stop any feelings of guilt
That no compunctious visitings of nature
   Don’t let any natural instincts
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
   Stop me from doing it
The effect and it! | Come to my woman’s breasts, |
   ... Come to my breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
   and change my breastmilk for hatred, you murdering spirits,
Wherever in your sightless substances
   Wherever hidden in the air
You wait on nature's mischief! | Come, thick night, |
   You wait for my call! Bring the night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
   And hide us in the dark smoke of hell
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
   That my sharp blade will not have to see the wound it will make
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
   And stop heaven seeing through the dark to try
To cry 'Hold, hold!'
   To tell me to “Stop, Stop!”
Hautboys and torches. Enter a Sewer, and divers Servants with dishes and service, and pass over the stage. Then enter MACBETH

**MACBETH**

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
If it actually was done, then its best

It were done quickly; if the assassination
It’s quick: if the assassination

Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
Could stop any consequences, and

With his surcease success; that but this blow
Quick and successful: if only this one stabbing

Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
Could be all that it is involved

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
Right here, right now

We'll jump the life to come. But in these cases
Then I would be in heaven. But in a case like this

We still have judgment here; that we but teach
We will still be judged; if you do

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
Evil bloody things, they come back

To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
To plague you: this fair justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
Means we are deciding to drink our
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;

Own poison. He's here trusting me twice;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
First, I am related to him and his subject,

Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Both strong reasons not to do it; and I am his host
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Who should protect him from a murderer
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Not kill him myself. Anyway, Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
Has been a modest King, has been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
So fair as a great King, that all his good deeds
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
Will beg like angels, with trumpets as tongues, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
The awful deed of murdering him
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
And everyone's pity will overpower
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Everything, or angels, riding
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
The invisible spirits of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
Shall show the horror of what I have done to everyone
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
That the world will be flooded with tears. I have nothing
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
To puncture my desire to be king, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
My ambition, which is so strong
And falls on the other.
It will ruin my chances of success.

Enter LADY MACBETH

How now! what news?
Oh hi! What’s happening?

LADY MACBETH
He has almost supp'd: why have you left the chamber?
He’s almost finished dinner: why did you leave the room?

MACBETH
Hath he ask’d for me?
Has he asked about me?

LADY MACBETH
Know you not he has?
Don’t you know he has?

Comment [24]: “spur ... the sides of my intent” the metaphor uses horse-riding imagery and suggests that Macbeth feels he is

Comment [25]: Numerous questions and the adjacency pairs juxtaposed by the previous soliloquy change the atmosphere on stage drastically emphasising the nervousness of the plotting couple
MACBETH
We will proceed no further in this business:
We will not continue with our plan.
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
He has given me promotions recently; and I am
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Well-regarded by many
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
And should enjoy the reputation that I have recently earned
Not cast aside so soon.
Not throw it away so quickly.

LADY MACBETH
Was the hope drunk
Were you drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
When you suggested it? Have you slept it off?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
Or are you waking now feeling all ill
At what it did so freely? From this time
About the great plan? From now
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
I will judge if you really love me. Are you scared
To be the same in thine own act and valour
To actually bravely do what
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
What you really want to? Can
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
You really live with yourself
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
As a coward and knowing it
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Always saying “I dare not” or “I would”? Like the poor cat i’ the adage?

MACBETH

Prithee, peace;
I beg you, stop
I dare do all that may become a man;
I do all that proves me to be a man
Who dares do more is none.
No one could do more.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was’t, then,
What animal was it
That made you break this enterprise to me?
That forced you to suggest this plan to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
When you dared to do it you were a real man

Comment [30]: Placing the words inside speech marks encourages an actor playing Lady Macbeth to mock or imitate a pathetic voice when saying the lines.

Comment [31]: The alliteration shows how much her accusations are upsetting him.
And, to be more than what you were, you would
And to aim to be the King, makes you even
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
More of a man. The situation
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
Was the same then, but you were fine about it
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Now the situation has arrived
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
And you give in. I have nursed a baby, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
How tender it feels to love a baby suckling you
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
I would, even while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
Have pulled my nipple from his toothless gums
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
And smashed the brains out, if I had promised you
Have done to this.
To do it.
MACBETH

If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH

We fail!

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
   But stay brave
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—
   And we won’t fail. When Duncan is sleeping
Where to the rather shall his day’s hard journey
   Which he will be after a day’s hard journeying
Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains
   While his guards
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
   Shall be given wine by me
That memory, the warder of the brain,
   And won’t remember anything
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
   A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
When they are sleeping like pigs.
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
Asleep and dead the world
What cannot you and I perform upon
   What will stop us doing anything to
The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
The unguarded Duncan? What will stop us planting
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
What we want on his guards, who will be blamed?
Of our great quell?

MACBETH

Bring forth men-children only;
I hope no more women are ever born
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Because your strength should only create
Nothing but males. Will it not be received,
Men. Won’t it seem that
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
The blood-covered guards have done it when we
Of his own chamber and used their very daggers,
Plant the daggers on them?
That they have done’t?

LADY MACBETH

Who dares receive it other,
Who will dare to suspect otherwise?
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
Because we will loudly grieve the next day.
Upon his death?

MACBETH

Comment [38]: Again the gender theme is presented as Macbeth calls for no more women to be born if they are all as ruthless as Lady M
I am settled, and bend up
   Ok I will do it
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
   And will put everything into this terrible thing
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
   Go now and pretend
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

Exeunt
Social context:
Shakespeare writes this in early 1600s. King James I of England was Scottish. His mother Mary Queen of Scots was executed by her sister Elizabeth I. Shakespeare could be suggesting that Lady Macbeth is like Elizabeth I and blood-thirsty, able to murder a relative to have power.

Before the reign of the Tudors (Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VII, Mary and Elizabeth) the ruthless powerlust of British rulers was evident in the Houses of York and Lancaster. Brothers murdered brothers to hold power.

Elizabeth I was also the longest reigning queen of England when she dies. She held power as a female in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. Perhaps Shakespeare is reflecting the power she showed as a woman in Lady Macbeth’s “unsex me here” speech.

James I was really scared of witches, having written the book “Daemonologie” so Shakespeare appeals to his patron King by having witchcraft and evil spirits in the speech.
Beloved sweetheart bastard. Not a day since then

I haven't wished him dead. Prayed for it

so hard I've dark green pebbles for eyes,

ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with.
Spinster, I stink and remember. Whole days in bed cawing Nooooo at the wall; the dress yellowing, trembling if I open the wardrobe; the slewed mirror, full-length, her, myself, who did this to me? Puce curses that are sounds not words. Some nights better, the lost body over me, my fluent tongue in its mouth in its ear then down till suddenly bite awake. Love's hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting in my face. Bang. I stabbed at a wedding cake. Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon. Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks.