

# **THE SCOTTISH PLAY**

**A comedy**

**by Lee Blessing**

**\*\*\*\* September 2005 version \*\*\*\***

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**JACK BONNER.....late 30's, associate director of a festival theater**

**ALEX McCONNELL....60's, industrialist, festival theater founder**

**BILLY NEIL.....50's, artistic director of the theater**

**FRED OBERG.....20's, actor, bartender, handyman**

**PEWTER PIPER.....23, Jack's personal assistant**

**MAUD MECKLY.....40's, actress**

**ZITA VIRAGO.....30, actress**

**EDEN HUNT.....20's, actress**

**PATH SANDERSON.....late 20's, up-and-coming film/tv leading man**

**MORGAN BONNER.....13, Jack and Maud's son**

## **TIME**

**The Present**

## **PLACE**

**Northernmost Shakespeare Festival  
Bannockburn, Michigan**

# *Act One*

## SCENE ONE

(A corner of The Dark Thistle, a British-style pub in upper Michigan. It's oaky, dimly-lit and deeply comforting in an alcoholic sort of way. Around a table sit ALEX McCONNELL, BILLY NEIL and JACK BONNER. Their glasses are raised and almost touching—in mid-toast. ALEX and BILLY have shots. JACK has orange juice. FRED OBERG, in an apron and holding an empty tray, looks on).

ALEX

To thirty years!

BILLY

Thirty years of Northernmost!

(They clink glasses and down their drinks)

ALEX

Finest scotch in the world! Single malt, old as a young man.

(with a laugh)

Would that we were, eh?

(of the scotch)

Sorry you're missing out on this, Jack.

JACK

I'm not.

ALEX

Another round, Freddy.

(a bit drunkenly, as FRED takes the empties and goes)

Jack, I wish you could have been with us at the beginning. My family spent generations cutting down every white pine in the U.P. and northern Wisconsin. It left me rich of course, but rich is not everything. It doesn't guarantee a

ALEX (cont'd)

cultural legacy. I had to make that myself. I created my theater. A living monument—that's what I wanted, for the whole community. And that's exactly what I got.

BILLY

You know, this is wonderful, Alex, but my goodness—time's simply flying. We should talk about next year's season, don't you think?

ALEX

(continuing his reverie)

I'll never forget our first production: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All that love and magic and mystery. Not to mention the donkey head.

JACK

Alex—

ALEX

What I am saying is, there were all these *feelings* we had, but we'd never heard them spoken out loud. Not before this theater. Not before . . .

(laughs)

Well, we'd certainly never heard anything like it, believe you me. What a thrill to watch a whole audience suddenly realize what they were worthy of hearing. God, it made me proud. And I've been giving it to 'em for thirty years.

(to BILLY, sentimentally)

'Course, I didn't do it alone. Billy. Billy Neil. You've been with me all the way. You stood at my side, staring at an empty timbered lot, with nothing but a dream in your heart and a green card in your pants. Remember?

BILLY

I do indeed. You paint a lovely picture.

ALEX

I plucked you out of a forty-seat London shit hole and put eight hundred seats in front of you. Give me Shakespeare, I said. And by God, you did. Tragedies, comedies, histories, collaborations—hell, you gave me plays he barely sneezed on.

BILLY

We wanted to do the full canon—

ALEX

And we have. We've done them all. All except one.

JACK

All except one.

BILLY

Gentlemen, I'm well aware there is one play by Shakespeare which we've never produced. And it gives me the greatest possible pleasure to tell you the time has finally come to repair this terrible omission.

(ALEX and JACK look at each other, surprised)

ALEX

You're going to do it?

BILLY

I most certainly am.

JACK

You're kidding.

BILLY

I've never been more serious in my life. Next summer, the Northernmost Shakespeare Festival shall begin its thirtieth season by completing our portrait of the Bard of Avon with the lone, exquisite example of his genius to have eluded us thus far. Yes, gentlemen, our first production will be . . . *Edward the Third!*

ALEX

Edward? The . . . Third? Is that by Shakespeare?

BILLY

*Finally* it has been attributed to Shakespeare! After years of debate. Isn't it glorious?

ALEX

Edward?

JACK

The Third?

BILLY

Oh, it gets a bit stiff here and there I admit, but Jack and I will whip it into shape. Jack, I want you to play Edward. You can still direct two shows later in the season—

JACK

Billy—

BILLY

*Edward III* at Northernmost! Can you imagine the excitement?

ALEX

Billy—

BILLY

Yes?

JACK

Isn't there something you've forgotten?

BILLY

Forgotten?

ALEX

Another play of Shakespeare's that, um . . . we've never done?

BILLY

What do you mean?

JACK

He means *Macbeth*.

(BILLY, shocked to hear this name, instantly grabs the salt shaker, pours some into his hand and throws it over his left shoulder. He turns around three times very rapidly, then spits on the floor)

ALEX

Billy, stop it. We're not even in a theater.

JACK

Will you sit down?

BILLY

Not if you mention that name!

(BILLY goes and spits in each of the corners  
of the room)

JACK

Ok, ok—we'll call it the Scottish Play.

BILLY

It's the most cursed play in history. I could tell you stories—

ALEX

We know the stories—

BILLY

Fires, floods, madness, death—

JACK

Kelsey Grammar—

BILLY

Anything can happen! I've seen it over and over. When you perform that play,  
calamity follows. No theater I head will ever produce the Scottish Play.

JACK

So the Northernmost Shakespeare Festival of Bannockburn, Michigan—Alex  
McConnell founder—in thirty years will have produced every Shakespearean  
play except—

(as BILLY grabs the salt shaker again)

. . . you know what.

BILLY

I can't believe you're bringing this up again. The Scottish Play was never  
meant to be produced. It was meant to be read, on a heath somewhere, by  
torchlight, then burned. It's the King Tut's tomb of plays. You should thank  
me that I've never allowed it to be done here. The whole town should thank me.

ALEX

Billy, what's happened to you? You always understood what I wanted. You supported me. If I had a dream, you were the one who made it come true.

BILLY

I'm sorry, Alex. Not this dream. Never.

ALEX

I don't know what to say.

JACK

Hard to believe you'd sacrifice all that just to foster a superstition.

BILLY

It's not a superstition! In 1672 a Dutch actor in the title role stabbed the actor playing Duncan to death—

JACK

It was a love triangle. Could've happened in any play—

BILLY

When Olivier played it, he was nearly crushed by a falling stage-weight!

JACK

Like *that's* never happened—

BILLY

When Gielgud did the role, two of the witches, Duncan and the set designer all *died*. They reused the set in a comedy, and the lead in *that* production died.

JACK

People live, people die. The point is—

BILLY

Orson Welles used African drummers and a real witch doctor. When a critic gave them a bad review, they cursed that man, and *he* died—!

JACK

This is magical thinking! Any show that uses broadswords will have its share of accidents—



BILLY

Actors turn mute. They develop high fevers—

JACK

It's often played with fog, in dim lighting—

BILLY

I can't tell you how many Lady M's I've seen go mad. The first actor ever to play the role died before he could step on stage—!

JACK

It's one of Shakespeare's shortest plays. People choose it at the last minute, they're under-rehearsed—

BILLY

In 1947 an actor was killed—run through—during a performance. His ghost now haunts that theater every Thursday!

JACK

None of this means the *play* is unlucky—

BILLY

Charleton Heston *burned his groin!*

(JACK and ALEX never heard this one before)

ALEX

Gentlemen, let's try to discuss this a little more dispassionately, if we could.

JACK

Thank you. Let me just observe that any play which has been done for four hundred years will experience a few disasters. I'm sure you could find as many for *A Comedy of Errors*. The point is, thousands of productions of this play have been performed without the slightest incident. Millions of people around the world have been treated to some of Shakespeare's most exquisite poetry and thrilled to the dark, tumultuous world of bloody betrayal in the Scottish highlands.

BILLY

Lowlands.

JACK

Whatever. Alex, I've had a great run here at Northernmost, but if we don't open our thirtieth anniversary season with a production of—

(as BILLY swiftly pours salt into one hand)

The play currently under discussion, then regrettably, I'm going to have to resign.

ALEX

Billy? What do you say to that?

BILLY

What can I say? I'm crushed. I . . . Jack, you've been like a son to me. You're my protege. I've always imagined that when I stepped down . . . Still, if you feel so strongly, then all I can do is wish you the very best. Who knows? A change of scene may be good for you. What's the point of being artists if we don't stretch ourselves?

JACK

Tell him, Alex.

BILLY

Tell me what?

ALEX

Jack and I have been talking.

BILLY

Jack and you?

ALEX

We've decided that however you may feel, the most appropriate way to celebrate our thirtieth anniversary is to begin the season with a production of the Scottish Play.

BILLY

You're joking.

ALEX

Jack will perform the lead. We'd like you to direct.

BILLY

Never.

JACK

This isn't negotiable, Billy.

ALEX

I've waited too many years for you to grow up over this curse nonsense. I'm not waiting anymore. Do the play or you're out. I'll make Jack the new artistic director.

BILLY

You'd do that to me? After thirty years?

ALEX

Billy, they're ridiculing me. All around the country, wherever I go. They think we're afraid of our own shadow up here. The folks in town have been asking me about it for years. I can barely look them in the eye. I made a pledge to deliver all of Shakespeare to the people of Upper Michigan, and I—

BILLY

How can you do this? It's me. It's Billy. I cut those trees down with you! I can still hear our chainsaws sing together—

JACK

Oh, for *Christ's sake!*

(as BILLY looks at him, surprised)

My God, I've had my fill of you! I've been working here for ten years. *Ten years!* And every year you say, "Jack my boy, I think this is it. I think I'll hang 'em up after this season". You know how many jobs I've turned down waiting for this one? I used to be a hot property Mr. Neil, but not anymore! They stop calling after awhile, you know? They just stop calling.

BILLY

(stricken at this betrayal)

You want my job. That's all this is about. It's a shameless grab for power. Admit it!

JACK

What's the point of being artists if we don't stretch ourselves?

BILLY

(to ALEX)

Alex—he wants my job!

ALEX

He can have it too, if he'll do *Macbeth*.

(Trembling, BILLY holds his fist out over the table. Slowly he lets the salt he poured into his hand earlier pour out directly in front of Jack. BILLY turns and walks out. He runs into FRED, who's entering with a tray with three drinks. The tray and drinks go flying, smashing to the floor. FRED stands, surprised)

FRED

Another round?

(Lights shift and the scene changes before our eyes)

## SCENE TWO

(The following spring. The Festival office. Banners, posters, etc. from past productions festoon the place. PEWTER is at her desk, on the phone. She's a bright-faced young woman in overalls and a sweater. Her desk overflows with paperwork. Nearby is JACK's desk, also inundated with papers)

PEWTER

(on phone, making notes)

Ok. Ok. Got it. Ok. Thanks. If you could fax their resumes, that'd be great. What? No, no—we're fine. It's hardly snowing at all anymore. And the fire's been out for hours. Thanks for asking, though. 'Bye.

(As she hangs up, FRED enters with a large banner which says *MACBETH*. It's frozen solid; icicles hang from it)

FRED

Hey, Pewter.

PEWTER

I thought you were helping Jack in the basement.

FRED

He wanted me to put this in the storeroom, so it can thaw out.

(carrying it offstage)

It's so cold outside! They say it's the worst spring blizzard ever. In May, for God's sake.

PEWTER

(looking up a number)

I'm on the phone, Fred.

FRED

(reentering)

This morning was the first time I ever used snowshoes.

FRED (cont'd)

(as PEWTER dials another number)

I knew you'd be here; that's why I tried it. I could've frozen to death.

PEWTER

(a year-old refrain)

We're just friends, Fred.

FRED

Seventy-two inches in thirty hours. I'm from Virginia. I've never seen anything like this. Hey, after work do you want to play hockey on top of the Shakespeare garden?

PEWTER

Go help Jack in the basement.

(hanging up)

*Damn!* I don't believe it—the phone went dead!

FRED

I'm not surprised. There's a lot of ice on everything. Plus some of the trees are still smoldering. What did the fire inspector say?

PEWTER

(as she looks in her bag for a cell phone)

He found a charred squirrel.

FRED

A squirrel?

PEWTER

It probably chewed through the insulation on the power line. If there was an arc near a pile of sawdust—

FRED

A pile of—?

PEWTER

It is a scene shop. At least it was. *Damn* it—where's my cell phone?

FRED

(with a confidential nod upstairs)

So, no . . . arson?

PEWTER

Not unless the squirrel had criminal intent.

FRED

At least nobody was hurt.

PEWTER

Yeah, but all the sets are gone. Shouldn't you be helping Jack and the plumber?

(She finds her cell and immediately dials)

FRED

I'm waiting 'til they're done fighting over the frogs.

PEWTER

The what?

FRED

The frogs. There's hundreds, maybe thousands, down there. One of the basement windows was open. When the blizzard hit, they must've all piled in—except for the ones that were, you know, burned up in the fire. It was like a total miracle the pipes broke last night. Gave those little guys all the water they needed. Jack wants the water pumped out, but the plumber wants to leave a little. You know, like a pond?

PEWTER

I'm on hold Fred, don't bother me— *A pond?*

FRED

Those frogs are so heroic. They're like survivors, you know?

PEWTER

(getting someone on the line)

Hello? This is Pewter Piper again. Yes, from Northernmost. Can I just talk to her? Is she talking yet? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh . . .

FRED

But you know frogs. If they don't get water, their skin dries up. They desiccate. It's not a pretty sight.

PEWTER

*I'm on the phone.*

(on phone)

I see. I see—but she *is* conscious? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh . . .

FRED

Frogs get flat when they dry out. Like little Frisbees.

(as BILLY, in silk robe and fur-lined boots,  
enters unseen and refills his coffee cup)

It'd be such a shame. Right now they're down there swimming around, croaking their little lungs out—

BILLY

Who? Jack and the plumber?

FRED

No, the frogs.

BILLY

Can you *believe* all the snow? Not very seasonable. A shame the fire trucks couldn't get through the drifts. I always loved that little scene shop.

PEWTER

(on the phone)

Please, *please* give her my number. Have her call me.

(hanging up, to BILLY)

The fire inspector says you're off the hook.

BILLY

Oh, you suspected me? That's so sweet. But I don't have to go outside to undermine Jack. I can do it from the security of my own warm, cuddly office.

PEWTER

How long are you going to sleep up there?

BILLY

Do I have Jack's word he won't change the lock the moment I leave?



PEWTER

Jack doesn't think the title of "artistic director emeritus" even exists.

BILLY

We're exploring new territory. Can I help it if Alex couldn't bear to kick me out entirely?

PEWTER

Jack says he wants to make you janitor emeritus.

BILLY

Thanks, but I seek no further glories than to rest on my fainting couch, watching Fate's white, fluffy judgment float down from above.

FRED

Jack says this weather's normal for the Upper Peninsula—

BILLY

In *January*.

(PEWTER's cell phone rings)

PEWTER

Hello—? Oh, thank God it's you! Can you walk? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh . . .

FRED

Did you see the fire last night?

BILLY

(gesturing upstairs)

I had a wonderful view. It was all so . . . so fiery! Still it's sad, isn't it? Macbeth's entire castle . . .

FRED

Who's going to tell Alex?

BILLY

I left a message at his hotel.

(with a self-satisfied chuckle)

I never dreamt Alex would take me up on my suggestion. "Raid Hollywood for

BILLY (cont'd)

your Macbeth,” I told him. Now he’s wasting oceans of time chasing after God knows what for his leading man. Who knew underneath all that dedication to Shakespeare Alex would be such a starfucker?

PEWTER

(on the phone)

Ok, ok—when you get there, *call* me. Be sure to call. Hello? Hello—? *Damn it!*

(hangs up)

I can’t do all of this by myself! Why isn’t Jack up here? I can’t believe we’re having all this *bad luck!!*

(JACK enters from the basement—soaked from head to toe in something very watery and very dark)

BILLY

Jack?

PEWTER

Omigod!

JACK

Not luck. Coincidence.

FRED

(as PEWTER runs for the storeroom)

What happened?

JACK

I slipped. On a frog. It was a *coincidence!*

FRED

Is the frog ok?

(as JACK stares at him)

I . . . should go help the plumber.

(FRED rushes out as PEWTER rushes back in with a towel and starts toweling off JACK)

BILLY

Slippery creatures, frogs. Good thing you didn’t croak.

BILLY (cont'd)

(as JACK's gaze shifts to him)

Frogs, fire, ice: things seem to be getting a little biblical around here.

JACK

You I'm going to toss in a snowbank.

BILLY

Wait—I'll call the papers. I'm sure Alex would love that kind of publicity: "Billy Neil Driven From Theater He Built". Photo of me half naked, freezing . . . you with a scourge in your hand—

JACK

Once this show is open, and it's a hit, and you are *sooo* history, I'm going to laugh about this pathetic routine of yours.

BILLY

False bravado doesn't become you, Jack. Why not drop this hopeless production and replace it with *Edward III*? I'm ready to direct. We can use the same cast—

JACK

*NEVER!!!*

BILLY

(enjoying this immensely)

Very well. Perhaps I can be of some assistance to the plumber.

(JACK sits at his desk as BILLY exits)

PEWTER

There's a robe in the storeroom—

JACK

Where's Lady Macbeth? She was supposed to be here two days ago.

PEWTER

She's in Utah.

JACK

*Utah—!?!?*

PEWTER

She got a late start. And remember, she's afraid to fly. And then the train had some kind of accident—

JACK

Accident!?

PEWTER

Just a tiny one. She's fine. Both her ankles are sprained, but she should be walking on her own in a week . . . to ten days. So anyhow, they got a new engine, and everybody's back on the train—

JACK

Thank God.

PEWTER

Except her. She's afraid of trains now. But they put her on a bus instead. I think she's between St. George and, um . . . Orem?

JACK

When will she actually be here?

PEWTER

They're guessing maybe three days. The weather's kind of bad out there.

FRED

(rushing in)

Jack! Good news! The plumber thinks he can leave a little pond that won't get in the way hardly at all. It'll give us time to catch and release all the frogs.

JACK

No frogs!

FRED

But—

JACK

I'm in a meeting, Fred. A Lady Macbeth meeting.

FRED

Oh, sorry. Was there another . . . coincidence?

JACK

It's nothing! She's on her way!

FRED

Remember that first Lady Macbeth? That was one *hell* of a coincidence.

JACK

Back to work, Fred.

FRED

I mean, lightning strikes a lot of crazy things, but the button on top of her softball cap? That was a new one.

PEWTER

Fred.

FRED

Most people don't even know those things are metal—

JACK

Save the frogs, Fred. Save all the frogs—ok? Just *GO!!*

FRED

Great! Thanks, Jack!

(FRED hurries out. JACK notices PEWTER  
staring at him)

JACK

What are you looking at?

PEWTER

(busying herself)

Nothing.

JACK

Things are going very well.

PEWTER

Do you need a backrub?

JACK

God, yes.

(PEWTER springs from her seat and starts eagerly rubbing JACK's shoulders. He closes his eyes, giving in to the sheer relief of it)

JACK (cont'd)

Yes. Oh . . . yes! This is not the only reason you're my personal assistant, but this is a *very good reason*. Oh . . . !

PEWTER

It took me nearly two hours to get here this morning. I knew it would take that long to dig through all the drifts.

JACK

You're a good worker.

PEWTER

I knew you'd be here. This is your big chance; you're not going to blow it.

JACK

You're very loyal.

PEWTER

I'm in love with you, Jack.

JACK

Can you do it more on the left?

PEWTER

I dream of you all the time. I think of you with every breath. You're the reason I put my clothes on in the morning and take them off at night.

JACK

Do my shoulders now?

PEWTER

I'd do anything for you, Jack. If you told me to kill people, I would kill them.

JACK

(putting his hands on hers)

Pewter, remember the talk we had?

PEWTER

I'm trying to forget it.

JACK

There was a time in my life, not so very long ago, when I might have taken you up on that offer to kill people for me, or give yourself to me in a frankly sexual way—

PEWTER

Yes—!

JACK

*But . . . but*—that was the old Jack. The one who spent too much time over at the Dark Thistle, having too much to drink and messing up his life and the lives of others—

PEWTER

Mess me up, Jack. Mess me up right now.

JACK

No. This is the new, improved Jack. This is the Jack who wants to help you in your work, teach you career skills, find you a nice, appropriate guy—

PEWTER

Let's make snow angels. Naked ones.

JACK

Attractive as that offer sounds, I'm going to decline and ask you to move away from my desk and back towards yours.

PEWTER

It's so unfair! Why did I have to meet you *now*?

JACK

I've had the same thought—

(as she advances again)

*But*, though I'm complimented, the answer is no. Let's go back to work.

JACK (cont'd)

(as she rises reluctantly and moves toward her desk)

Thanks for the back rub.

PEWTER

Want another one?

JACK

Call that plow guy again. Find out how soon he can dig Banquo and Lady Macduff out of the lodge.

PEWTER

I already talked to him. He's pretty busy. Hopes to have the lodge clear by tomorrow. Day after, at the latest.

JACK

So half my cast doesn't exist yet and the other half's under six feet of snow?

PEWTER

Sorry—

JACK

How long's it going to be *cold!*?

PEWTER

One more day. Then a heat wave's coming. They say the whole town could flood when the snow melts.

JACK

Great. Ok, call the casting director. Find out what's happening with the witches.

PEWTER

Oh—we got 'em! They're all signed. Billy took care of it.

JACK

*Billy--?!*

PEWTER

He did it before I got here today. I'm sorry.



JACK

Who'd he hire?

PEWTER

Oh, um . . . I just wrote it down . . .

JACK

*Pewter--!*

PEWTER

I'll find them!

BILLY

(returning from the basement)

Fred is positively glowing, Jack. I think you've made a good decision. Add a few toads, newts and bats, and we can make the witch's brew right down there. "So foul and fair a day I have not seen".

JACK

I told you not to quote the Scottish play.

BILLY

You're not becoming superstitious, are you?

JACK

Never. But every time you do that--

(trying to open a drawer, which sticks)

*Damn--!!*

BILLY

Trouble?

JACK

It's just sticking a little. It was fine a minute ago . . .

(JACK pulls harder. It won't budge. As he struggles, BILLY stares at one of the banners)

BILLY

*The Tempest*. There's a wonderful play--and not cursed at all. Well, maybe for you--

JACK

(still fighting with the drawer)

Don't talk about *The Tempest*!

BILLY

(to JACK, of the drawer)

Can I help? It's my theater too.

JACK

Not anymore!

BILLY

Funny thing about a curse—

JACK

There's *no curse!!*

(as he continues to struggle)

You just don't get it, do you? Billy Neil time is over. No more mumbo-jumbo. No more superstition, cowering in the corners—

(as he struggles, through clenched teeth)

Just the healthy clang of broadswords heralding a proud and happy production of one of the Bard's finest—! Happy audience, happy producer, happy director, happy . . . fucking . . . *cast!!!*.

(The drawer suddenly flies out, scattering  
JACK and the papers all over the floor)

PEWTER

Oh—!

JACK

Find those names!

(picking up the papers as BILLY watches)

You know what I say, Billy? I say, bring it on. You hear me? Bring it on. I don't care how much shit you, or coincidence, or bad luck or the Curse of the Scottish Play throws my way. I am going to laugh in all your faces. Because you know what? This production is making me famous. We're getting mentions in *Variety* just for *doing* this play. *Variety*, hell—we were in *USA Today* last week! My agent's calling me again. We're getting a star for Macbeth, and when this thing opens the press is going to be crawling all over this town. Bring it on, Billy. Just bring it on. I'm ready for whatever you got.

PEWTER

Here's the names! Of the witches, I mean.

JACK

(replacing the refilled file drawer)

Excellent. Who is it?

PEWTER

Um . . . let's see, it's Maud Meckly, Zita Virago—is that how you say it?  
(as BILLY nods, beaming)

And, um . . . Eden Hunt.

JACK

Those are my witches?

PEWTER

What's wrong?

JACK

Those are my *witches*?!!

BILLY

Three for three, Jack! They were all available. Can you believe the luck?  
And they're so much more experienced than the actors you wanted.

JACK

You wouldn't.

BILLY

Had to. They needed a decision. You were still fighting your way through the snow. Sometimes an emeritus has to step in and—

JACK

Pewter! Call the casting director! Tell 'em we changed our minds.

BILLY

I don't think Alex would appreciate that. You know how much he loves Eden.

JACK

I'll never forgive you for this.

BILLY

Enjoy, Jack! With my compliments!

PEWTER

They're supposed to be good. Two of them even worked here.

BILLY

They're his ex-wives, dear. All his ex-wives! Fair is foul and foul is *fair!*

JACK

I told you not to quote the Scottish—!!

(He slams the file shut, catching a finger. His mouth opens in a silent scream. BILLY exits, smiling.  
PEWTER stands over JACK, writhing on the floor)

PEWTER

You don't have to pay me for today.

(Lights shift as the scene changes)

## SCENE THREE

(The rehearsal room. It's not a lovely room of course—just the traditional, undistinguished, open space for rehearsal. A number of Samsonite folding chairs sit around the room, perhaps a covered upright piano, old floor plans for sets, lighting plots pinned to the walls, etc.) (A long table has been set with coffee, tea, water, soft drinks, juice, bagels, rolls—the usual for a cast meet-'n-greet. Only three people are present: MAUD MECKLY, forty-something with a practiced, unsparing glare; ZITA VIRAGO, with dark, dramatic looks, considerably MAUD's junior; and finally EDEN HUNT, so wholesome she's almost prurient. They are all beautiful, but EDEN is beautiful and very young. They're all in a bad mood)

(They sit as far from each other as possible. EDEN, who's just arrived, has her luggage with her—it's hot pink. They wait silently, looking idly around the room. Whenever one looks away, the other two stare at her. After a moment, EDEN gets up and goes to the table. She inspects the food and drink selections and reaches for a roll)

MAUD

(with a vague air of disapproval)

Hm.

(EDEN's hand retreats from the roll as she looks around at MAUD, who's already looked away as if she'd said nothing. After a moment, EDEN's interest returns to the table. She reaches for a bagel)

ZITA

(same tone as MAUD)

Hm.

(EDEN's hand instantly retracts from the bagel. She looks at ZITA, who pretends to be inspecting her shoe. Scowling at both of them, she sits again)

without taking anything from the table. They wait as before. After a moment, MAUD sighs, rises and moves to the table. She moves to pour herself a cup of coffee)

EDEN

Hm.

(MAUD gives EDEN a long look. EDEN stares right back at her. MAUD puts down the coffee pot and picks up the de-caf pot instead.

ZITA

(with a it's-still-bad-for-you tone)

Hm.

(MAUD puts down the de-caf and picks up a bottle of water. She also takes a banana)

ZITA

(with an isn't-that-interesting tone)

Hm.

(MAUD instantly starts to put down the banana, then reconsiders and starts to peel it. As she does so, both the others respond)

EDEN and ZITA

(in a more elaborate tone)

Hmmmmmmm . . .

(Glaring at them both, MAUD puts the partially peeled banana back down. ZITA quickly rises and goes to the table. ZITA picks up the peeled banana and, staring MAUD right in the eye, suddenly snarfs down the whole Thing in one sexually triumphant gulp. ZITA puts the peel into MAUD's hand and heads back to her chair. MAUD throws the peel, hitting ZITA squarely in the back. EDEN can't help but laugh. ZITA turns angrily, picking up the peel and winging it at EDEN. As ZITA moves toward MAUD, EDEN jumps up and grabs a handful of

granola from an open container on the table and tosses it at ZITA. ZITA ducks, and the granola hits MAUD instead. ZITA turns on EDEN again, who grabs a cruller and holds it out defensively towards ZITA. ZITA bites the cruller, then grabs both it and EDEN. ZITA tries to stuff the cruller into EDEN's mouth as EDEN struggles. EDEN grabs the cruller and throws it in MAUD's direction. All three women rush to the table and grab some sort of weapon. MAUD grabs paper plates and hurls them like Frisbees at the others. EDEN grabs a small plastic knife and paper plate and uses them as sword and shield in a defensive posture, and ZITA grabs an open bowl of yogurt and readies herself to start flinging it at the others.

JACK strides in on this tableau. He stops when he sees the three of them together—a vision he'd heretofore seen only in very bad dreams)

JACK

Oh— Well, so. I see all my . . . witches are here.  
(shaking himself into action)  
Let's get to it, then. Welcome to—

(PEWTER rushes in with a fistful of pink memo slips)

PEWTER

Jack—

JACK

Not now, Pewter.  
(back into it)  
Welcome to Northernmost Shakespeare Festival's initial production of the season, *The Tragedie of Mac*—  
(interrupting himself)  
Pewter, wasn't this supposed to be a full cast call?

PEWTER

I've been trying to tell you. They're all sick.

JACK

What?

PEWTER

(brandishing the memos)

They've got the flu. All of them.

JACK

All of them?

PEWTER

All except Banquo. He slipped in Duncan's upchuck and fell down the stairs.

JACK

Is he hurt?!

PEWTER

Slight concussion. He'll be fine in a couple days. Oh, and Lady Macbeth of course—

JACK

(grabbing PEWTER's arm, steering her away, whispering)

Where's Lady Macbeth?

PEWTER

After her bus broke down in Utah, she was afraid of busses, so she rented an SUV. It was hard for her to control it though, with two sprained ankles, and there was a thunderstorm and—

JACK

Yeah, yeah—where *is* she?

PEWTER

The good news is, the SUV's got global positioning—

JACK

*Where?*

PEWTER

She's off-road. Are you familiar with the Badlands?



JACK

This isn't happening.

PEWTER

Don't worry. The South Dakota Highway Patrol is closing in. They think she's up some kind of wash?

JACK

Get her here. I don't care how, just get her here. *Now!!*  
(as PEWTER moves further off, dialing her cell phone)  
Apparently the rest of the cast isn't feeling too well—

MAUD

What was all that about Lady M?

JACK

Nothing to concern you.

MAUD

I've played the role three times, you know. I mean, were she to drop out for any reason. Heaven forbid.

JACK

That's very generous. Thank you. But . . . it's been cast.  
(clapping his hands with phony enthusiasm)  
So! So great to be with you . . . all . . . again. I suppose I should be completely frank about how you came to be cast in this production. The truth is, I asked for you—for each of you. Zita, Eden . . .Maud.

MAUD

We're aware of our own names, Jack.

JACK

Of course. I just want to take this moment to thank all of you for what you contributed to—well, to who I am today. I admit when I was your husband . . . plural . . . I didn't make life easy for any of you. And casting you in this production—one that's already getting national attention, may I add—is just my small and completely insufficient way of trying to repay each and every one of you, professionally and personally.

ZITA

That sounds like a load of crap.

EDEN

Sure does.

JACK

I don't blame you for being skeptical. All I ask is that you give me the chance to prove what I'm saying. You have my pledge that we'll do everything we can to make your time here fulfilling and pleasurable. For example, how are your accommodations?

MAUD

Hell. The three of us are housed together.

(JACK barks out a short, horrified laugh)

JACK

Sorry. Excuse me. *Pewter--!!*

(She hangs up as he moves to her. They speak *sotto voce*)

PEWTER

Billy did it.

JACK

He has no authority!

PEWTER

I know; I just found out.

JACK

So split them up!

PEWTER

They can't go in the lodge--everyone's got the flu--!

MAUD

Something wrong?

JACK

You sure you three can't get along? You've already met Zita—

MAUD

The harlot?

JACK

And you could get to know Eden—

MAUD

Why would I want to? I've seen her luggage.

EDEN

Bitch.

MAUD

Teen.

(EDEN starts toward MAUD, but JACK stops her)

JACK

Or, we can split you up.

MAUD

Oh, don't bother. At least we have you in common. We can always compare your various binge behaviors. Might provide a cackle. And I suppose studying these two will help me chart the course of your inevitable decline.

JACK

Oh, well . . . good.

MAUD

I don't for a minute believe your feeble lie about repaying us. I know exactly why we're here.

EDEN

You do?

MAUD

Yes, and you would too, if you were intelligent.

EDEN

Jack—!

MAUD

Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead—make her intelligent, Jack. I'll wait.

(after a beat)

No? Very well.

(to EDEN and ZITA)

While it may remain a foggy mystery to you—and you—and even perhaps to Jack, I knew instantly why he cast us. Our dear ex-husband has reached mid-life—that moment when he's compelled to stop and stare back over the blasted terrain of mistakes he's made, dreams he's failed to dream and goals of which he's fallen so terribly, terribly short. Oh, and most of all of course, the women he's betrayed. Jack's wandering in a spiritual wilderness, clutching at straws of pathetic authority in a regional backwater where Shakespeare meets what—the Cree Nation? At the bitter end of youth Jack has stumbled, lost and amazed, into the great hall of the terminally unprepared. Rampant alcoholism has so eroded his judgment that, thinking he's somehow magically recovered, he gathers us like the ghosts of better times—if not better Jacks—to bear witness to some kind of new, enlightened era. A total fantasy. What we shall actually witness is what he has so clearly become: a resentful, chain-smoking, alcohol-drenched pariah who, when he's not shrieking nonsensical orders which are universally ignored, arranges fitful, undignified couplings with interns—

(indicating PEWTER, who's back on the cell)

such as that one, there.

PEWTER

I'm a *personal assistant*. I was an intern last year.

JACK

You've developed into quite a woman, Maud.

MAUD

As have you.

JACK

Still, I think if you'd take a moment to use your powers of observation, you'll notice that I'm not the Jack you married—any of you. I've been in recovery for over a year. AA—all of it. I no longer drink or smoke or have so much as an impure thought towards members of my staff.

MAUD

Impossible.

PEWTER

It's true. He won't go near me, no matter how much I—

JACK

Pewter.

(PEWTER falls silent. MAUD approaches her)

MAUD

You like him, don't you?

PEWTER

Yes, I do.

MAUD

Do you know a lot about him?

JACK

Maud—

MAUD

Do you know how he left me and our four-year-old son for this demented hack?

ZITA

I'm not a hack, you witch!

JACK

Ladies—

ZITA

And at least I got help for *my* little problem—!

JACK

Zita, don't—

ZITA

Besides, he left me too!

(to PEWTER, indicating EDEN)

ZITA (cont'd)

For *that*, if you can believe it. Not that I blame Jack. He was such a drunk by then he couldn't see straight.

EDEN

I resent that!

ZITA

I'm surprised you got it.

JACK

Can we all just calm down? There's a lot of water over the dam here.

EDEN

A lot of Scotch, you mean. This is just some kind of stunt, isn't it, Jack? You're trying to set a record for most ex-wives in a play.

JACK

Can we just leave it be? Can we?

(An uncomfortable silence. We hear PEWTER on her cell muttering "Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh . . .")

MAUD

Oh, by the way—here's a note from your son.

JACK

(taking it, reading)

"If you don't treat my mother well, God will burn your ass in hell". Nice poem. Glad he's getting some religious training.

ZITA

I think I agree with Maud. But I think casting us wasn't really a conscious decision on your part, Jack. I think it was more subconscious.

JACK

Why?

ZITA

Isn't it obvious? You finally have a project that's getting a tiny bit of national attention, and you need us to be here to see it—simple enough.

JACK

Why on earth would I need the three of you for that?

ZITA

Because there's no one else. Your family all drinks. I can't imagine you see much of them. You're not wearing a ring. Are you with anybody?

JACK

Just because you played a psychotherapist on a series that never aired—

ZITA

You're a pitiful, lost little boy who finally has something to brag about—and here we all are, your substitute mommies.

EDEN

That's gross. Is that true, Jack?

ZITA

And I'll have you know that series *did* air. In Thailand—where, by the way, I'm now a member of their Psychotherapists' Hall of Fame.

JACK

(pulling ZITA aside)

Zita, are you taking your meds?

ZITA

I only go off them when I'm happy. Do I look happy?

JACK

(to all three)

Can I just make a point here? I haven't reached Step Nine yet in AA, so I haven't formally apologized to each of you for my many, many . . . many past sins. But I will. It's my firm intention, as soon as I get there. It's only natural that you feel resentment, but in the meantime I just hope none of you has taken this job to . . . you know, to sabotage me.

(A beat. MAUD, ZITA and EDEN all look at each other. Then at the same instant, they shriek with unholy laughter. They stop just as suddenly)

JACK

Good. Fine. Glad we cleared that up.

(BILLY enters, and starts browsing the food)

BILLY

Hello, everybody!

EDEN

Billy!

BILLY

Eden! Lovely as ever.

(spreading a bagel with cream-cheese)

Any salmon to go with these bagels?

JACK

We're having a meet-and-greet. Can't you come back later?

BILLY

And let everything dry out?

ZITA

(moving to BILLY, hugging him)

Billy has to be here. It's his theater.

BILLY

Not anymore. Only emeritus now. No power whatsoever—except moral. Lovely to see you, Zita. Trust you're still on your meds. And who's this?

JACK

Billy, Maud. Maud, Billy.

BILLY

My pleasure! It's amazing, Jack. So many mistakes, in so little time. Of course, these lovely ladies aren't mistakes at all. It would be you, wouldn't it, Jack? You must be one great, big, giant, enormous—

JACK

*That'll do.*



BILLY

Where's the rest of the cast?

JACK

They're, um . . . under the weather.

BILLY

Under the river?

JACK

The *weather*. They have the flu.

BILLY

In May? That's awfully . . . incongruent, isn't it?

(buttering his muffin)

Oh—you'll never guess who I saw getting out of a car just now.

ALEX

(entering)

Hello, everyone!

JACK

Alex—! Welcome back! Say hello to the cast.

ALEX

The . . . cast?

JACK

Some of them are out. A little flu. It's nothing.

ALEX

Eden!

EDEN

Papa Bear!

(EDEN hurries past JACK and plants a giant—  
and somewhat too prolonged—kiss on ALEX)

ALEX

Have you been behaving yourself?

EDEN  
No.

ALEX  
(with a laugh)  
That's my little girl. Papa's brought a big surprise.

EDEN  
For me?

ALEX  
For all of us.

EDEN  
Let me see!

ALEX  
Hello, Zita. You look lovely as ever. Still taking your meds?

ZITA  
You bet.

ALEX  
Excellent. And you must be Maud. I'm Alex.

MAUD  
A pleasure.

EDEN  
Papa Bear, what's the surprise?

ALEX  
Ladies and gentlemen, my trip has been a success! We have our Macbeth!

JACK  
Wonderful! Who is it?

MAUD  
Don't you know?

ALEX

Allow me to present one of Hollywood's hottest up-and-coming male leads. Ladies and gentlemen, a true star: Path Sanderson! Path?

(PATH SANDERSON makes his entrance. He's insanely handsome, with the "I can't do anything wrong" air of a can't-miss star. He smiles, and EDEN screams. Everyone in the room is impressed. EDEN instantly abandons ALEX and grabs PATH by the arm—something PATH's more than used to)

EDEN

Hi. I'm Eden.

PATH

Obviously.

ALEX

How's that for a recruiting trip, Jack?

JACK

I'm . . . I'm bowled over. This is amazing. This is . . . ! This is *huge!*

BILLY

Alex, you've outdone yourself.

ALEX

Three hit movies last year. Two more coming out this summer. You think we'll get coverage now?

JACK

I'm . . .

(reflexively kissing ALEX's hand)

Thank you!

ALEX

Don't thank me. Path, can you come over here?

(as PATH charmingly extricates himself)

I'd like you to meet your director—Jack Bonner.

PATH

Hi, Jack. Boner, was it?

JACK

Bonner.

PATH

Oops, my bad. Great to be here.

JACK

(as they shake hands)

Great to have you! I can't get over it. This was one hell of a secret, Alex!

PATH

I'm the one who wanted to keep it secret, actually.

JACK

Oh?

PATH

Dealing with the *paparazzi*'s like taking a whiz. Don't want the floodgates to open 'til we know where to point. And of course, I've gotta read the play.

JACK

You haven't read it?

PATH

Like I'd have time. Don't worry—I read the coverage. It's an action-adventure thing, right?

JACK

Excuse me just a minute. Alex?

(taking ALEX aside)

Has he ever been on stage?

ALEX

You mean, when there was a play on?

JACK

Fine. Fine. Ok . . .

(returning to PATH)

JACK (cont'd)

Path, I can't tell you how happy we are to have you here. If there's anything you need—

PATH

Here's a list.

JACK

(as PATH hands him a lengthy list)

Oh. Wonderful. I'll make sure we, um . . . yes.

PATH

This was great, everybody! See you when we, I don't know, rehearse or something. So where's the bar?

ALEX

The Dark Thistle? Right across the street.

(PATH clasps ALEX by the arm, pulling him toward the door)

PATH

Thank God! I hate hiking for booze, don't you?

ALEX

Um . . . sure. I guess we'll be over there, Jack—

PATH

Nice town. What's it called, Rugburn?

ALEX

Bannockburn.

PATH

Swedish. Cool. Hey Nirvana, come on.

EDEN

Eden.

PATH

Whatever. I'll buy you a drink.

EDEN  
Jack?

JACK  
Go on.

ALEX  
(as EDEN passes by him for PATH)  
It's so good to see you again!

EDEN  
(exiting on PATH's arm)  
Me, too.

ALEX  
(hurrying out after them)  
Yes, um . . . Your Papa Bear has so much to tell you . . .

JACK  
All right. Meeting's over. First rehearsal tomorrow at ten.

(MAUD and ZITA get their things together  
as PEWTER takes EDEN's bags out)

BILLY  
That Path's really darling. Sort of beautifully . . . vapid, don't you think?

JACK  
You know the difference between you and me, Billy? I can make him look good.

BILLY  
At least he'll draw crowds. Don't want our catastrophe to go unnoticed.

ZITA  
I'm happy to hear you're taking a little break from alcoholism, Jack. It'll make it easier to do meaningful work with you.

JACK  
You're not a therapist. You used to *play* a therapist.

ZITA

Shh. It's not you I'm talking to. It's your subconscious.

BILLY

(as ZITA exits)

By the way, where's Lady M? Is she sick? Or is she still on her way?

MAUD

She's not even here yet?

JACK

Of course she is.

(whispering to BILLY)

Don't talk about this in front of her. She'll drive me crazy.

BILLY

(to MAUD)

Lady M. is lost *en route*. Personally, I doubt she'll ever get here. Lovely to have met you.

JACK

(to an exiting BILLY)

You bastard.

MAUD

Jack, you should have told me—!

JACK

Billy doesn't know what he's talking about—

PEWTER

(reentering, with glance at MAUD)

I have an update on Lady M.

JACK

It's all right. She knows.

PEWTER

The South Dakota Highway Patrol has her in custody. She's being charged with resisting arrest and assaulting an officer. They think it's a reaction to the pain medication for her ankles, but—

JACK

So she's out of the picture? That's what you're telling me?

MAUD

What a hideous tragedy! You know, Jack—

JACK

I'm not talking about this.

MAUD

You can't live in denial. You need a Lady M. I could keep you up all night on the phone, or you can simply crumble now.

JACK

Why give it to you? Why not Zita, or Eden?

MAUD

They can only make you miserable. I can harm you forever.

JACK

I'll take my chances. Pewter, call the casting director.

MAUD

(as PEWTER exits)

Please, Jack. I'm wasted as a witch, and you know it.

JACK

Sounds like perfect casting to me.

MAUD

Is that your idea of Step Nine?

(more mollifyingly)

Jack, think back, way back, to the time before alcohol. When you first saw me onstage. Remember what you thought? Remember what you said?

JACK

You made it a privilege to do theater.

MAUD

Yes. And so did you. You're starting a new chapter now, Jack. Why can't you and I just go back to that time, and—



JACK

No! There's no point in talking about this. I'll have enough to do herding Path around.

MAUD

There's nothing I could offer that would make you give me Lady M?

JACK

Nothing. Except . . . Oh, why even talk about it?

MAUD

What? *What?*

JACK

Visitation.

MAUD

You must be joking.

JACK

I haven't seen him in nine years.

MAUD

You lost your right! In the settlement. You agreed you'd never see Morgan!

JACK

Listen—

MAUD

You left him alone in a car! In the winter. For three hours. While you sat and drank yourself practically unconscious. He didn't know what to do. He almost froze to death!

JACK

I know. I've been apologizing for that for a long time—

MAUD

What makes you think he wants to see you?

JACK

Certainly not his poem.

MAUD

That was the *niciest* one.

JACK

I'm completely different now. You have to believe that. You'll see as you work with me.

MAUD

Really? He was thirteen last week. You forgot to send a card.

JACK

Oh—! I'm sorry. I've been so busy—

MAUD

Don't apologize. We're used to it by now. Tell you what—make me Lady Macbeth, and I won't go back to court for higher child-support payments.

JACK

My God, you're a piece of work. Forget it, ok? Just forget the role exists.

MAUD

(starting out, then stopping)

How much visitation?

JACK

Summers.

MAUD

My eye. Christmas, maybe. And . . . ok, the Fourth of July. Maybe.

JACK

That's it? Two weeks a year?

MAUD

Days. Two days. That's my final offer.

(as JACK exits in disgust, following him out)

Think about it. Two whole days. Jack? Jack? You're not going to give Lady M. to Zita or Eden, are you? Remember the first ex-wife has privilege—in every culture! All right! Three days!

(Lights shift as they go)

## SCENE FOUR

(The mainstage. It's empty, save for a ghost-light. JACK sits downstage. FRED enters behind him, pushing a wheelbarrow filled with large, jagged stones. He stops center and starts placing the stones on the stage)

FRED

Man, these are heavy! Wish it wasn't so damn hot out.

JACK

Any trouble getting them?

FRED

Nah. The quarry says we can have all we want. Super idea for a set, by the way. "Universe of stones".

JACK

At least we don't need a scene shop to create it.

FRED

We're lucky the quarry's uphill. With all the flooding, I mean. Can't believe the creek rose so much overnight. If there's anything you need me to row into town for—

JACK

No, no. Just . . . keep working on the stones, ok?

(While they speak a trap opens on stage, right next to FRED. He turns to put a stone down where there's now only a hole and almost loses his balance.)

FRED

*WHOA-HO-!!!*

(Off-balance, FRED loses control of the stone and it falls a long way, finally smashing—and splashing—into something below. A splash of water emerges from the trap, and a chorus of frogs can be heard)

JACK

What the hell--!? *Careful--!!*

FRED

I'm sorry, Jack. That trap door's doing it again.

JACK

(calling to the back of the house)

*MYRON--!!* What in hell's going on with this trap?!! Fred almost fell in! Shut it! *Now!!* And check the whole system! Immediately!

(as the trap slowly closes again)

Fred, are you ok?

FRED

Yeah, yeah. Close one, though. I'll be ok.

JACK

Just . . . stay alert. I don't understand it. We overhauled the traps last season.

FRED

Could be human error. People are jumpy, having a celebrity around.

(setting out rocks again)

That Path is really something, isn't he? He was still over at the bar when I went to bed. Reporters are starting to show up. They're even asking me questions.

JACK

Comes with the territory, I guess.

FRED

Hope Path's ok on stage.

JACK

I've seen worse. Not since junior high. But we'll get through. My agent's blown away. Keeps telling me, "Anything Path wants. Just keep him happy." Brian thinks this'll lock it in for me—in L.A., I mean.

FRED

You going there?

JACK

Keep it under your hat.

FRED

Sure. Wow. L.A. Won't you miss it around here?

JACK

Let's see: miss a lifetime of being underpaid, just to make sure somebody in Ishpeming has the chance to see *Troilus and Cressida*? Sorry. L.A.'s where the action is. There may even be a shot for you, if Path likes you.

FRED

You think? That'd be fantastic! I've always seen myself in sidekick roles. I could never leave Pewter, though.

JACK

Why not? She won't give you the time of day.

FRED

She's my one true love.

JACK

L.A. is full of one true loves.

FRED

Not like her. Hey—that oldest ex-wife of yours was telling me about your kid. I didn't know you had a son. And he's a poet? That's great. What's he like?

JACK

I, uh . . . haven't seen him in awhile. Not since he was four, actually.

FRED

Oh . . . Sorry.

JACK

My fault. Long story. Maud won't let me near him. I send money every month for a kid I haven't seen in nearly a decade. I remember the last time I saw him. Maud told him I was there to say goodbye, but he didn't know what that meant. Neither did I, looking back. He was sitting on a conference table in a law office. I had to beg her for even *that*. Still had his snowsuit on—it was freezing outside. His mother was there, an officer of the court was there . . . and

JACK (cont'd)

I was drunk. You could smell it on my breath. Swore I wasn't going to drink that morning, but . . . you know, got nervous. He hugged me anyway. Had his mittens on.

(touching the sides of his neck)

I can feel them, right here.

(with a sigh)

Not that it matters. That's water *way* over the damn. By now, he probably doesn't remember anything about me, except my breath. And I sure don't know anything about him. I'd get more feedback sending money to an orphan in Guatemala. Anyway, no more actresses for me. To be drunk's bad enough, but to be drunk enough to marry an actress . . . That was my downfall. I could never resist a woman in the throes of a completely synthetic passion.

(unaware that PEWTER has entered  
to clear the ghost light)

From now on, I'm looking for a woman who never acted in her life.

PEWTER

I've never acted in my life.

FRED

You were Joan of Arc in high-school—

PEWTER

Shut up, Fred.

MAUD

(entering)

Jack, have you thought about my offer?

JACK

Three days a year? Still mulling.

MAUD

Speaking of Morgan, he sent you another poem this morning. Here.

JACK

(reading)

“Make my mother Lady M. Remember, I am taking chem”. What is this, a bomb threat?

MAUD

Sure you don't want to do it just for your health, Jack?

JACK

No!

(turning to PEWTER)

Have they rescued the rest of the cast from the lodge yet?

PEWTER

The flood waters are too strong. Most of them are still sick anyway. The ones who're feeling better are sitting on the roof memorizing lines. The tech staff's sick too—the ones who aren't out filling sandbags.

JACK

Ok, then. This morning we'll just go with the witches and Macbeth.

FRED

What about Banquo?

JACK

You can do it for today.

FRED

*All right!*

JACK

We'll start in five. Has anyone seen Path?

PEWTER

He was at the Dark Thistle all night . . .  
(as JACK gives her a look)  
is . . . what I heard.

JACK

Of course he was.

(JACK exits, with MAUD following him out)

MAUD

Morgan's very protective of me. You really should be careful—

PEWTER

(once she's gone)

She's driving Jack crazy. I asked him if he wanted me to kill her, but he said no. He's got so much on his mind. Every time I make a mistake, I just want to cut my arms off.

(as FRED lifts a heavy rock and groans)

Don't get a hernia.

FRED

It's no sweat. I always feel strong around you.

PEWTER

We're just friends, Fred.

FRED

Will you marry me?

PEWTER

I told you not to ask this week.

FRED

Sorry. It's just that, you know, I kind of gave up everything to live here year-round, and took three part-time jobs so I could be near you, and lost my agent and most of my friends and everybody thinks I'm crazy—

PEWTER

You're an actor. I don't date actors.

FRED

Why not?

PEWTER

'Cause actors don't control their own destiny.

FRED

Who does?

PEWTER

Jack does. That's why I want Jack.



FRED

That's nuts. He's like a hundred, and you're like two.

PEWTER

He's heroic. Fighting his way out of alcoholism—and he told me about his son once. Jack's emotions are so deep—and they're so real.

FRED

Real old. And I don't believe you about actors. You'd date Path Sanderson fast enough. Not like he'd ever ask you; not like he'd know you from a plant.

PEWTER

I'm glad he wouldn't. Men like him are emotionally immature. Inside, they're just scared little boys—

(PATH enters with EDEN on his arm.  
They laugh uproariously)

PATH

We have arrived!

(giving EDEN a major-league kiss)

Hey, everybody! Somebody said it's morning, so here we are! Where's Jack Bowser?

EDEN

I keep telling you—it's Bonner.

PATH

It's Bowser. Jack Bowser, the dog-faced boy.

(PATH howls like a dog)

FRED

You're right, he does seem scared.

PEWTER

(exiting with the ghost-light)

We start in two, everybody. Witches and Macbeth are called.

FRED

And Banquo.

PEWTER

(as he follows her out)

Go away, Fred.

PATH

(kicking a rock)

What's all this shit?

EDEN

Must be the set.

PATH

The set? What is this, a caveman movie?

EDEN

(quickly grabbing PATH and kissing him)

You're my caveman.

PATH

(coming up for air)

Whew! I would've been, if I could've dragged you back to the cave. That old "Papa Bear" was dogging us all night. He always stay up like that?

EDEN

I think Alex feels a little threatened.

PATH

What, you mean you and him . . . ?

EDEN

I was coming out of an ugly marriage. I was really young.

PATH

I don't blame you or anything. He is rich and shit—

EDEN

*Really* rich. But so are you—

(EDEN kisses him. JACK and MAUD reenter)

MAUD

Up all night, going over our *parts*?

EDEN

We know our parts.

MAUD

In Braille.

EDEN

Jack—!

JACK

(as PEWTER and FRED enter)

Morning, troupers.

PATH

Morning, Bowser.

(PATH, with EDEN still clinging to him, howls like a dog. JACK stares at him, as does ZITA, who's just entered carrying many, many books)

PATH (cont'd)

Is it true you were married to all these women?

JACK

You can read about it in the Book of the Dead. Everyone ready to go? Wearing something comfortable?

MAUD

Path certainly is.

ZITA

Aren't we doing any table work?

JACK

I thought Path might be a little bored, sitting around a table—

PATH

Good call.

JACK

We can work things out as we go.

(as ZITA disgustedly drops her books)

So, a few introductory remarks. *Macbeth*—

PATH

Yeah?

JACK

No, I mean the play.

PATH

Oh.

JACK

So—

PATH

How'm I gonna know?

JACK

Pardon?

PATH

If you're talking about me or the play.

JACK

I'll try to be clear. So . . . *Macbeth*—the play—is first and foremost a tragedy of opportunity. Much is made of the supernatural qualities of the witches, but I feel they're simply meant to symbolize what happens to a man when Fate presents him with an irresistible set of opportunities—

MAUD

So we're nothing?

JACK

No—

EDEN

Just symbols?

JACK

Projections of Macbeth's great but latent flaw: ambition.

ZITA

Projections? I don't get it. You mean we're just a bunch of swamp gas 'til he comes by?

JACK

That's not what I—

EDEN

Gee, Jack—it's crumby to make us just gas.

JACK

I'm not—

MAUD

Can I be helium? Something inert at least, so I don't have to move around a lot on these rocks?

JACK

You know, maybe it's not a good time for introductory remarks.

MAUD

Yes, let's do them at the end.

JACK

Why don't we just dive in? Feel free to ask questions anytime—

PATH

I've got a question. Is this going to take long?

JACK

Rehearsal, you mean?

PATH

Yeah. 'Cause I've got a shitload of calls to make.

JACK

Um, rehearsal generally runs most of the day.

PATH

Most of the—?! But it's not even a take!

JACK

A performance, you mean?

PATH

Whatever.

PEWTER

There'll be breaks when you can make calls.

PATH

When's the next one?

PEWTER

An hour.

PATH

*An hour?!*

JACK

Good, so that's established. Can we start with the three Witches sitting on the rocks?

(pointing places for MAUD, ZITA and EDEN)

That'll be Witch number one, Witch number two , Witch number three—

PATH

(as they sit uncomfortably on the rocks)

Where do I sit?

JACK

Macbeth doesn't sit here, big fella. That would make him one of the witches.

PATH

Oh, right. My bad.

JACK

You and Banquo . . . amble in from over here. You didn't get the play read or anything last night?

Not this deep in. PATH

Pewter, how deep are we? JACK

Page six. PEWTER

Fair enough. You two come in from here— JACK

When? PATH

How about . . . on your cue? JACK

Sure that's the best place? PATH

Let's try it. Fred—? JACK  
(as FRED shows PATH the spot in the script)  
Everybody comfortable?

No! These hurt! EDEN  
(of the rocks)

Oh, when we come in? What do we do? PATH

Say the lines. See where it takes us. JACK

If you say so . . . PATH

Maud? JACK

MAUD

“Where hast thou been, Sister?”

ZITA

“Killing swine.”

EDEN

“Sister, where thou?”

PATH

‘Scuse me?

JACK

Yes?

PATH

Will they have pointy hats?

JACK

Pointy—?

PATH

Witches. You know, pointy hats?

JACK

Good idea. Pewter—make a note: pointy hats. We’ll, uh . . . we’ll take that up with the costumer. Thanks for the contribution.

PATH

Didn’t want you to miss it. I’ll throw in ideas like, whenever. Ok?

JACK

Ladies.

MAUD

“A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap,  
And mounch’d, and mounch’d, and mounch’d: ‘Give me,’ quoth I:—  
‘Aroynt thee, witch!’ the rump-fed ronyon cries—”

PATH

Aroynt?



JACK

Yes?

PATH

Is that, like a word? “*Aroynt*”?

JACK

Yes, that’s one of Shakespeare’s words. Path, we really can’t–

PATH

Did he have like his own private language? What about “ronyon”? Are there a lot more of these?

JACK

You know, maybe this isn’t where we should start. Why don’t we go to your entrance, Path?

PATH

We’d get done a lot quicker.

(coming closer with FRED, crossing something out in his script)

So . . . cut the intro–

JACK

We’re not cutting it–

PATH

And . . . “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” Which is it? Foul or fair?

JACK

Hm? It’s, um . . . both.

PATH

That’s kinda wishy-washy.

JACK

Actually, the point is–

PATH

Don’t get me wrong. I’m just trying to make it the best script possible.

JACK

I appreciate that. Try to think of it as typical Scottish weather.

PATH

This is *Scotland*?

JACK

Yes . . .

PATH

Hunh! That puts a slant on things.

JACK

Fred?

FRED

(doing a pretty good job)

“How far is’t call’d to Forres?—What are these,  
So wither’d and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth,  
And yet are on’t?”

PATH

Is this sci-fi?

JACK

No. But thanks for the question. Tell you what, let’s go to the “all hails” instead—

MAUD

Good idea, Jack. That way we can skip over those pesky witches’ lines.

JACK

We’ll come back to it, ok?

MAUD

“All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!”

ZITA

“All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!”

EDEN

“All hail, Macbeth! that shall be king hereafter!”

PATH

Gloms?

JACK

That’s who you are, the Thane of Glamis.

PATH

Like when you glom onto something?

JACK

No—

PATH

Sounds like that. Don’t you think that weakens my character? I sound like some kind of thief.

JACK

Path, Macbeth is a murderer. I don’t think we’re going to worry about whether he swipes stuff.

PATH

A murderer? Who’s he kill?

JACK

He’s going to kill Duncan, who’s his kinsman and his king. Macbeth’s going to murder him while he’s asleep and a guest in Macbeth’s own castle. And for that, Macbeth will be condemned to one of the lowest circles of Hell.

PATH

(this is all news)

You’re kidding. You’re . . . Oh, man. This is . . . oh! Rewrite. Rewrite!

JACK

That’s not how it works—

PATH

That’s how it’s gonna work.

JACK

Can we save this discussion for later?

PATH

He can't kill people. Not in their sleep. That's not even fair.

JACK

Path—

PATH

I'm a hero.

JACK

Of course you are—

PATH

Heroes don't go to hell.

JACK

Macbeth's a fallen hero—

PATH

I don't care if he's plummeting. I'm not going to—

JACK

Tell you what, we'll look at all this. Right now though, let's . . . um, let's go to the end of the witches—

MAUD

Fabulous!

JACK

And, you know, take a little look at that while we're . . . while we're thinking.

PATH

As long as we're thinking.

JACK

We are.

PATH

‘Cause I’m real serious.

JACK

I know. Ok, Maud. Maud? *Please?*

MAUD

“Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!”

(An awkward pause. JACK looks at PATH)

JACK

That’s you.

PATH

What?

(as FRED shows him)

Oh! No sweat.

(PATH reads—without a clue, immune to meter, rhyme, pronunciation, characterization, and rife with ersatz readings from cop shows, sitcoms and action pictures)

PATH (cont’d)

“Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more.  
By Sinel’s death, I know I am Thane of Glamis;  
But how of Cawdor? the Thane of Cawdor lives,  
A prosperous gentleman; and to be King  
Stands not within the prospect of belief,  
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence  
You owe this strange intelligence? or why  
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way  
With such prophetic greeting?—Speak, I charge you.”

(Everyone is stunned. This is the single worst reading of Shakespeare they have ever heard. MAUD, ZITA and EDEN take advantage of the stage direction and exit)

PATH (cont'd)

Where are they going?

(Slowly, JACK approaches PATH and puts his hand on PATH's shoulder while considering what he can possibly say. Deciding that the answer is nothing, JACK shakes his head and walks out without a word. PEWTER follows him. PATH looks at FRED, who's the only one left)

PATH (cont'd)

I don't get it. What's going on?

(FRED shrugs. A beat. FRED leaves)

PATH (cont'd)

Is this one of those breaks?

(PATH walks off as lights shift)

## *Act Two*

### SCENE ONE

(JACK's office, later that day. JACK and ALEX)

JACK

You said he had some training!

ALEX

He does. Doesn't he?

JACK

*Animal* training! He worked with a border collie on a sitcom!

ALEX

Right there—a border collie. *That's* Scottish. Did you see how Eden looked at me? Yesterday I mean, when I first walked in.

JACK

What?

ALEX

There's still something there. An ember. A smoldering ember.

JACK

Are you even listening to me?

ALEX

I think she wants to get hot and heavy.

JACK

You're talking about my ex-wife.

ALEX

I can't help it if you didn't want her—

JACK

Wasn't she with Path last night? *All* night?

ALEX

In the Dark Thistle—yes, I was with them. She was brilliant, pretending to be interested in him, making him feel welcome, when all the time it was me she wanted to be near.

JACK

It was, eh?

ALEX

Oh, she may have kissed him once or twice. But every time she came up for air it was me she smiled at.

JACK

Alex—

ALEX

We're in excellent shape here, Jack. You'll work wonders with Path. Get him a border collie if you like. Now, you have to excuse me—Eden wants to show Path the quarry at sunset. She'll be disappointed if I'm not there.

(ALEX exits. JACK slumps in his chair and sighs. After a moment, ZITA enters)

ZITA

Tough rehearsal.

JACK

Oh—hi, Zita. Yeah, pretty tough.

ZITA

(moving to rub his shoulders)

It's a star's job to be a headache. Remember when I used to give you backrubs after rehearsal?

JACK

I don't remember much from back then. Kind of a blur. Feels good, though.



ZITA

Doesn't it? Even your arms are tense. Have you been breathing right, Jack? So many people don't know how to breathe. They think it's so easy, but it's not.

JACK

(hearing a sudden sharp, metallic click)

What's that?

ZITA

Nothing. Pair of handcuffs.

(She has handcuffed him to his chair)

JACK

What in hell? What are you doing?!

ZITA

It's time for a session, Jack. You're a wreck.

JACK

A session?! Zita—! You said you were on your meds!

ZITA

Sometimes it's not about little blue pills, Jack. Sometimes it's about doing the hard work of facing yourself.

JACK

Why am I handcuffed to this chair!?

ZITA

See? There's a question right there. And we both know the answer: it's the only way you'll seek therapy.

JACK

I'm not seeking therapy!

ZITA

Exactly. You think AA is enough, but it isn't. Your entire life is one big scream for help. Luckily, I'm here.

JACK

Zita, you weren't a therapist, you *needed* a—!

ZITA

(muffling him with her hand)

If the next thing out of your mouth isn't positive, we'll say hello to Mr. Gag.

JACK

You're just pissed at me for dumping you—

(She quickly scribbles something on a Post-It note and sticks it to his head)

JACK (cont'd)

Ow! What's that?!

ZITA

A reminder to stop projecting. I put it on your brain because that's what you project with. I dumped you, not the other way around.

JACK

This isn't a doctor's office, it's a theater.

ZITA

We're all in a theater, Jack: a theater of our own mind.

JACK

I'm going to scream.

ZITA

No, you're not. You'd be too humiliated. Besides, deep down you really want this.

JACK

I do not!

ZITA

But it won't come easy. You'll have to struggle. Remember, I can't do the work for you.

JACK

Can't we postpone this? Maybe we could go for dinner.

ZITA

(slapping another note on his midsection)

False appetite. Very interesting. Don't sidetrack, Jack. Face it head-on.

JACK

Face *what*?

ZITA

You've stopped drinking, right?

JACK

Yeah, so?

ZITA

You go to AA regularly?

JACK

I miss sometimes.

ZITA

So, you think you're better than the rest of them.

(slapping another note on his forehead)

De-nial!

JACK

*Damn it-!!!*

ZITA

(writing another note, slapping on his chest)

Rage. Covering your deeper feelings.

JACK

Please quit doing that.

ZITA

You need something to refer back to. I don't see you taking any notes.

JACK

That's it! You're fired, you crazy bitch!

ZITA

Sexual anger. When I think of everything *that's* been used to cover.

JACK

(as she calmly writes a note and slaps it on his crotch)

*Ow--!! Watch it--!!*

ZITA

We're clearly going to be here for quite awhile.

JACK

No, no--wait. Listen. Let's be reasonable, ok? Let's just-- What should I be doing right now? Just tell me and I'll, you know, get right to it.

ZITA

If I were you, I'd be looking at some affirmations.

JACK

Affirmations? Great! Like what?

ZITA

How about, "This is the luckiest production with which I've ever been involved"?

JACK

*It's not--!*

(ZITA, who's already been writing the note,  
slaps it on his head)

ZITA

Isn't it? Ask yourself what this production has brought into your life.

JACK

You?

ZITA

Excellent! See? Therapy isn't so awful. You treated me badly, but I've come back to you anyway. Isn't that lucky?

JACK

Yes?

ZITA

Yes, indeed.

JACK

I didn't mean to treat you badly . . .

ZITA

Of course you did. You were a drunken wreck. You treated everyone badly. But I knew how to take revenge on you, didn't I? You remember *The Tempest*?

JACK

*The Tempest* . . . ?

ZITA

I thought I was the happiest actress in the world. Married to you, playing Ariel to your Prospero. Then I began to notice the way you looked at Miranda—your own daughter.

JACK

My daughter in the play—

ZITA

(slapping more notes on his crotch)

But psychologically! What was she psychologically, Jack!?

JACK

Eden was—

ZITA

*Young*. She was *young*.

(another note)

*Innocent*. Remember what I did to you, Jack? Remember your line?

JACK

“Go make thyself a nymph o’ the sea—”?

ZITA

That’s it!

JACK

“ . . . take this shape  
And hither come in’t— ”

ZITA

“Go make thyself a nymph o’ the sea—” And I did go, didn’t I, Jack?! *But I didn’t come hither!* And you had no Ariel for the next four acts! You had to pretend Ariel was invisible, even to you! You had to say, “What’s that, Ariel?” and repeat all my lines like the stupid, fat idiot you were!

JACK

(as she slaps blank Post-It’s across his  
brow, until he’s effectively blinded)

Zita—!

ZITA

(in a low, intense tone)

Listen to me, Jack Bonner. No matter how bad things get around here, you will *remain happy*. You betrayed me as a woman, but you will support me as an actor. You understand?

JACK

I can’t make you Lady Macbeth.

ZITA

Lady Macbeth? You think *that’s* what I want?!

JACK

Isn’t it?

ZITA

What do you think I am, Jack? You think I came up here just to get a role? You think I care that little about you—about us?

JACK

I don't know—

ZITA

I'm here to save your soul, Jack. I'm here to reconstruct your psyche, your fundamental connection to life itself.

JACK

It's only a four-week run.

ZITA

Stop being negative! I didn't come up here to get depressed by you all over again. I want progress! Hard work! Right now you see through a glass darkly, but soon all will be revealed! You'll step into the future. You'll emanate a pure light!

JACK

Zita, you're insane—

ZITA

I'm what you made me, Jack! *I'm what you made me!!*

(suddenly growing calmer)

Hug your illusions. You're about to let them go.

(kissing the top of his head, starting out)

So. Good. Fruitful session. Can't wait for the next one. See you at rehearsal, sweetie!

JACK

What about the handcuffs?!

ZITA

Don't dump your problems on everyone else.

JACK

Zita—! *Zita—!!!*

(But she's gone. JACK struggles with his handcuffs, but no hope. BILLY enters)

BILLY

Jack?

JACK

Billy! Get in here!

BILLY

Mm--little visit from Zita?

JACK

Shut up and get me out of this.

BILLY

Bolt cutters in the usual place?

(pulling out a pair of bolt cutters from JACK's desk)

Sentimental of you to keep them. Or did you always plan to bring her back?

(BILLY cuts the handcuffs in two. There's one on each of JACK's wrists now, but he's free. He starts ripping post-its off his forehead)

JACK

Next year we're going back to the way Shakespeare did it. We're casting *all men*.

BILLY

Thrilling. By the way, I heard Path was very . . .interesting today.

JACK

(rising)

I've got to go call my sponsor.

BILLY

Sure you wouldn't rather have a quick one at the Dark Thistle? On me.

JACK

You love this, don't you?

BILLY

I do like it a little.

(JACK storms out. As BILLY starts to put back the bolt cutters, PATH enters)



PATH

Where's Jack?

BILLY

He just stepped out.

PATH

Damn. I was going to ask him how I'm doing. Suddenly no one's talking to me. What's your name again? Billy?

BILLY

Billy Neil, at your service.

PATH

And what are you, like . . . the mascot around here?

BILLY

(putting the bolt cutters away)

I was the artistic director of this theater, 'til Jack stole it from me.

PATH

Yeah? He's got more on the ball than I thought. So you must actually know something about acting, right?

BILLY

One or two things, I flatter myself.

PATH

Tell you the truth, I'm starting to get the feeling around here that people think—this is between me and you now, right?

BILLY

Of course.

PATH

I think people may think I'm, you know . . . not a good actor.

BILLY

No.

PATH

Yeah. And it's not easy, either. 'Cause this Macbeth guy is like a real douche-bag of a hero. I mean, have you ever read this play? He kills people, he's like cruel and shit—

BILLY

He's flawed.

PATH

Flawed? Mike Tyson is flawed. This guy's a fucking murderer. And it really pisses me off, you know? 'Cause the only reason I came here—besides my pending drug prosecution and that shithead I had my peeps take care of in that club in L.A. last month—the only reason was so I could look like I was good and pure and you know, in some kind of . . . culture. Just for a few weeks. Get out of town, do a play, cross up the tabloids—they eat this shit for breakfast. Like when Madonna gets an honorary degree from M.I.T?

(like a reporter to a photographer)

“Get her in the robe! In the *hat!*”. You know? And Macbeth I thought, with swords and shit, was a natural. I thought I'd be like, you know, Lancelot or something. Instead, I'm grabbing at knives that aren't there, having guys kill my best friend—what shit is *that?*—not to mention my wife, who kicks my ass for like basically the whole play.

BILLY

It is a tragedy.

PATH

Damn right it's a tragedy. And it's gonna stay that way unless I fix it. Listen to a speech for me, ok? Tell me what I'm doing wrong.

BILLY

I shouldn't meddle—

PATH

Why not? You're out of a job. How often to you get to work with the most important man in American theater?

BILLY

What a sobering thought.

PATH

Here goes:

(reading, as though it's hip-hop)

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow—”

BILLY

Oh—let's not start there. Maybe we should work on that one . . . I don't know—

PATH

Tomorrow?

BILLY

Yes.

PATH

Sorry, no time. “Creeps in this petty pace—”

BILLY

Path, Path, Path— Don't get me wrong. You show a talent that's truly . . . unique. But it's wasted on things like line study, interpretation. Any actor can do that. What you need to deal with are the really big decisions.

PATH

Such as?

BILLY

For example, what if the role of Macbeth isn't what you really want?

PATH

‘Course it's what I want. It's above the title. I mean, it is the title.

BILLY

But, as you so aptly point out, Macbeth isn't a hero. Or, he's so flawed he may as well not be.

PATH

Yeah, but . . . I gotta be Macbeth.

BILLY

Do you? Do you really?

(A smile beginning to form on  
BILLY's lips as lights shift)

(Lights shift as scene ends)

## SCENE TWO

(The Dark Thistle. The same corner we saw in Scene One. PATH and EDEN sit at a table playing tonsil hockey. Two half-drunk pints are in front of them. ALEX sits nearby, distractedly listening to a report from PEWTER)

PEWTER

They're getting the last costumes out of the trees. Not much point to it—they're all burned to a crisp. And the armor's melted.

ALEX

(distractedly watching the others)

That's terrible. What could explode in a costume shop?

PEWTER

Propane tank?

ALEX

Oh, yes. At least no one was hurt. Only one explosion this week. That's pretty good for us. Why'd the um, the um . . . tank blow up?

PEWTER

Not sure. The Fire Marshal doesn't even investigate anymore. Just writes down "Macbeth" and drives away. Oh, all the broadswords got warped by the fire.

(EDEN finally comes up for air. She glances at ALEX, who gives a flirtatious wave and a twinkly smile)

ALEX

Thanks, Pewter. That's very, um . . . timely.

EDEN

(to PATH, as PEWTER exits)

Lady Macbeth! Can you really get me the part?

PATH

No sweat. You should've told me earlier you wanted it.

EDEN

Of course I do. It's the biggest role in the play.

PATH

What time is it, anyway?

EDEN

I think rehearsal's starting.

PATH

Let's only have one more then.

EDEN

This is so great. I never used to drink before rehearsal.

(suddenly aware of ALEX again)

I mean, is this ok?

ALEX

You can do no wrong, my dear. By the way, where did you two sneak off to after we all went up to the quarry? You always seem to lose me there.

EDEN

Alex, are you jealous?

ALEX

Of course not. I only--

EDEN

That's so *sweet!*

(kissing ALEX on the cheek)

I can't believe how happy I am! I've got my two favorite guys, and now I'm going to get my favorite part!

PATH

I've got more surprises than that for you, babe.

EDEN

Ooh, what?! Did you learn your lines?

PATH  
(with a laugh)

Please.

ALEX  
What is it, then?

PATH  
You'll see. Those reporters still out outside?

ALEX  
As always.

EDEN  
I wish your agent hadn't told them where you were.

PATH  
Doesn't make sense without reporters. And now I've got a new development for 'em. Always liked this part. Like throwing chickens to the alligators.

EDEN  
What *is* it?

(JACK and BILLY suddenly enter, in mid-argument)

JACK  
I don't care! You can not talk to my actors! They are my actors, and I won't have you— Alex! There you are! Billy is tampering with my production.

ALEX  
We can't have that. What's going on here, Billy?

BILLY  
I'm not tampering.

JACK  
He's been talking with Path.

BILLY  
I have not! Well I have, but it's for everyone's good—

JACK

Path, Eden—come on, we've got rehearsal.

BILLY

Alex, I think you should know that Path has sent a number of useful script changes to Jack, and Jack has not even deigned to read them.

JACK

I've been waiting for the cocktail napkins they're written on to dry out.

PATH

It's probably just an oversight.

JACK

See?

PATH

Actually, I have a much bigger problem.

ALEX

You do? What is it?

PATH

Just that I came here to get lots of publicity and, you know, that's working out—but also I wanted to play a really good guy.

JACK

A good—! You're Macbeth!

ALEX

Hear him out.

(to PATH)

Yes, yes—a really good guy?

PATH

And let's face it: the fact is I'm playing a really bad guy. Big problem.

JACK

It wasn't for Laurence Olivier.



PATH

Yeah, but people know me. That's why I want to play Macduff.

JACK

Macduff? Alex—!

PATH

(to JACK)

Macduff is good! He's a hero! And *you hid him from me!*

JACK

I did no such thing!

PATH

He was like nowhere in the coverage!

JACK

Who's been talking to you?! Where do you get these idiotic ideas?!

BILLY

Idiotic?

JACK

I should have known!

ALEX

Easy, Jack! Let's discuss this calmly.

JACK

I am calm!

PATH

I don't like being lied to! Either you make me Macduff or I'll buy this town and give it back to the wolverines!

ALEX

Now, Path—

JACK

I never meant to mislead you about—

PATH

You didn't even tell me this play was cursed!

JACK

It's not cursed! Where do you see any evidence . . . whatsoever . . . that this play is . . . is . . . I need a drink.

BILLY

I'll get you one.

EDEN

(suddenly rising, moving JACK to a seat)

No, no, no—you don't need a drink. Sit down. Let's talk this out.

ALEX

My God, she's an angel, isn't she?

(noticing the stares he's getting)

Gentlemen, please. Cursed play or no, we must go forward. Path has a problem, and we need to solve it. Ideas?

BILLY

I have one: let's do *Edward III*.

PATH

(as JACK and ALEX groan)

What's that?

BILLY

He's a wonderful hero. A king of England, which is much better than Scotland—

ALEX

Billy. Too late. Let it go.

BILLY

Failing that, I would suggest that Path play Macduff—

JACK

That's completely impossi—!

ALEX

Jack.

JACK

We have an actor playing Macduff.

BILLY

Who just this morning was startled by a garter snake, slipped and fractured his coccyx. I took the call; hope you don't mind. He'll be out for several weeks, so I'd suggest that Path replace him and—I'm just spitballing here, just having a thought—that you, Jack, take over the role of Macbeth.

JACK

I'm the *director*. I can't act in the play too.

BILLY

Wasn't a problem for Olivier.

EDEN

Wait a minute! I'm not going to play opposite Jack—!

(to BILLY)

Path was going to make me Lady Macbeth.

BILLY

(pleasantly)

How nice! I didn't realize—

JACK

What in hell is going on here?!? Who's in charge of this production!!?

BILLY

(after a moment of general non-response)

If I may finish?

(as ALEX nods)

The solution, Eden, is for you to play Lady Macduff.

EDEN

But that's *smaller*!

BILLY

Not necessarily.

PATH

Billy and I have been working on some rewrites

BILLY

Starting with the title.

JACK

The title?

PATH

Yeah, we're going to call it *Macduff*. To reflect, you know, the enlarged role–

BILLY

And the slightly altered point of view. But don't worry, Macbeth will still be there. Just less of him.

PATH

Lots less. And Lady Macduff will be like hugely more.

EDEN

(getting cozy between PATH and ALEX)

Oooh, that sounds great!

JACK

Alex, are you listening to this?

ALEX

(as EDEN nuzzles him)

Let me hear the whole idea–

JACK

The whole–?! I'm being completely undercut here!

BILLY

Alex, think of it. We'd be doing a Shakespearean play which has only just now come into existence!

JACK

It's a play by Path Sanderson!

BILLY

*And* William Shakespeare. And that is how the writing credit will read–

JACK

You're a maniac!

JACK (cont'd)

(to ALEX)

He's deliberately trying to destroy this production!

PATH

Easy, boy! Rowf! He's a feisty little bowser!

JACK

I'll show you feisty--!!

(JACK goes for PATH. BILLY holds him back)

ALEX

*Jack--!! That's enough!!*

JACK

(relaxing, still angry)

And it's *Bonner*.

PATH

R-r-r-owf!

ALEX

Let's all calm down. Jack, as you know it's my policy never to interfere with a production or its director in the middle of rehearsals. Any decision here will be yours, and yours alone. Is that understood?

JACK

Thank you, Alex.

ALEX

Now as I see it, we can go one of two ways. First, we can continue our traditional production of the Scottish Play with a new actor as Macduff and-- who's Lady M?

JACK

Maud. It'll be Maud.

EDEN

Ja-ack--!

JACK

Sorry, that's final.

ALEX

Really? Fair enough. And of course Path would continue as Macbeth—

PATH

No way. If I'm him, I'm out of here.

ALEX

(to JACK)

You see the problem. Still, if it's what you decide, I'll support you. The other solution is to make these few little changes, which *would* make Path happier, and allow us to create an absolutely . . . unique dramatic experience and perhaps become one of the best known theaters in the country. I'm sure you could direct and play Macbeth at the same time. We could make Billy your assistant, and as far as I can see, that would make everyone happy. But as I say Jack, it's your decision. What shall we do?

JACK

I think it's pretty obvious—

PATH

(springing up, taking JACK aside)

Jack, Jackie, Jackity-Jack-Jack—before you decide, take a listen. You ask anybody in L.A. what my *absolutely* best quality is, you know what they'll say? Loyalty. You work with me right now and you have not my promise but my guarantee of a career both lucrative and creatively fulfilling in a little town I like to call Hollywood.

JACK

Path—

PATH

No, wait. Close your eyes and think about your salary. Now double it. Now double it again.

JACK

I'm not going to—

PATH

Now double it again. And *again*. That's your first year. Ok, open your eyes.  
(as JACK does so)

Have I got your attention? Good. Now consider the alternative. Doing a production *without* Path Sanderson. Instead of that street out there crawling with reporters, it'll be crawling with—well, whatever it usually crawls with. And even if you don't get fired for that, what do you have to look forward to? A lifetime of squeezing Romeo and Juliet's pimples for the next bunch of lumberjacks' kids? You're better than that, man. You're better than all of this. Help me show you.

JACK

I know what you're saying, and believe me, I think about it. I think about it hard. But if I keep things as they are, Maud's going to grant me visitation with my son. It's the only way I'll get it.

(A beat. PATH shakes his head sympathetically)

PATH

Man. Man. That's . . . that is really . . .  
(his mood suddenly breaking)  
Ok, I'm out of here.

ALEX

Path—!

PATH

There's no reasoning with this guy. Visitation! Talk about scraping the bottom of the barrel for an excuse. I'm sorry, but some of us have serious lives here. That's it. I'm gone.

JACK

(as PATH starts out)

I'll do it.

BILLY

What?

JACK

I'll . . . play Macbeth. You can play Macduff. We'll change the title, the billing, the whole thing. We'll do it your way, Path. Right down the line.

PATH

All right! I knew you'd crack.

JACK

Billy, you can . . . assist me.

BILLY

Wonderful!

ALEX

Are you sure about this, Jack?

JACK

I'm sure. I'm . . . I'm sure. So. I'd . . . better get over to the theater. When can I see the new script?

BILLY

It's on your desk.

JACK

Great. Thanks. I'm sure it's terrific.

(with unconvincing enthusiasm)

Let's have fun with this, people.

(As JACK starts to go, MAUD enters)

MAUD

There you are! Jack, I want an answer. Am I Lady Macbeth or not?

JACK

(with a sigh)

As much Lady Macbeth as there is . . . you are.

MAUD

Oh, Jack—that's wonderful!! I could kiss you!

JACK

See if you can hold that thought.

(JACK exits)



MAUD

What's wrong with him?

(Lights shift as she stares at the others)

## SCENE THREE

(Mainstage, the day before the first preview. If anything, there are even more limestone rocks in an asymmetrical ring. FRED stands center, rehearsing alone)

FRED

(as Banquo)

“Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,  
As the Weird Women promis’d; and, I fear,  
Thou play’dst most foully for’t; yet it was said,  
It should not stand in thy posterity;  
But that myself should be the root and father  
Of many kings—”

(PEWTER enters with a thick sheaf of papers)

FRED (cont’d)

Oh—hi!

PEWTER

(handing him some sides)

You’re the new Banquo.

FRED

What?

PEWTER

You’re not an understudy anymore. Jackson Sullivan left.

FRED

Not another one!?

PEWTER

Can you blame them? It’s not like they signed up for roles in *Macduff*.

FRED

But it's most of the cast. I mean, who's left?

PEWTER

Only those who can stomach the new lines. By the way, the speech you were just doing? Path rewrote it. Happy memorizing.

FRED

(reading it aloud)

"It's all yours now, baby. All the royal shit those Pointy-hat witches promised. But you broke the rules For that brass ring, MacBreath—" *MacBreath?*

PEWTER

Billy told Path about the curse, so he changed the name.

FRED

" . . . But just remember, the pointy-hat Witches also said you're gonna shoot a bunch of blanks, And my no-neck monsters are gonna be kings—" This is terrible!

PEWTER

Actually, for Path it's pretty good.

FRED

This is such a disaster. If you weren't here, I'd have quit so long ago.

PEWTER

I have to go hand the rest of these out.

FRED

Wait a minute.

(taking her unwilling hand, starting to kneel)

Will you—?

PEWTER

Will you shut up!? No, I will not marry you! For the one hundred and eighty-seventh time! Can't you see my life is shattered? Jack's going to California, and he's not taking me! Me, who would kill for him, who would strangle all his enemies—totally, joyously. I'd even kill myself, if that's what he wanted.

FRED

I'd do that. For you, I mean.

PEWTER

You would? Ok—kill yourself. Right now.

(turning to go)

I knew you were all talk.

FRED

Wait—

PEWTER

You can't compete with my love for Jack. You're superficial and self-centered.

FRED

I am not.

PEWTER

Yeah? Why's my name Pewter? You've known me over a year; you've never asked.

FRED

Because . . . you're good with computers?

PEWTER

I'm terrible with computers! But when he hired me, Jack thought I was good with computers, 'cause I was young. So he started calling me that, as an endearment. And when he found out I sucked at computers and wanted to stop calling me that, I told him I'd changed my name anyway 'cause I liked the way it sounded—which I don't—but I wasn't going to throw away anything he gave me. I kept it and changed the spelling so I could be named after a dull and lusterless metal, like I feel inside. I'll love Jack until he forcibly casts me upon a trash heap somewhere and disappears without a trace. I'll love him even then.

FRED

I would come and save you.

PEWTER

You are so *thick!*

PEWTER (cont'd)

(starting out, then stopping)

By the way, we found a few costumes. Billy had some from an old show in his closet.

FRED

Great! Which show?

PEWTER

*Julius Caesar.*

FRED

Togas?! Why were they in his closet?

PEWTER

We don't want to know.

(BILLY enters. He has an air of desperation.

A very angry MAUD, in street clothes, follows him)

MAUD

*Billy—!*

BILLY

Not now, Maud. Fred, go get fitted for your toga. Pewter we're starting again, same place. Jack'll be here in a minute; he's getting into costume.

(as FRED and PEWTER exit, shouting into the house)

Myron? Feel free to work on the lights—you won't bother us.

(During the rest of the scene lights go up and down on various areas of the stage without regard to what's happening)

BILLY (cont'd)

Maud, could you see what's keeping Jack?

MAUD

I don't have time. Now that I'm Lady *Macbreath*, I'm too busy memorizing my *line*.

BILLY

I know Path's cut a lot of your role, but—

MAUD

A lot? A *lot*?! I'm barely in the murder scene, the banquet scene doesn't exist anymore and in the mad scene, he's got me washing my hands with a moist towelette!

JACK

(entering from backstage, in toga and sandals)

At least you're still a witch. How do I look?

BILLY

Wonderful! Very . . . theatrical!

MAUD

(slapping a piece of paper in his hand)

Have a poem.

JACK

“Mother says we make our luck. That's why you're a stupid—” You're writing these yourself.

MAUD

Maybe. The point is, you're going to be sorry. You're going to be extremely sorry.

JACK

What do you mean?

MAUD

There's a little visitor coming. One who writes poems.

JACK

Morgan?!

MAUD

Don't get excited—you're not going to see him. But he'll see you. He'll see every horrifying minute of this whatever-it-is you've created—all for the sake of betraying him one last time.

JACK

You wouldn't.

MAUD

You think I want him idealizing you out of ignorance? He needs to see what I've been saving him from all these years. He needs to see the man that I would rather die than have him become. Guess I'd better get into my costume.

(starting out, dropping a piece of paper behind her as she exits)

Oh—forgot. Another poem.

JACK

(picking it up and reading it)

"I'll be there tomorrow night. Mom says you are quite a sight."

(quietly, staring at the paper)

Let's rehearse.

BILLY

(calling towards the wings)

Path! Eden! We're starting again!

(PATH and EDEN enter. They wear togas and sandals)

BILLY

Where we left off, please.

(BILLY and JACK stand aside as PATH and EDEN lock in a passionate embrace. She pushes him away)

EDEN

"Please don't go back to Scotland. He'll kill you!"

PATH

"You're so good and beautiful. But I gotta."

EDEN

"Don't deprive me of your gorgeous eyes and . . . and hero's lips!"

PATH

"Time's up, Babe. Macbreath's days are numbered. I know he killed my partner. Now I gotta to prove it".

EDEN

“Oh please, prove it fast. Chop him to pieces. And chop his wife up, too. She is such a bitch”.

(tripping on one of the rocks, hopping around,  
holding her foot in pain)

*Shit—!!* Can't we get rid of these damn rocks!!?

PATH

I like 'em.

EDEN

*Ja-ack—!*

BILLY

(kneeling down to help her)

How's the foot, dear?

EDEN

Bleeding!

JACK

Pewter's going for new footwear later. We'll have it by tomorrow.

EDEN

I won't be able to walk by tomorrow!

JACK

Myron! Can we have a little light here?! You've got it everywhere else on stage!

EDEN

(as lights rise on her area)

Forget it! I'm not rehearsing anymore.

BILLY

Please? It's just a stumble-through.

EDEN

Never has that term been more appropriate. And I hate my costume!



JACK

They're all we've got.

EDEN

I feel like Caesar's wife.

BILLY

We're having them dyed. Someone from California. It'll make an enormous difference.

PATH

Actually, I'm totally comfortable.

EDEN

Of course *you're* comfortable, you have your own jet!

(horrified at what she's said)

I'm sorry, honey! I didn't mean that—!

PATH

If you guys don't want me here, I can leave right now.

EDEN

*No—!!*

BILLY

Please, Path—we're all on edge.

JACK

It just slipped out.

EDEN

It just slipped out—!

PATH

Really?

(as EDEN shakes her head anxiously)

Ok . . . you're tired and bloody—I forgive you.

EDEN

Thank you, Path!

JACK

(as she kisses him)

Let's take five to regroup.

(PATH whips out a cell-phone. ALEX climbs onto the stage from the house. He carries a small first-aid kit and immediately kneels at EDEN's feet)

ALEX

Are you all right?

EDEN

My toes-ies hurt . . .

ALEX

I can see. Jack, can't we make the rocks softer?

EDEN

It's so hard to rehearse . . .

ALEX

Are we going to be ready?

JACK

Absolutely.

PATH

If this was tv, we wouldn't even be asking the question.

(back to his cell)

Yeah, Marty? Path. It's going great! Hey, when you come tomorrow, can you bring more of the agricultural product?

ALEX

No one looks very Scottish . . .

BILLY

They will.

PATH

No, I mean the *agricultural* product. From my closet? That's right. See you tomorrow.

PATH (cont'd)

(flipping his cell shut)

Managers. You gotta take 'em by the hand.

ALEX

Jack, the press all want to come tomorrow night.

JACK

No! It's our first audience—it's a preview.

PATH

I said it was okay.

JACK

You did?

(with a shrug)

Whatever Path wants is fine with me.

PATH

*That's my little Bowser! Go for it, man! The only way!*

(giving a dog-pound cheer, then a merry yap)

Ok, I had a brainstorm last night. We're moving the climactic battle scene from the end of the play to the beginning.

BILLY

What?

ALEX

Is that wise?

PATH

No, we make it the frame, see? We wrap it around the rest of the story. Like we fade in—MacBreath and me are fighting, fighting, clangity-clang—then we freeze, see? We just like freeze, and the lights . . . go out or something, whatever they do, and when they come up again it's the three witches and their stewpot, and on we go. And then we fight again at the end of the show, only this time we show who won. That way I can say all my best lines twice.

JACK

(without hesitation, but dispassionately)

Brilliant.

JACK (cont'd)

(calling into the house)

Myron? Have you got that?

PATH

(to JACK)

Oh, and during the fight I'm not going to call you MacBreath, ok? I'm going to call you MacBowser, so I can woof at you and stuff.

JACK

Fine.

PATH

Just in the heat of the fight. For a laugh.

JACK

Sounds funny.

BILLY

Of course we don't have broadswords—or anything—yet.

PATH

I'm still deciding. It's between two things.

JACK

Whatever you like.

PATH

Great. Here, it'll go sort of like this. For now I'll stab you with my hand.

(holding his hand like a sword)

“Turn, Hell-hound, turn!”

(to BILLY)

Are we sure we want “hell-hound” and not “dirt-bag”?

BILLY

Trust me.

JACK

“Oh, crap! The one man I'm scared of.  
I killed your family, and your partner, too.  
I'll bet you're really upset”.

PATH

“My voice is in my sword”.

(PATH and JACK ‘fight’, using their arms as swords)

JACK

“You’re never going to hurt me dude,  
‘Cause you’re of woman born”.

PATH

“Ha! I knew you’d fall in my trap! Say hello to Mr. Caesarian! The joke’s on you, MacBowser!”

(PATH whines mockingly like a puppy then  
‘stabs’ JACK. A silence. The others look  
at JACK nervously. JACK smiles)

JACK

That’s great. That’ll work great.

ALEX

Jack? Are you all right?

JACK

Couldn’t be better.

(As PATH gives a playful “woof”, PEWTER  
enters and hands JACK some pages)

PEWTER

Path just rewrote this.

PATH

Oh! Yeah. See how you like it.

JACK

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!”

JACK (cont'd)

(turning a page)

“Life is just a piece of crap. A bullshit actor  
Who hasn't got the brains or balls to go for it  
In L.A. It's a play written in English so old that  
No one understands it, full of rhyme and meter,  
Signifying . . . nothing . . . dude”.

(after a beat)

This is . . . good, Path. This is . . . This—

PATH

That *rocks*, baby. That's what that does.

JACK

I'd better, um . . . I'd better go memorize it.

PATH

(extending his hand)

Hey, kiss my ring first.

JACK

What?

PATH

My ring. Kiss my ring. Why do you think I wear it?

(as JACK stares at him confused)

I wrote you a terrific speech. Gratitude?

(JACK looks at the others. They all find a way  
to look away. JACK reluctantly bends and kisses  
PATH's ring)

BILLY

All right, everyone. Let's return to the love scene, if we may. Jack, didn't you  
have some notes on that?

PATH

We already did it. We can't keep rehearsing forever. Gotta leave room for the  
inspiration of the moment.

(an arm around EDEN)

What do you say we sack out the rest of the afternoon?

EDEN  
(with a swift glance at ALEX)

I'm . . . I-

ALEX  
If we are going to break, why not go for a drink? The three of us.

PATH  
Three's not a good number for what I've got in mind, old guy.

ALEX  
You mean, you and Path are-?

EDEN  
I'm sorry, Papa Bear. I was going to tell you-

PATH  
Don't call him Papa Bear. I'm your Papa Bear.

EDEN  
Path-

PATH  
What were you screaming at three in the morning last night, eh?  
(prompting her)  
"Who's your Papa Bear? Who's your Papa Bear?"

EDEN  
You are.

PATH  
(cheerfully, to ALEX)  
See? You're not the Papa Bear. I'm the Papa Bear.  
(pointing to himself)

Papa Bear-  
(pointing to ALEX)  
Not Papa Bear. You *used* to be the Papa Bear, but you're old and dead now,  
and I'm the new, young, actually-can-get-it-up Papa Bear. *Comprende?* Great.  
See all you little forest creatures tomorrow.

(PATH exits with EDEN in tow)

BILLY

I guess that's a break. Are those more rewrites?

PEWTER

A couple.

BILLY

Maybe we should . . . go look these over.

(BILLY and PEWTER exit, leaving only  
JACK and ALEX)

JACK

(quietly)

Sorry, Alex.

ALEX

That's all right. Plenty of actresses where she came from, eh? No end of . . .  
actresses. Still, there was something about her.

JACK

Eden? Yeah, there's something about her.

(ALEX exits quietly into the house. After a  
moment ZITA limps in, very depressed. She's  
in toga and sandals. Her toes are bloody)

ZITA

Got any Band-aids?

(as he hands her Band-Aids from under his toga)

Can hardly wait for our first audience tomorrow night. Is there even one scene  
we've rehearsed all the way through?

JACK

I know it's rough. Thanks for staying.

ZITA

What else can I do? I'm too depressed to leave. I knew you'd depress me—you  
always find a way.



JACK

Zita—

ZITA

At least Path didn't rewrite the witches. He likes it that no one understands what we say—thinks it's more "witchy". Plus through attrition I've got more roles. I'm now the English Doctor, the Scottish Doctor, the Old Man and Ross—only now he's called Rusty.

(finishing up the bandaging)

So. That's why I'm here. Why are you? How come you sold out your own kid?

JACK

I was lying to myself. It never would've worked. It's been too long; he hates me now.

ZITA

You lost your nerve? That's all it was?

JACK

I faced reality.

ZITA

You wouldn't know reality if it ripped your whole life up. Oh excuse me, I forgot. It has.

JACK

We live with our choices.

ZITA

We're all going to live with your choice tomorrow night. The sooner we get this disaster over, the better. Suppose you'll be all right no matter what happens. After all, the Dark Thistle is right over there.

(limping out, stopping)

You sure we're getting new shoes?

JACK

Pretty sure.

ZITA

As your therapist I'm very disappointed.

(She limps out again. JACK stares after her.  
Suddenly the lights black out)

JACK  
(shouting in the dark)

*Myron-!!*

(A path of light appears onstage. In one direction it  
leads where ZITA has exited. The other leads to  
where ZITA indicated the Dark Thistle is)

Thank you.

(JACK starts out in the direction ZITA went.  
He stops, hesitates a moment, then turns and  
goes out in the direction of the bar)

## SCENE FOUR

(The main stage, just before the start of *MacDuff*.  
ALEX stands alone at center, looking awkwardly  
out at the house)

ALEX

Good evening, everyone! I'm Alex McConnell, founder of the Northernmost Shakespeare Festival Theater.

(smiling through the sound of applause from  
the audience)

What a wonderful full house! I swear, the whole town of Bannockburn must be here tonight!

(over applause)

I know you don't normally see me on stage, but I want to welcome you to a very special occasion: the opening of our thirtieth anniversary season with a brand-new adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by none other than Path Sanderson—

(smiling through much louder applause and  
teenaged girls' screams and shouts of "Path!", etc.)

Yes, yes. As I say, a new play entitled *MacDuff*. I think we're in for a . . . a truly unforgettable evening. By the way, I want to thank you for braving the elements to attend this first preview. I know there's a tornado watch. Rest assured we'll be monitoring the situation closely.

(as smoke begins to wreath the stage and  
obscure the low rocks all around him)

Oh—well, I see we're beginning. I'd better leave the stage to the professionals.

(starting off, tripping on a rock, amid audience laughter)

Oops! Pardon me. Getting very smoky . . . I hope everything's . . .

(he trips again)

Oh, dear! Don't worry, I'll make it. Thank you, everyone! Have a . . .

(almost tripping again)

*Damn it—!* Enjoy!

(ALEX stumbles off as the smoke threatens to obscure everything onstage. The lights, still unreliable, are dim with sudden flashes. Sounds of invisible battles, cries and screams of fighters offstage, etc. PATH enters, to wild applause and shouts—*ala* a rock concert. His toga

has indeed been dyed: tie-dyed, in garishly bright colors. This will be true of all the togas in the show. He now wears heavy, black steel-toed shoes and carries a hatchet)

PATH

“God, it’s noisy! Where the hell are you, MacBreath?! I’m here to chop you into little pieces, just like you tried To do to my whole family! Come on, MacBreath—stop hiding! I’m tired of killing little guys. It’s time to rumble!”

(JACK enters as MacBreath, wearing the same sort of shoes as PATH—as will they all now—and carrying a hatchet. JACK weaves as he moves. It’s getting too smoky for them to see well)

JACK

“Why should I fall on my own hatchet? Better to Bury it in your thick skull, MacDuff!”  
(unable to see)

MacDuff!?

PATH

“Turn, hell-bitch, turn!”

JACK

*(sotto voce)*

Where?

PATH

*(likewise)*

Over here!

(JACK takes a step in the direction of PATH’s voice and makes a blind swing with his hatchet, nearly cutting PATH’s head off)

PATH (cont’d)

Watch it with that thing! What are you, drunk?  
(realizing that JACK is indeed drunk)

Oh, geez—!! You are!!

JACK

Get ready to die!

PATH

(taking a wild swing of his own)

Yeah? “My voice is in my sword!” I mean, my hatchet!

JACK

(stumbling on a rock, falling)

Shit—!

PATH

(over him, hatchet poised)

“Say hello to Mr. Caesarian! The joke’s on you, MacBows—!”

(JACK hits PATH hard on his shoe  
with the blunt end of his hatchet)

PATH

*Agghh—! Damn—!! What the hell are you doing!!*

JACK

Don’t call me that!

PATH

I think you broke my toe—! Oh, *man—!!*

(PATH stumbles and falls. As he does so, a scene change begins. The battle noises cross-fade into murky, witchy sounds and MAUD, ZITA and EDEN, all in tie-dyed togas, steel-toed shoes—and yes, pointy hats—drag in a huge, unwieldy, bubbling cauldron. There’s still a lot of smoke, so they inevitably bump into rocks—each woman uttering a soft “shit!” whenever she does so. They don’t notice they’re about to set the cauldron down that they’re setting the cauldron down directly atop PATH’s supine form)

MAUD

(entering)

“When shall we three meet again?” Shit!

MAUD (cont'd)

“In thunder, lightning, or in rain?”

ZITA

“When the hurlyburly’s done,  
When the—” Shit! “When the battle’s lost and won”.

EDEN

“That will be ere the set of—” Shit! “. . . sun”.

PATH

*Watch it—!*

(They set the cauldron down as PATH rolls away)

MAUD, ZITA and EDEN

(together)

“Fair is foul and foul is fair:  
Hover through the fog and filthy air”

MAUD

(tripping over JACK, *sotto voce*)

Get off the stage!

JACK

(*sotto voce*)

I hurt my knee.

(FRED enters, dressed as the others,  
with a hatchet at his side)

FRED

“Hey, there—how the hell far is it to Forres?”

ZITA

(*sotto voce* to FRED)

Not yet!

FRED

I thought—

PATH

(trying to help JACK off stage)

Come on, you drunk piece of—

JACK

(taking another swing at him)

*Get away from me!!*

(PATH trips and falls backward, dropping his hatchet. JACK crawls after him, hatchet in hand. PATH crawls away, having hurt his own leg now. Suddenly a trap opens in front of PATH, who nearly falls in. JACK keeps coming after him)

PATH

*JESUS—!!*

FRED

(plunging on, not knowing what else to do)

“Man, these chicks are whacked! Look at their Pointy hats. Have you ever seen anything like that Before?”

*(sotto voce)*

Jack, it’s your line—!

JACK

(from the floor, still pursuing PATH)

“Speak if you can. What are you?” *Where* are you—?!

(JACK takes a swing, just missing PATH’s leg)

PATH

Stop it, dude!

(calling up to the booth)

Hey, there’s a hole in the floor! *Fix the hole!!*

(As the trap slowly closes and the slow-motion pursuit continues, a roaring sound seems to come from outside the theater. It slowly grows louder)

MAUD

“All hail, MacBreath!”

MAUD (cont'd)

(jumping away as JACK takes another wild swing)

“Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!”

PATH

Co-producer on my next movie—what do you say?!

JACK

What movie? You're *dead!!*

(As the roaring outside grows louder, JACK swings again, nearly hitting ZITA)

ZITA

“All hail, MacBreath!

(ducking)

Watch it, shithead! Are you drunk? Oh God, he's drunk! “Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!”

EDEN

“All hail, MacBreath! that shalt be king—” Jack, let him *alone—!!* I'm *sleeping* with him—!

MAUD

(as JACK continues stalking PATH)

Who *wouldn't* you sleep with?

EDEN

You shut up!

ZITA

Get back in character, both of you!

EDEN

Who's line is it?

ZITA

*Fred—!!!*

FRED

“Why are you freaked, dude? This sounds like really



FRED (cont'd)

Good shit--?"

(jumping away, as JACK swings at PATH)

*Crap!! Watch it!!*

(ZITA grabs PATH's hatchet from the floor  
and brandishes it)

ZITA

Everybody! Back in character! Right *now!!*

EDEN

Stop being so bossy!

ZITA

I'll show you bossy, you little slut!

(ZITA swings at EDEN, missing her. EDEN  
blanches and screams. Stepping back, she trips  
over a rock and falls into the witches' cauldron.  
Her legs wave helplessly as she tries to get out.  
The roar outside continues to build)

ZITA (cont'd)

(to FRED)

Do your line!

FRED

I can't remember it!

ZITA

(swinging at FRED, who ducks)

Am I the only sane one here?!!

EDEN

(muffled, from the cauldron)

*He-elp--!!*

ALEX

(from his seat in the audience)

Will someone *help her!*?

ALEX (cont'd)

(rushing on stage, grabbing EDEN by her legs and trying to pull her out)

Don't worry, darling! I'm here!

(suddenly aware of the crowd)

By "darling" I only mean—

EDEN

Shut up and *help me!!*

(ALEX does so as JACK crawls after PATH and ZITA menaces MAUD with her hatchet)

JACK

(still crawling after PATH)

*Stop moving!!*

PATH

*NO!!!*

MAUD

Give me the hatchet, Zita—

ZITA

No! Do your line!

MAUD

What line?

ZITA

I don't care! Just do one!!

MAUD

(doing so, cornered)

"Lesser than Macbreath, and greater."

ZITA

"Not so happy, yet much happier—"

(FRED takes this moment to grab ZITA from behind, disarming her. The hatchet clatters to

the floor. MAUD tries to hide behind an insufficiently large rock)

FRED

I've got her—!

ZITA

Let me go—!!

(As the two of them struggle, a wild swing from JACK strikes FRED's heel)

FRED

*AGGHHH—!!!!*

JACK

(carrying on after PATH)

Sorry!

(FRED falls. By now the roar outside is very loud. PEWTER, her headset still on, rushes in from the wings, grabbing the fallen hatchet. She quickly kneels by FRED)

PEWTER

*Fred!!* Are you all right?!

(to JACK)

Why'd you *do that*?!!

JACK

Didn't mean to—

ZITA

(to PEWTER, of the hatchet)

Give me that! You're not even an actor!

(ZITA grabs at the hatchet in PEWTER's hand—a tug of war ensues. Just as ALEX finally gets EDEN out of the cauldron, ZITA's grip slips, and she falls back into EDEN, knocking her back into the cauldron. ALEX tries to push ZITA away.)

They struggle and ZITA falls in the cauldron as well. ALEX grabs both their legs and tries to pull them out. As the roar outside rises to a near-deafening level, PATH tries to escape JACK's pursuit but slips and hits his head. He's groggy. This is JACK's chance)

JACK

Pewter! Kill him! Kill Path! He's right next to you!

PEWTER

(dropping her hatchet)

No.

JACK

Why not? You said you would.

PEWTER

I love Fred!

FRED

You do?

(JACK crawls to PATH and grabs him, holding the hatchet high)

MAUD

(rising, pointing at JACK, to the audience)

Morgan?! Watch carefully! This is *your father*—!!

PATH

Don't do it, man! Think what you'll lose!

JACK

What?! I've got no career, my three exes are a harpy, a wacko and a prostitute—!

PATH

Your kid! What about your kid!?!?

(As JACK hesitates, PEWTER rushes to grab his hatchet arm from behind. JACK struggles with her as the trap starts to open again. BILLY hurries in

from the wings and addresses the audience)

BILLY

Everybody! The tornado watch has been upgraded–

PEWTER

Give me that–!

JACK

No!!

BILLY

It's now a warning–! We need to get to the basement–!!

(JACK wrestles PEWTER off, shoves her aside. PATH grabs his hatchet arm, and MAUD grabs JACK as well. He struggles with them both, hatchet poised. No one pays any attention to BILLY)

ZITA

(as ALEX finally gets her out of the cauldron, to BILLY)

What's he doing here? He's not an actor!

BILLY

(to the audience)

“Shelter yourselves, for now the storm doth rise.  
Away! Away! Methinks I hear their drums.  
Ah, wretched France, I greatly fear thy fall:  
Thy glory shaketh like a tottering wall.”

(running across the stage)

Come on, everybody! Follow me!

(running straight into the open trap, disappearing)

*Aaggggghhhh–!!!!*

(The others stop struggling for a moment to stare, then immediately resume their struggles. JACK shakes off MAUD and frees his arm. He raises the hatchet homicidally)

MAUD

*JACK–!!!!*

PATH

*NO-!!!!*

(MORGAN, thirteen, comes up on stage from the house)

MORGAN

Dad?!

(JACK freezes. Everyone looks at MORGAN)

MORGAN (cont'd)

(shouting in what's by now a gale of sound)

I'm scared!

(The roar becomes deafening. The walls shake.  
It's Armageddon. They all look toward the roof.  
Blackout)

## SCENE FIVE

(The Dark Thistle, the next day. Everyone's there except PATH. They sit in a dazed gloom. JACK's leg is in a pressure cast. Others have the odd arm or leg bandaged. BILLY has a crutch. MORGAN sits near his mother, leafing through a dog-eared news magazine. The others stare vacantly. After a moment FRED, also in a pressure cast, limps in with a drink on a tray. He puts it in front of ALEX)

FRED

Scotch on the rocks.

ALEX

Thank you, Fred.

FRED

(as ALEX sips)

The radio said it's the first time in North American history that a tornado and an earthquake occurred in the same place at the same time.

(after a beat, to ALEX)

I'm sorry about the theater. And the town. There isn't much left.

ALEX

It's all right. Thank God we got everyone into the basement in time.

FRED

Sorry about all the mosquitos down there. Guess there weren't enough frogs to-

JACK

It's all right, Fred. It's all right. I know a lot of people in DC. At least there'll be plenty of disaster relief. Wish it were that easy to repair a reputation.

(after a beat, to BILLY)

What on earth were you quoting last night? All that about "wretched France"?

BILLY

It was *Edward III*.

ALEX

Just couldn't wait, could you?

EDEN

(after a beat)

Path must be back in L.A. by now.

ZITA

(popping a pill)

If I was him, I'd just keep flying.

BILLY

Back on the meds, I see. Good timing.

MAUD

(after a beat)

Anything interesting in the magazine, darling?

(With a sidelong look at JACK,  
MORGAN shakes his head no)

PEWTER

Is anything left of the theater?

FRED

Does rubble qualify as "anything"?

BILLY

(after a beat)

We could rebuild.

ALEX

Here? The town would never let us. We're lucky they didn't lynch us.

BILLY

Somewhere else then?

ALEX

Nowhere in America would let us.

(BILLY sighs. A beat)



MAUD

Is the van packed?

FRED

Wasn't much left to pack it with, but yeah. It's ready for . . . whoever's going.

MAUD

(rising)

We are going—right now. I want to get my child out of here before the aftershocks. Come on, dear.

ALEX

(as MORGAN rises)

Morgan? Isn't there . . . anyone you want to say goodbye to?

MAUD

No, there isn't. Morgan?

(She quickly shepherds her son out. ZITA rises)

ZITA

I'm going, too. Be sure to call me, Jack.

(handing him a card)

You need a lot of putting back together, personality-wise. The good news is, your career won't be taking up a lot of time. *Ciao*, all.

(She exits. JACK reads her card)

JACK

“Zita Virago, Doctor of Psychotherapy. New York, Los Angeles . . . Bangkok.”

(As he lets the card flutter to the floor, EDEN rises)

EDEN

Thanks, everybody. It's been . . . the worst experience of my life.

(Listlessly, they all raise a hand to not-quite wave goodbye as EDEN exits)

PEWTER

This'll be a fun group to drive. Fred, is your stuff in the van?

FRED

I'm not going anywhere. You said, "I love Fred".

PEWTER

No, I didn't.

FRED

Yes, you did.

PEWTER

Didn't mean it.

FRED

Yes, you did.

PEWTER

(as she and FRED exit)

I did *not*.

FRED

(off)

Did.

PEWTER

(off)

Didn't!

ALEX

(after a beat)

I need time to think. Maybe I'll go up to Sudbury for the summer.

BILLY

Where?

ALEX

Mining town, up in Ontario. My mother's people were from there. I'm half-Canadian, you know.

BILLY

Really? Does Sudbury . . . have a Shakespeare Festival?

ALEX

Not that I know of.

BILLY

Well . . . *that's* lucky.

ALEX

(with growing excitement)

Yes, it is.

BILLY

Where is it exactly?

ALEX

I have a map in my car.

(as they rise)

Jack? Are you coming?

JACK

(tempted for a moment, but shaking his head no)

You go ahead. I'm fine.

(holding up his cell phone)

Still waiting for my sponsor to call back.

ALEX

Your sponsor? L.A.?

JACK

A.A.

BILLY

Sure you won't come?

(JACK nods, and they rush off)

ALEX

(as they exit)

We can do the whole canon again!

BILLY

Absolutely!

ALEX

But not the Scottish play.

BILLY

*Never* the Scottish play!

(A moment passes. MORGAN appears, still carrying his magazine. JACK looks up and sees him)

MORGAN

Thought you might like something to read.

JACK

Thank you.

MORGAN

(handing JACK the magazine)

There's a good article in there. Says Upper Michigan has one of the largest life-forms in the world. Gigantic, underground fungus. Stretches for miles.

JACK

Thank you.

MORGAN

No sweat.

MAUD

(calling from outside)

Morgan—!

(MORGAN has an impulse to leave but stays. He and JACK stand looking at each other)

MAUD (cont'd, off)

*Morgan--!!!*

(MORGAN starts to smile. JACK smiles back)

MORGAN

Later.

JACK

Later.

(Their smiles widen)

MAUD

(off)

Morgan--!!!

(MORGAN hurries out. JACK stares after him.  
He's still smiling when his cell phone rings)

JACK

(answering)

Hello?

***THE END***