

## Scene 9 (II ii)

Some time later, inside the castle

We are back inside the castle, in a passage which leads to the backstairs which give private access to Duncan's bedroom. When Macbeth has committed the murder, he will come down those stairs.

(II ii 2) Enter Lady. ... His wife enters, to wait for him at the foot of the stairs. Despite having had a drink or two to keep up her courage, she is acutely alert to her surroundings. Everything is so quiet that random noises sound very loud to her, even when they come from outside.

(II ii 5) Hark! ... She is startled, but recovers. It was just an owl.

(II ii 13) Who's there? ... A voice cries out in the distance. Folio makes Macbeth enter in order to deliver this line, but that cannot be right. The line is to be spoken by a muffled voice offstage, not necessarily by Macbeth. (His wife is not sure whose voice it was.) But since Macbeth is in the wings, daubing his hands with red paint while he waits to come on, perhaps it might be convenient to give this line to him.

(II ii 16) Hark! ... She is startled again, by some noise -- we are not told what.

(II ii 17-18) Had he not resembled ... A surprising admission of her own weakness. When the moment came, she succumbed to those "compunctious visitings of nature" (I v 50) from which she had hoped to be spared. She "laid the daggers ready"; she did not use them herself.

(II ii 19) My husband! ... This is the moment for Macbeth to enter, with two bloody daggers in his hands. (He seems not to have got any blood on his clothes.)

(II ii 20-3) I have done the deed. ... Folio loses some speech-prefixes here, I think, and so loses the rhythm of the dialogue. As I hear it, the conversation should go like this:

*Macbeth.* I have done the deed.

*Lady.* Didst thou not hear a noise?

*Macbeth.* I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.

*Lady.* Did not you speak?

*Macbeth.* When?

*Lady.* Now.

*Macbeth.* As I descended?

*Lady.* Ay.

The third line here sounds like Macbeth to me.

(II ii 30) This is a sorry sight. ... He is looking at his bloody hands -- that was how Pope (1723:539) understood the line -- and tries to show them to her. But she does not want to look at them. (She only realizes later that he is still holding the daggers.)

(II ii 58) Go get some water ... Now she looks at his hands -- and is horrified to see what he has done. (I think Folio's "Hand" should probably be changed to "hands", as it was by Davenant (Chetwin 1674:20). But Macbeth does later speak of one hand (II ii 77) where he might rather be expected to speak of both.)

(II ii 72) Knock within. ... The knocking begins. (The reason for it, as Shakespeare will let us know when he is ready, is that Macduff and Lennox are trying to get into the castle. The gate is locked, as of course it would be, and the porter is slow to wake up.)

C.F. Dec 2025