

The Tragedy of Macbeth

[Shakespeare homepage](#) | [Macbeth](#) | Act 4, Scene 2
[Previous scene](#) | [Next scene](#)

SCENE II. Fife. Macduff's castle.

Enter LADY MACDUFF, her Son, and ROSS

LADY MACDUFF

What had he done, to make him fly the land?

ROSS

You must have patience, madam.

LADY MACDUFF

He had none:
His flight was madness: when our actions do not,
Our fears do make us traitors.

ROSS

You know not
Whether it was his wisdom or his fear.

LADY MACDUFF

Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes,
His mansion and his titles in a place
From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;
He wants the natural touch: for the poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
All is the fear and nothing is the love;
As little is the wisdom, where the flight
So runs against all reason.

ROSS

My dearest coz,
I pray you, school yourself: but for your husband,
He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
The fits o' the season. I dare not speak
much further;
But cruel are the times, when we are traitors
And do not know ourselves, when we hold rumour
From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
But float upon a wild and violent sea
Each way and move. I take my leave of you:

Shall not be long but I'll be here again:
Things at the worst will cease, or else climb upward
To what they were before. My pretty cousin,
Blessing upon you!

LADY MACDUFF

Father'd he is, and yet he's fatherless.

ROSS

I am so much a fool, should I stay longer,
It would be my disgrace and your discomfort:
I take my leave at once.

Exit

LADY MACDUFF

Sirrah, your father's dead;
And what will you do now? How will you live?

Son

As birds do, mother.

LADY MACDUFF

What, with worms and flies?

Son

With what I get, I mean; and so do they.

LADY MACDUFF

Poor bird! thou'ldst never fear the net nor lime,
The pitfall nor the gin.

Son

Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set for.
My father is not dead, for all your saying.

LADY MACDUFF

Yes, he is dead; how wilt thou do for a father?

Son

Nay, how will you do for a husband?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

Son

Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

LADY MACDUFF

Thou speak'st with all thy wit: and yet, i' faith,
With wit enough for thee.

Son

Was my father a traitor, mother?

LADY MACDUFF

Ay, that he was.

Son

What is a traitor?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, one that swears and lies.

Son

And be all traitors that do so?

LADY MACDUFF

Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.

Son

And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

LADY MACDUFF

Every one.

Son

Who must hang them?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, the honest men.

Son

Then the liars and swearers are fools,
for there are liars and swearers enow to beat
the honest men and hang up them.

LADY MACDUFF

Now, God help thee, poor monkey!
But how wilt thou do for a father?

Son

If he were dead, you'd weep for
him: if you would not, it were a good sign
that I should quickly have a new father.

LADY MACDUFF

Poor prattler, how thou talk'st!

Enter a Messenger

Messenger

Bless you, fair dame! I am not to you known,
Though in your state of honour I am perfect.
I doubt some danger does approach you nearly:
If you will take a homely man's advice,
Be not found here; hence, with your little ones.
To fright you thus, methinks, I am too savage;
To do worse to you were fell cruelty,
Which is too nigh your person. Heaven preserve you!
I dare abide no longer.

Exit

LADY MACDUFF

Whither should I fly?
I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world; where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence,
To say I have done no harm?

Enter Murderers

What are these faces?

First Murderer

Where is your husband?

LADY MACDUFF

I hope, in no place so unsanctified
Where such as thou mayst find him.

First Murderer

He's a traitor.

Son

Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain!

First Murderer

What, you egg!

Stabbing him

Young fry of treachery!

Son

He has kill'd me, mother:
Run away, I pray you!

Dies

Exit LADY MACDUFF, crying 'Murder!' Exeunt Murderers, following her

[Shakespeare homepage](#) | [Macbeth](#) | Act 4, Scene 2

[Previous scene](#) | [Next scene](#)