

Macbeth

4.2

Enter Macduff's Wife, 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.

5

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, 10
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, 15
He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
The fits o'th' 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, 20
But float upon a wild and violent sea
Each way and none. 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, 25
Blessing upon you!

LADY MACDUFF

Fathered 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, 30
And what will you do now? How will you live?

MACDUFF'S SON
As birds do, mother.

LADY MACDUFF What, with worms and flies?

MACDUFF'S SON
With what I get, I mean, and so do they.

LADY MACDUFF
Poor bird, thou'dst never fear the net nor lime,
The pitfall nor the gin. 35

MACDUFF'S 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?

MACDUFF'S SON Nay, how will you do for a husband? 40

LADY MACDUFF Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

MACDUFF'S 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.

MACDUFF'S SON Was my father a traitor, mother? 45

LADY MACDUFF Ay, that he was.

MACDUFF'S SON What is a traitor?

LADY MACDUFF Why, one that swears and lies.

MACDUFF'S SON And be all traitors that do so?

LADY MACDUFF Everyone that does so is a traitor, and 50
must be hanged.

MACDUFF'S SON And must they all be hanged that swear
and lie?

LADY MACDUFF Every one.

MACDUFF'S SON Who must hang them? 55

LADY MACDUFF Why, the honest men.

MACDUFF'S SON Then the liars and swearers are fools, for
there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest
men and hang up them.

LADY MACDUFF Now God help thee, poor monkey! But 60

how wilt thou do for a father?

MACDUFF'S 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! 65

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! 70
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 Messenger

LADY MACDUFF Whither should I fly?
I have done no harm. But I remember now 75
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? 80

A MURDERER Where is your husband?

LADY MACDUFF

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

A MURDERER He's a traitor.

MACDUFF'S SON

Thou liest, thou shag-haired villain.

A MURDERER (*stabbing him*) What, you egg!
Young fry of treachery!

MACDUFF'S SON He has killed me, mother. 85

Run away, I pray you.

[He dies.] Exit Macduff's Wife crying `Murder!'
followed by Murderers [with the Son's body]