Act 2 Scene 2

Duncan has been murdered. Macbeth is already regretting his action, and Lady Macbeth takes the daggers away from him.

1–2 That . . . fire: Like Duncan’s two chamberlains, Lady Macbeth has been drinking.

3 owl: The owl (like the raven) was thought to be a bird of ill omen and is now compared to the night watchman who rings his bell outside the cells of prisoners condemned to death.

4 the . . . night: the last good-night.

5 surfeited grooms: drunken servants.

6 possets: hot milky drinks with added liquor and spices, ‘nightcaps’.

7–8 death . . . die: death and life are struggling to decide whether the attendants live or die.

9–13 Alack . . . done’t: Lady Macbeth does not immediately see her husband—perhaps because he enters upstage behind her, or because the scene is in (imaginary) darkness.

10 th’attempt: the attempt to kill Duncan.

11 confounds: ruins.

15 crickets: The Elizabethans believed that the chirping of these insects was a herald of death.

SCENE 2

Macbeth’s castle; enter Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth

That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold;
What hath quench’d them, hath given me fire.

An owl shrieks

Hark, peace!

It was the owl that shriek’d, the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern’st good-night. He is about it.

The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms Do mock their charge with snores. I have drugg’d their possets,
That death and nature do contend about them,
Whether they live, or die.

Enter Macbeth with two bloody daggers

Macbeth

Who’s there? What ho?

Lady Macbeth

Alack, I am afraid they have awak’d,
And ’tis not done; th’attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miss ’em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done’t. My husband?

Macbeth

I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

Lady Macbeth

I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?

Macbeth

When?

Lady Macbeth

Now.