

Mary Elizabeth Oakley Plays Lady Macbeth

by Steven Michelson

Copyright © 2000 by Steven Michelson. All rights reserved.

(Mary Elizabeth Oakley, in her early twenties, walks on stage, dressed as Lady Macbeth in a nightgown, carrying a candle and a bloody dagger. She has a strong southern accent.)

MARY ELIZABETH

(Overacted, as Lady Macbeth) Out, damn spot! Out, I say! One: two: why, then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard?

(Breaking out of character) Oh, what am I doin'? I can't go on with this. I know, I know y'all came to see me - Mary Elizabeth Oakley - as Lady Macbeth, but I just can't do it no more. I'm sorry to interrupt the show like this, but I hope y'all understand.

(She looks out into the audience.)

Oh wow. Not an empty seat in the house. I do hope y'all have enjoyed the show thus far, but I just can't continue - not after what I've just done. If y'all want a refund, I can understand. But I tell you, I don't think y'all would be able to continue either, if you'd just done what I've just done.

I can't believe I did it, either. After three years of talkin' 'bout it, I finally did it! It's not like Jack didn't deserve it - if anybody deserved it, he certainly did. Oh, sure. Jack - that's my husband - didn't think I'd do it. Except for this acting, he didn't have a lot of faith in me lately. Matter of fact, he laughed when I told him what I was gonna do. You might have heard him backstage during the last scene, just before I came on. He was laughin' so hard, he just about laughed his sorry little ass off, until he fell on the floor. Did y'all hear that thump out here? Well, anyway, I'm glad he thought it was funny. He just kept on laughin' right up to the point when I plunged this dagger right through his sorry ass throat. Let me tell you, he ain't laughin' no more. And for once in my life, he ain't gonna control me.

I still find it hard to believe I got myself in this situation. Why would I let myself get involved with a man like Jack? Well, to be honest, it wasn't always bad. Oh sure, he used to get in fights with other kids in high school, but he treated me good. Bring me little gifts - flowers and stuff. He brought me long-stem roses on closin' night of our senior class production of *Our Town*. Wasn't that sweet? I played Emily. Did a real good job, too, if I do say so myself. Yeah, he treated me mighty nice back then. He even proposed to me after I found out I was pregnant with his child. Said that was the honorable thing to do. Have y'all ever seen a pregnant Emily? He promised me we'd have a good life together. He said we'd save up so that some day we could buy us a house in the suburbs with an eat-in kitchen and a yard with a swing set for the kids. Compared to the trailer park, that was just too much for me to pass up, so I agreed to marry him. I couldn't wait to get away from that place. Far away from the good-for-nothin' bastard who called himself my father and my momma the drunk who was too weak to protect me from his advances. I swore that when my baby was born, I would protect him like my momma never protected me.

For a while, we were doin' good. We had a nice apartment, he got himself a good union job fixin' jet engines, and I got me a job waitin' tables. We were doin' pretty good. We even had extra money for some nice things. That's when he bought me this here diamond ring. He couldn't afford one before we got married, but he made up for it. It's worth a pretty penny too, if you don't mind me sayin'.

I think the most wonderful day of my life was when Jason was born, four months after graduation. He was the most precious little thing. And he was mine. All seven pounds six ounces of him, with his blue eyes and bald little head, he was just so perfect and so needy and I was the one who was gonna take care of him. I was gonna protect him from all that was bad in the world. He wasn't gonna have to go through what I went through. When he was born, Jack didn't want me workin' no more, what with the new baby and all. Jack was determined to take care of his family. He used to say he didn't want nobody lookin' at him and thinkin' he couldn't support his own family. So he wouldn't let me go back to work. And to be honest, I didn't mind, as long as we could make ends meet. That's when Jack started puttin' in lots of overtime. And that's when I started takin' acting classes, to express my artistic side. Them classes really paid off, too. I think that's why I got this here part of *Lady Macbeth*.

On Jason's first birthday, the airline where Jack worked went bankrupt and Jack lost his job. I offered to go back to work till he found another one, but he wouldn't hear of it. He said a child needs his mother, probably because he didn't have one on account o' her dyin' when he was born. Things were a little tough, but we were determined to get through it. I kept remindin' him of our marriage vows - "for richer or for poorer... till death do us part." So he looked around for a job, but nobody was hirin' back then. That's when he started to drink, and when he drank, he drank. He was an angry drunk, too. Started blamin' me when things didn't go right. Said I wasn't supportive enough. Even started hittin' me on his worst days. I tried to please him, I tried to make a nice house for him, I tried to be supportive, but when he drank, there was nothin' I could do to make him happy. I felt terrible about our situation - like it was my fault. I kept offerin' to get a job, but he wouldn't let me. I said just until he got one himself. I think he was worried that I'd have an easier time gettin' a job than him, and if I did, that Jason and I wouldn't need him anymore. About the only thing he'd let me do outside the house was my acting. He was funny that way. He wouldn't let me work, but he'd let me take my classes and do my shows. I think he figured he could brag to his friends, sayin' he was married to a actress.

A few months went by since he lost his job, and he was drinkin' more and more, and gettin' more and more violent. I told him I thought he had a problem, but he said the only problem he had was me and little Jason. I know he didn't really mean it, but it hurt just the same and it made me angry - so angry I told him I'd kill him if he ever laid an unkind hand on little Jay, and he laughed at me. Course I know killin' is wrong, but when it comes to a mother protectin' her child, it's justified, don't y'all think?

Jack finally did get a job stockin' aisles at the grocery store, but it didn't pay nowhere near what his union job did. He stopped drinkin' for a while, and things seemed to be gettin' better. He even joined AA. Again I offered to look for a job to get more money, but he wouldn't let me. Three months later, they fired him for stealin' some rib-eye steaks for our anniversary. It was a nice gesture, I told him, but it was still stealin'. He didn't see it that way. That's when he went back on the bottle, and things just got worse from there. He was always drunk. He stopped me from seein' or talkin' to my friends. Besides grocery shoppin' and goin' to the liquor store for his beer, the only thing he let me leave the house for was my acting class, and he came along with me, probably to make sure I wasn't talkin' to nobody about him behind his back. He screened all my telephone calls and even put a lock on the phone. Can you believe that? He put a lock on the phone! I couldn't talk to no one without him knowin'.

Earlier today, Jason startin' to run a little fever, so I wanted to call the doctor. He wouldn't let me. Said Jason would be fine, and that we should all just come here to the theater and I should do the show. Then he had a few more beers.

The show was goin' pretty good, too, don't y'all think? This was supposed to be my big scene, too. The one where I was sleepwalkin' and couldn't get the blood stains off my hands. Well, since I had some time backstage since my last scene, I figured I'd take little Jay's temperature again. He was running a fever of 103. So I told Jack I was gonna call the doctor. He said over his dead body would he let me call a doctor, and he took the backstage phone and put it under his shirt so I couldn't get at it. So I said, "fine, if that's the way it's gotta be, that's the way it's gotta be. I will call the doctor. Over your dead body."

And that's what did it for me - when he wouldn't let me take care of my little boy - that's what did it for me, and that's what did him in. It was one thing makin' my life miserable, but I'd be damned if I'd just sit around like my momma did when he put my little boy's life at risk. Wouldn't even let me call a doctor! Can y'all believe that? What kind of monster won't let his wife call the doctor for his little boy?

So I grabbed the dagger we used back in Act 2 - that was a fun scene, don't y'all think? I figured if this here dagger was good enough to kill a king, it's good enough to kill Jack. Jack watched me pick it up, and asked me what I was goin' to do with it. I told him I was gonna kill him and he went crazy hysterical, laughin' so hard. He said I'd never go through with it. I saw that as a challenge that I could not pass up. I said, "oh yeah, you just watch me, you drunken bastard!" Enough was enough, I was gonna end his misery and mine with one swipe of the knife. So I jumped on him, swingin' the knife from side to side. That's when he fell down - the thump y'all must've heard before I came out here. He laughed a little more - said I wouldn't go through with it. I said, "go to hell!" and I plunged that dagger right through his throat until he laughed no more!

I was justified. I know I was. 'Course I know that killin' is wrong... most of the time. But in this situation, the way he treated me, the way he put my son's life at risk, it just made sense... it just made sense... it just made sense...

(She looks intently at her clean hands, somewhat in a daze.)

Oh my. Look at all this blood. Who'd a thought Jack would have so much blood in him? I gotta wash this off before someone sees me like this.

(She begins to exit.)

They might think I done somethin' wrong. It was justified, but they just might not understand. It was justified... it was justified... it was justified...

(She exits.)

THE END

(For added effect, two police officers could quietly converge from the back of the theater to the stage, and escort her off-stage.)