

The Piteous Life and Tragical Death
of
Steve the Intern

An Office Comedy of Shakespearean Proportions
By Daniel A. Takács

Dramatis Personae:

Duncan's Buckets:

Duncan: 50s-90s, President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chairman of the Board.

Anne: 50s-70s, Duncan's Assistant,

Roderick: 30s-60s, Production Manager, under Duncan.

Kent: 30s-60s, Chief Operating Officer, under Anne.

Eliza: 20s, General Manager, under Roderick.

James: 20s, intern to Roderick and Eliza.

Steve: 20s, intern to Anne and Kent.

Kyle: 30s-50s, head of human resources.

A Friar

Board Members, Interns, and Attendants.

Guildspersons:

Dick: a guildsman policeman.

Margaret: a guildswoman cook. Cockney dialect.

Cockney Tom: a guildsman janitor. Cockney dialect.

Meek: a guildsman stage manager.

Actor Laurence: a guildsman actor. English RP dialect.

Stoner Stu: a guildsman warehouse worker at Duncan's Buckets. Stoner dialect.

Additional Guildspersons.

Gloucester's Twenty-Ducat Buckets:

Gloucester: 50s-70s, president of Gloucester's Buckets, a hunchback.

The Bucketheads: Gloucester's mute soldiers.

The Place: Elizabethan New England

The Time: Modern Day

ACT I

Scene 1:

(A conference room. Enter STEVE.)

STEVE

O, for a bard to whet our blunted eyes!
For kings and minotaurs and gods,
For monstrous men and shipwreck'd ships,
Success against thrice deathly odds.
Such horrors and delights I'd preach
To hold your breaths upon my lips,
But gods and monsters are all dead,
And heroines beyond our reach.
But, if your pardon we may beg,
These humble artisans and I
Have toil'd ourselves to learn a play
Which may the meanwhile please thine eye.
No honor will you find, nor glory
Within nigh modern tales we'll sing,
Yet evil's still within our story
For evil did survive the death of kings.
It is a tale of overthrows
And poisons, crowns and thrones and pacts,
Of loves to out-woo Cicero,
Of motives true, and sinful acts.
So hark and listen, if we have your leave,
A tale of interns vile and low:
The tale of murd'rous Steve!

(Enter JAMES.)

STEVE

You! What do you here, young sir?
You are unknown to me.

JAMES

You know'st me not, for this is but my first
And, Duncan willing, not my final day
Within your company. My name is James.

STEVE

Are not you some worming agent of our rival?
Bent with venom'd plan against wise Duncan?

JAMES

I swear I am no spy by this my ring
Which beareth on it the fraternal sign
And Grecian letters which our worthy Duncan
Also sports from youthful college days.

STEVE

I trust the letters on this ring as if
'Twere writ by honest Jove himself.
But wherefore come you to this place
You are not meant to witness?

JAMES

Lost, I am!

As newest intern, basest of all trades,
I lost my labrynthinal way between (*LAB-rinth-AEE-null*)
The desks, when up I cast my dizzied eyes
And found my person like a lonesome skiff
In this sweet treasure cove of office space.

STEVE

This is our hallow'd room of conf'rence;
Here Duncan curves this lofty enterprise
Along the tides of business. But get you gone!
Our holy Duncan, chairman of the board,
Our CEO, and president, will momentarily
Divide his vastly holdings and select
His order of inheritance. What ho!
Who's there!

(Enter ELIZA.)

ELIZA

'Tis I, Eliza, Roderick's faithful underling.

STEVE

And glad am I to see your handsome face
In times of such uncertainty.

ELIZA

My love.

(STEVE and ELIZA kiss.)

ELIZA

Some news I bring, but who's this interloper?

STEVE

This boy is James, an intern like myself,
And sworn to Duncan, as we all do swear.

ELIZA

Young James! Roderick, my boss, foretold
Your coming, for to him and me you are assign'd.
He bids you watch this coming meeting that
You may observe his acts and axioms
To learn the ropes of Duncan's twisty ladder.

JAMES

My thanks, I pledge myself to you and Rod'rick.

ELIZA

A double pledge, no honesty in that.

JAMES

I mean to Duncan, CEO, and you his agents.

ELIZA

Well, then I accept your triple pledge, so long
As Duncan justly reigns it.

JAMES

Many thanks.

STEVE

You are welcome, James. But Eliza: news!

ELIZA

Young James, this you may hear: you know that favor
Hath ever shine'd on Roderick to succeed
To Duncan's old position on retirement.

STEVE

And pass o'er Anne, who otherwise would have
An easy throne, but all know this, Eliza!

ELIZA
Nay.

For now it dawns that Anne has newfound hope:
Some presentation Kent hath wrought for her,
That clever ghostwriter, meant to swipe
The seat from under Rod'rick's rear.

STEVE
Bad news for you, who would be Rod'rick's heir.

ELIZA
Yes, but good for thee, who as Kent's intern,
Might buy some kingly influence.

STEVE
No crown did ever
Trickle down to interns through succession,
Our hopes must bet on your career, not mine.
For Roderick must we fight today.

ELIZA
I hate to think on thee a-languishing
As damn'd eternal intern.

STEVE
I love you as myself,
And so I must gift to thee each thing I love,
Even my ambition.

ELIZA
Your love is clarified in action.
O Kiss me, Steve!

(STEVE and ELIZA kiss. Enter DUNCAN, RODERICK, KENT,
ANNE, KYLE, BOARD MEMBERS, and ATTENDANTS.)

STEVE
But who comes now? 'Tis Duncan and his herald,
Come here to spill their zipper'd mouths
With news of layoffs or of cheer.

KYLE

Here cometh President Duncan King,
Founder of Duncan's Buckets,
Chairman of the Board,
And Chief of Operating Officers,
As wise a man as ever walked this Earth,
And good as any Saint. All hail, Duncan!

ALL

All hail Duncan!

KYLE

Ye may seated be.

(ALL sit, except DUNCAN. Pause.)

DUNCAN

There once was a man from Nantucket
Who started a firm to make buckets,
But when the time came
To pass on his name,
He sold the damn thing and said, “fuck it.”
My friends, my good men, my assistants,
I know I'll be met with resistance,
But Gloucester (*GLOU-stir*) has offer'd,
From deep in his coffers,
A purchase with gaudy persistence.
Now knowing you're working for Gloucester,
Whoever shall follow my ouster
Will work under him
And sail to his whim;
For this new position you joust.
Now whom in this room is still willing,
Now known the position you're filling,
To answer my riddle?
Who'll play second fiddle?
Good Kent, your demeanor is chilling.

KENT

My lord, you know I love you like a father,
And my fellow Duncians know I love them too. (*DUNK-yans*)
You ever promoted me, rais'd me up

And gave me opportunity to learn
At your own ringèd hand. But sir,
'Twas you who taught me Gloucester's evil mind,
How he, both cruel and menacing
Hath driven all who work for him to dirt.
My hate for him outweighs my love for you,
And so I'd rather then withdraw myself
From your consideration, if this be the case.

DUNCAN

Thy voice's tone is flowery, 'tis true
And spine thou hast as weak as flower's stem
Who then is strong enough to bear my burden?

(Pause.)

ANNE

My noble president and master, Duncan,
I have serv'd as your assistant for
These forty years and never rais'd my voice,
Nor made objections to your presidential whims,
Nor gave you false report when Gloucester's spies
Did lure at me with bait both wealthy and renown'd.
I kept your counsel, sacrific'd myself
Upon the alter of your opinion,
But never have I served your Grace so well
As I do now by making vigorous
Objection to this foolish course.

DUNCAN

Nay, harsh Annabelle!

Pour not these noxious spirits in my ear!

ANNE

My Liege, the buckets you make here are stern,
Hearty, and more unbreak'd than any in
New England! Gloucester cares not for this craft.
Shoddy, pulp'd, and warp'd, his buckets be,
As twisted as the imp who peddles them: how else
To make his so-called "Twenty Ducat Buckets?"
I beg, I cast aside all dignity,
I grovel 'fore the eyes of those I once
Called peers and colleagues. Do not pollute your name

With such a vile, a rank and wither'd man
As he who offers honey'd poisons,
Which but infect the meat that they should feed,
And turn your legacy to leprosy.

DUNCAN

Thou're weak and old, and worse, a woman.
O, I had thought you had a heartier heart,
Poor Anne, you could have been my heir
But now I cast you out into the muck
For your distrusts and mutinies.
O you are banishèd. Come not within
My sight again, or I know not what I may do to thee.
To Gloucester I will sell my shares,
But who shall take my duties on
Or are you all too weak to ask for power?

(Pause.)

STEVE

I ask.

DUNCAN

I?

STEVE

Aye.

DUNCAN

Can you make a boat out of rock?
Can you make a tree stand and walk?
You're an intern, a slave!
Be good and behave.
When you've got me my coffee, we'll talk.

(Exit STEVE.)

DUNCAN

Not one of you would see the secrets hid
Behind my curtain of my majesty?
You murder thus my trusting heartstrings thus
To bury living your ambitions so.

RODERICK

My lord, and President. My CEO.
You know I do not speak well.
My hands do serve me well to serve my Liege,
For making solid buckets is my trade.
And yet, if none will speak, I will.
I will try to keep your legacy alive.
This is what I promise. If it pleases or unsatisfies.

DUNCAN

So you accept, then, this role?

RODERICK

I do, my lord.

DUNCAN

You speak not well, but well enough methinks.
And seems your shriv'ling colleagues, all do shrink
To hoist upon them this newborn position.
Your cravenness is clarified in this transition
Come interns and Kyle from HR,
Record these my wishes thus far:
My CFO's out,
To Roderick give clout,
He's Caesar, your Ruler, your Tsar!

KYLE

Give not this man your clout, sir. A clout about the head is more pain than pride.

DUNCAN

What say you, Kyle?

KYLE

Nothing, my lord.

DUNCAN

Nothing?

KYLE

Nothing, my lord, but that to clout a friend will only headaches bring.

DUNCAN

This is foolishness.

KYLE

Aye, my lord, yet all men are fools.

DUNCAN

Not I.

KYLE

As I manage human resources, I am a lord of foolishness. And a lord of fools ought to be able to fool a king.

DUNCAN

What, fool me?

KYLE

Are you not a King?

DUNCAN

King is my name, and ruler I am too.

KYLE

Why, then you lead a pack of fools!

DUNCAN

Well, that I'll give you.

KYLE

And who but a fool, is king of fools? For surely only fools will follow a fellow fool!

DUNCAN (*laughing*)

I like this fool, he livens me!

(Anne crosses the stage, carrying a box of her belongings.)

KYLE (*indicating ANNE*)

It is not meet to terminate a friend, when you thus feel alive. Anne is but a fool, are not we all? My king, keep this woman, your servant, at her present office, and all will see you wise beside a humble fool.

DUNCAN

Kind Kyle, you move me to forgiveness.

Anne, I make you now Roderick's assistant

Guide him as you guided me these decades

And you both shall prosper extravagantly.
I hereby make this declaration:
At midnight tonight my creation
Will pass on to Rod'rick
But if he should fall sick.
To Kent shall he pass on my station.
And so on my line shall pass down
To associates, then interns my crown.
At midnight tomorrow,
To my gayest sorrow,
To Roderick falls my renown.

(Enter STEVE, interrupting, with coffee.)

DUNCAN

And thou, who had such hungry ambitions
Have only acquir'd our suspicions.
Learn this: you are base
It is your young face
Which must line to succeed in this business.

(DUNCAN pours the coffee on STEVE's head.)

DUNCAN

My Boardsmen and long-lov'd colleagues
Forgive me my elderly follies.
Base interns, adieu.
And Rod'rick to you,
Tomorrow you're our big tamale.

(Exeunt all but STEVE.)

STEVE

Who calls me base because I am an intern?
My age is equal to any man or woman here.
Base. Why call me base? My sweat is sweat,
My hours the self-same hours that these, my betters, bill.
And now the old man perishes in wealth.
He cares not who succeeds his own success
But senile, whips his poison'd tongue moment
By moment on new prey. Why base then, I?
Have I not charm, ambition, cunning tongue
To worm my way into the folds of favor?

I would have follow'd meek that long-walk'd path
To find a kingship of mine own and work'd
The years of wasted toil and earn-less sweat
And paid the useless dues they take and take;
But since I am so base, I will the low way go.
You gods that govern who shall rise and fail,
Vault my spine with basest strength
And purge me of all virtues but desire;
I make ambition now my only god!
Observe, then, in one short night thy sun's ascent!
Through villainy will I become the president!

(Exit STEVE.)

Scene 2:

(Below Roderick's Office Balcony. Enter STEVE.)

STEVE

Above in yonder window paces Roderick;
His power I shall wring into my thirsting maw.
Why look, he struts so fretfully about
As if he could his wisdom magnify
By mere experience of trekking feet.
Roderick beware, 'Tis fear itself that stalks beneath your lair.

(STEVE makes a phone call.)

RODERICK

Hello?

STEVE

Sweet, Duncan, spare your Roderick of
This villainy. He not deserves this!

RODERICK

Steve?

Is that you, Steve?

STEVE

O, Duncan, spare him, please!
Your Roderick has serv'd you well, so sabotage

Is not a fitting end to he!

RODERICK

Steve, this is your friend,
Your Roderick whom you seek to save. But who meant
You to call?

STEVE

O sir, it was a number wrongly dial'd.
Think not on't and so goodbye.

RODERICK

But wait,
Good Steve! What meant this message?

STEVE

It was not meant for your kind ears, my friend.
But to Duncan meant I call. And so,
Farewell.

RODERICK

But what meant you by this "villainy?"
Surely there is none so planned for me?

STEVE

'Twas nothing, sir, but my imagination
Sick with overzealous parasites
That retched on you some dark infatuation.

RODERICK

As your employer, speak!

STEVE

How should I speak when loyalty divides
My soul in two, when gravity of two
Great stars do pull my will in opposite
directions!

RODERICK

Speak, if we be friends, Steve!

STEVE

It was some nothing of my mind:
I did suspect some plot upon your rightful rule,
And nothing more.

RODERICK

No more?
Say on, Steve, if thou lov'st me, I implore!

STEVE

It is my paranoia
Which would but spoil what should be celebrations
You today so ripe deserve. And so, // adieu.

RODERICK

// My Steve. For the love you bear me
Who rais'd you up from unemployment lines
Who placed you with my colleague, Kent,
When no positions then were open'd up:
I command thee: tell me what you know.

STEVE

Meet me, then, in twenty minutes clad
In silence and without a word to any man,
The dark garage shall be our place to talk,
Speak to none, and stride a briskful walk.

(STEVE hangs up.)

STEVE

I need now to dark garage to bring him down.
With words of poison shall I hook myself a crown.

(Exit STEVE.)

RODERICK

O news sour, took! This sweetest day dissolves to fear.
Like cotton candy dropp'd into a puddle.
O goodly Steve!
Please bring me news of cheer and not of muddle!

(Exit RODERICK.)

Scene 3:

(Enter RODERICK.)

RODERICK

O darken'd parking lot, how I do fear
Thy whisper'd voices, hulking shadows, loud alarms.
Perhaps in this dank air I'll find my Steve.
Hark, are you a man?

STEVE

I am. Are you a demon, king, or knave?

RODERICK

'Tis Roderick, production manager.

STEVE

Then here am I, your faithful Steve.

RODERICK

Why have we met in this unlighten'd place?

STEVE

Kent, I fear'd, o'erhearing on our plans,
Would warn his Duncan of your lucky knowledge.

RODERICK

Give mercy, Steve, and tell me what you know.

STEVE

Nothing do I know, but what I think, I will impart.
But are you sure this is your course?
You never seem'd the plotting type to I.

RODERICK

I must hear, Steve, I must be satisfied.

(Pause.)

STEVE

Nay, I will tell you all.

(Pause.)

STEVE (*cont'd*)

Know you Duncan well?

RODERICK

Aye, he is my boss.

STEVE

But know his mind?

RODERICK

Aye, more than most.

STEVE

But art thou sure?

RODERICK

I know the less, the more you speak.

STEVE

Then mark you this:
Did not you give the unions your support when they
With pickets, yea, and signs, fought Duncan's rule
Last year?

RODERICK

But they were in the right!

STEVE

I know!

You need not speak to me of right, I know!
But lately Duncan hath been heard to say,
“If Rod'rick had not this unioniz'd protection,
It would be him I'd strike.”

RODERICK

My position now has tenurized protection,
But if I am to management promoted,
My neck is free for chopping off.

STEVE

The next I should not say.

RODERICK

Speak!

STEVE

But will you then betray me, once my heart is cleft?

RODERICK

We are bound up in this together.
I swear on this here Grecian Ring,
You know an oath once breath'd upon this Fraternal Artifact
Cannot be broken then by man or god.
I swear on mine, my father's, and my childrens' souls,
Betray me not, and I shall love you but as myself
Protect you, shield you from all words and swords.
I will protect thee Steve, to this I swear.

STEVE

I trust you, brother, and so I speak.
In private letters Kent dictated me
To my own ears, I heard him making such a plot against you.
He wrote to Duncan saying thus: "Make Gloucester
Rule o'er Roderick, and let them fell each other,
And I shall rule upon their burial mounds."
O, Roderick! I'm sorry to betray my boss's trust!
I only thought to reason with wise Duncan,
And now I've made the greatest sin e'er made by human hand!
I've broken with my manager's command!
And spilled these evil beans upon your plate!
O can you forgive my sin, though I deserve thy hate?

RODERICK

I love thee Steve for your intelligence,
Which may yet be the sin that saves my soul.
I'll not betray you, Steven. By my Ring
You are protected.

(Pause.)

STEVE

Though I mistook'd your phone instead of Duncan's,
Yet this mischance of fingers is a gift!
Now knowing of this danger you stand arm'd,
And may divert abuse from your old master.

RODERICK

I owe you for your kindness, honest Steve.
Now I will travel to the labor summit held
Upstate and make my case to them, gods save me.
And if I can unseal my tongue when need
Is at its direst, I will return with force.
I give thee now authority to speak
With mine own voice, at least to James my intern
And Eliza my assistant, whom you know.

STEVE

I know her well, and we will vector all
Our strength and cunning to your will.

RODERICK

Please, you deliver Duncan's coffee now.
I fear he'll see the ghost of my betrayal
Besmear'd upon my face if I do it.

STEVE

I will, Roderick. In faith and honor.

RODERICK

In faith and honor, honest Steve. Farewell.

(Exit RODERICK.)

STEVE

So sang the guillotine before it fell.
Am I a villain then, when what I speak is wise?
This advice I give is worthy, and
Would lead to opportunity for him.
And Duncan often curséd Rod'rick thus,
In a sporting jest, yet who can tell?
So I but serve his purpose with my tongue,
And for my service I have influences bought.
How base am I, when I but serve my master?
For even when I poison Duncan's ear
With innuendo of poor Rod'rick's plot
I serve my master Duncan true.
When master Roderick acts suspiciously,
My other master Duncan will base mutiny

Perceive on such a meager proof.
And with such shreds of suspect evidence
I will dispatch myself two presidents.
But figures do approach.

(Enter JAMES and ELIZA. STEVE hides and watches, unseen.)

ELIZA

I will not for I can not. Steve is mine
And I am his, and we are bound in faith
That lasts eternally.

JAMES

Then where's his ring?

ELIZA

I have none, nor need none now to keep my love.

JAMES

O, I am a fool.

ELIZA

It takes a fool to know one.

JAMES

A fool for love, which, blinding me to my
Own decency, hath robbed me of my courtesy.
Will you forgive my trespass on your love?

ELIZA

It is not easily forgot.

JAMES

It is
But my first day and knowing not the loves
And hates and unseen twine that bind this quilt,
I did but test your love, for love.
Now seeing your commitment to thy Steve.
I humble-ly withdraw, and beg the memory
Of my heart's overzeal be swallowed
Like a spy's communication.

ELIZA

I may forgive, but do not test
My patience, nor my love, again.

JAMES
I swear't!

ELIZA
Then I'll away, and see you in the brighter
Lights of day.

JAMES
Goodbye.

(Exit ELIZA.)

STEVE
O Faithful, woman! And faithless friend.

JAMES
Eliza, you'll not hear my song of love
So I must sing my heart to heaven in thy stead.
O that my organ of love could be removed:
So I could never speak thy name again,
That surgeon I would thank who tore it out.
Yet I have heart to love and lungs to sing.
Though sworn my heart I will abandon
I will instead in secret nurture it,
And hope that one day, Steve will sabotage himself
So I may claim the love he cast asunder.

STEVE (*aside*)
What villainy is this? (*To James*) Is that you, James?

JAMES
O, Steve! I did not see you there, nor hear
Approaching steps, have you watch'd long?

STEVE
I just arrived, to check the garage for... raccoons.
My friend, what bothers you?

JAMES
'Tis but this job, which doth

Intimidate me so.

STEVE

I understand.

When I began as intern, Rod'rick said
To me, "But act in faith and honesty,
And never bear an evil in your heart,
For he who is his own true self can't help
But thrive." But you're upset.

JAMES

No, no!

'Tis but a sandwich that I had for lunch
Which longly I had left upon the counter,
Which now upsets my entrails so.

STEVE

Then I am sorry for the news I must
Impart on your so burden'd stomach:
Your position is at risk.

JAMES

Risk, how?

STEVE

Your Roderick has flown, and will tomorrow night
Come marching on this place with union thugs.

JAMES

O why?

STEVE

I do not know, but can suspicion you:
To ease himself of Gloucester's vising yoke,
He comes to murder Duncan ere retirement.
And with that brood of union goons allied upon his back
His loyal cops will never file formal charges.

JAMES

Those damnéd union pigs! Let us to Duncan
To warn him of this plot!

STEVE

I know! But wait.
For love of Roderick, to whom we owe our jobs,
We must tread sacrosanct on this 'til truth,
Whatever may be true, comes out. Ay, we!
This double purpose doth confound us both.

JAMES

My allegiance is to Duncan, but I will wait,
'Til Roderick's guilt is proved, before I act.

STEVE

Let us be sworn to each the other now
That neither of us falls without the other;
A pact, a friendship, will you be my brother?

JAMES

Yes, my friend. My brother. Adieu.
May we emerge alive, and honorable too.

(Exit JAMES.)

STEVE

Farewell, Farewell, my friend, my brother.
And with such little work as swearing kin,
I'll make one friend betray the other.

(Exit STEVE.)

ACT II

Scene 1:

(Duncan's Office. Enter STEVE, with a coffee cup.)

STEVE

Can this be Duncan's office, tapestried
With wealth and gilt with lordly taste?
My envy tells me this is what it wants,
To stride this boundless floor in thought,

Command my servants by my intercoms.
This throne, though just an office chair, invites
To say that I am welcome on her lap.

(Enter DUNCAN.)

DUNCAN

Young Steven, I did not expect your face,
But where is Roderick, who always brings my
Coffee at this noonish hour?

STEVE

His place I do not know:
Your Roderick, departing on some duty
Hath left your care to me, and I your loyal
Intern serve your ev'ry mortal whim.

DUNCAN

But this is unusual for Roderick;
Speak, where has he gone? What business requires him?

STEVE

My lord, you know the loyalty I owe
To Roderick, he who plucked me from the
Unemployment lines; I would not speak against
Him come what might, so bid me not to speak.

(DUNCAN puts aside the coffee.)

DUNCAN

What means this feinting? Swallow not your tongue.

STEVE

I ask you, Duncan, bid me not to speak!
I would rather cut my tongue out, bleed
upon your floor the thoughts within my mind
Than, giving form, make words the snakes that would
Beprick your ears with mortal infection.

DUNCAN

You'll speak because your master thus commands.

STEVE

I speak then out of loyalty to you,
Which overthrows the love I must bear Roderick,
For duty then, I thus unfold me heart:
I know not where good Roderick has absconded
And likely 'tis for betterment of you.
How hard it is to speak, my heart rebels!

DUNCAN

Continue, intern.

STEVE

He told me you intended him to fail,
And only plac'd him in your stead
So Gloucester, him in pact with you, could cut
Him from your newly vacant place. Ay, you.
He told me to prepare for mutiny,
And bade me bring your coffee lest he was
Discovered and condemned. But these were jests
As like as any plot, and he will earn
Your trust upon his guiltlessly returning.

DUNCAN

Snake oil, say I. My Roderick was ever loyal
And risk'd his skin a thousand times in service
Why this unsourced report, intern?
What stake has thou in this?

STEVE

Sir, you do me wrong! I never spoke
To you without command, but if you would
Be satisfied, then call the intern, James.
In him has Roderick confided, I am sure,
And if a mutiny be planned tonight, he'll know.

DUNCAN

Anne, enter Anne!

(ANNE enters.)

DUNCAN

Bring me James. And make him feel the heat
Of Duncan's anger from afar.

ANNE

At once, Your Grace.

(Exit ANNE)

STEVE (*aside*)

This next part must I delicately turn,
For one step wrong and 'twill be me to burn.

(Enter JAMES and ANNE.)

JAMES

I came as you call'd, my Duncan.

DUNCAN
Speak, then.

JAMES
Speak?

DUNCAN
Speak, aye knave speak!
It is no wonder that we call you base.
What art thou, boy, some mumbling dummy?
Unleash your tongue and speak they secrets out!

STEVE
Speak, my friend.

JAMES
Of what, I know not yet
The query.

DUNCAN
O turn thy sticking tongue elastic, James,
And spin no tales of thy forgetfulness,
But answer true the whereabouts of Roderick.

STEVE
Speak, James, it is our duty to obey.

JAMES
A double duty then divides me! My master bids
Me silent and my other master bids me honest.

And Steve, my Rod'rick's ensign doth unlace
His silence with a word to Duncan.
How fell to me this sundry secret?
O where's the right in wrongs?

STEVE

Just James, you know I love kind Roderick,
But our wise Duncan has detected out
Our friends' predicament.

DUNCAN

That is no trifling thing upon your finger, boy:
A ring besot'd in centuries of blood hast thou.
I beg, as brother in fraternity to thee,
Remember now your oath, and sing.

JAMES

My heart doth wilt for I must answer thorns.
Good Duncan, Roderick to the guildsmen seeks
His claim, but as protection only.
He thinks that you betray him.

STEVE

So said he me, before he bade me bring your coffee.
Thy coffee, wait!

(Steve dives and knocks the coffee out of Duncan's hands.)

STEVE

O poison'd goblet damn thee down!
My Duncan, now I see where treachery abides.
Sly Roderick did give to me this cup,
Which Duncan drinking, I would be to blame
When poison'd java did upstart your heart!

DUNCAN

Good Steve, I know now you were honest.
It is my long lov'd Roderick who will pay for this mutiny.
I issue now this creed: none of you
Shall rest 'til he has answer'd for his deeds.
To Kent I give my vast estate of holdings,
For hate doth curdle now my blood Rod'rick.
And now two new positions open up.
So under Kent, I must promote Eliza.

James, you shall be Eliza's new assistant,
And Steve, you do to Rod'rick's rank ascend.
And for your loyal trust I make you now
Third heir to then inherit this old chair,
Should tragedy devour up Kent or thy Eliza.
Come Steve, help me to write memo up:
At the party tomorrow, to Roderick's sorrow.
Shall Kent assume my duties and titles.

STEVE

I will, my president, my Duncan, my lord,
And serve you faithfully forever more.

DUNCAN

Come Anne and help me to bed;
O woe to see a mutiny
From nobles I so long have led.

(Exit DUNCAN and ANNE.)

STEVE

Good James, we are both traitors now, 'tis true,
But let our faith be bound up in each other;
I may prevail yet to Duncan's chair
And I will raise your state if you will be
My bosom's champion, my advocate.

JAMES

I am your nothing. With a stony heart
I greet your soft hand, and to my lord,
The honest Roderick, I will report
Thy wind-turning loyalty. I am Duncan's man,
Not thine, and I'll see my masters reunited
Before with devil's pen I'll sign your friendship book.

(Exit JAMES.)

STEVE

What matters the opinion of this insect?
Myself with mine own bootstraps have I rais'd
And over-leapt the rivals to my cause.
Why should I answer to this peacock's tail?
By these slick hands, by this my lying throat

I bend this business to my will.
Tomorrow I shall set to silence him.
I buy supplies tonight, tomorrow's work is grim.

(Exit STEVE.)

Scene 3:

(The Parking Garage, Enter STONER STU, with a ukulele.)

STU (*singing*)

O, I sell my wares from dawn til dusk,
With a hey-nonny-nonny and a hey-hee-ho,
The greenest leaves with the strongest musk,
With a hey-nonny-nonny and a hey-hee-ho,
If you've got green and you want to buy,
With a hey-nonny-nonny and a hey-hee-ho,
I buy it low and I sell it high!

O, I'm a healer,
I'm a feeler,
I'm a dealer,
And I'm oh so proud!
Yes, I'm the dealer,
Have no fear!
Yes, I'm the dealer,
Shh, not so loud!

(STU speaks.)

Well hello there, man! Welcome to my mobile shop! I'll be straight with you, I have the best product you're gonna find, like, anywhere. Anyone need a little... pick me up?

(STU displays his goods. He interacts with audience, may ad-lib.)

Ah! Narc! No way! I know my rights. You can't prove anything.

Yeah, I have a pretty hard life. I work here at Duncan's Buckets, but my true passion is to not work hard, and still be rich. One day, maybe I'll get out of this warehouse, and retire to the Cayman Islands. Until then, I must peddle my wares here and there, always one step ahead of the law.

(STU sings.)

O, I'm the healer,
I'm the feeler,
I'm the dealer,
And I'm oh so proud!
Yes, I'm the dealer,
Want some beer?
I'm the dealer,
Shh, not so loud!

(Song ends.)

But hark! A customer! Who comes upon this dark garage?

STEVE

Stoner Stu, are you around?
Untangle thee from shadow's heavy grasp
And show thy face.

STU

You can just call me Stu.

STEVE

Come man, art thou Stoner Stu or not? He of the Green Leaf? Keeper of the Kush? Captain Indica?

STU

Shh!

STEVE

Then perhaps we can do business?

STU

Business is my specialty. But how do I know you're cool?

STEVE

Come, here's my lanyard — .

STU

Stop! Don't show me that.

STEVE

You told me — .

STU

What's the password?

STEVE

...Can I buy some drugs?

STU

Correct! What can I get you? We're having a sale on edibles.

(STU eats an edible.)

STEVE

Of late, and feeling fail'd in all pursuits,
I have a deathly pallor taken on,
And from my parchéd lips all joys
Dry up ere I can quench my agony.
Kind Stu, O, feed me now my comfort!
For I cannot another day arise
To face this primal pain.

STU

Your speech hath really moved me, man.
What be your needs. We got Purple Poppyseed
That's really, like, quite laid back.

STEVE

Would you could cure my fears with weeds!
Alas, this path I've tested, tried and wrung,
But what I need is more than smoky comfort.

STU

This week only, half off on vaporizers.

STEVE

I need a stronger medicine, a drastic cure.
Could I but have a modicum of comfort
To know I could but murder my sad mind
This poison would debase my appetite for death.
And so, the drug I most desire is poison.
For in knowing that I have the option to
Debarb this petty world of carless blows,

I know I'll find the agency to live,
And jump those hurdles which 'til now
Have seemed sky-scraperly to me.

STU

But don't look so unhappy yet, my man:
But check this out: these poison mushrooms are.
If you ingest all this at once, you'll die for sure.
And may the visions of your final trip
Deliver you to peaceful, dude-like rest.

(STU hands STEVE the bottle.)

STU

But this is not for ready use, correct?
You need this only for your peace of mind?

STEVE

My honest thanks.
This gift doth quiet my unstopping chatter.
Here, take these ducats.

STU

Keep your ducats, man.
I've been to darken'd places in my time,
And know how cancerous sad thoughts can be.
But real talk, my friend,
Hast thou consider'd therapy?

STEVE

And so

I take my leave, goodbye my brother, Stu.
But look, a figure doth approach.
Go, go away and suffer no abuse,
And may this kindly med'cine find no use.

STEVE (*Aside*)

At least for my imbibement anyhow.

(Exit STEVE.)

STU (*Aside*)

Perhaps to thee my secret I may tell:
These shrooms are not for suicide.
They will but delicately drape a dream upon him,
A state of seeming death to onlookers,
But inside only happy, peaceful thoughts.
I hope in time he can forgive my lying lips,
This dealer's only selling pleasant trips.

(Exit STU.)

Scene 3:

(The Labor Summit upstate. Enter DICK, MARGARET, COCKNEY TOM, MEEK, ACTOR LAURENCE, STONER STU, and GUILDSPERSONS. A “Village People” vibe.)

DICK

Are all the guilders arrived?

MARGARET

Ay!

MEEK

Call a roll.

MARGARET

Ay! A roll!

DICK

Well then, a roll has been called.

(DICK eats a roll.)

MEEK

Nay! A roll call. A roll is not for eating.

DICK

Ah! Yes! Let us call for more rolls!

ALL

Huzzah!/More Rolls!/Etc.

MEEK

Nay! Nay! I will do it! I will call the roll.

LAURENCE

What role wouldst thou play? I must remind thee: it is we, the guildish actors, who shall play all roles.

DICK

And we, the police, who eat the rolls!

MARGARET

And we cooks who roll the rolls!

MEEK

Quiet, everyone will get a role!

(Pause.)

STU

How many should I roll?

(Pause.)

MEEK

Are the police present?

DICK

Roll!

(MEEK begrudgingly accepts this.)

MEEK

Cooks?

MARGARET

Roll!

MEEK

Actors?

LAURENCE (*rolled "R"*)

Rrrrole.

Factory workers? MEEK

Roll on! STU

Janitors? MEEK

Ro! TOM

[The company should feel free to add as many of these as there are guildspeople cast, with jokes. For Example:]

Musicians? MEEK

(Drumroll.)

Barbers? MEEK

Roll BARBERS (barbershop quartet)

Roll

Roll

ROOOoooOOOlllll!

[Etc.]

Stage managers? That's me! Present! MEEK

(Pause. ALL look at him, perplexed.)

Roll. MEEK *(assenting)*

DICK

Thus finishes the roll!

(DICK finishes his roll.)

DICK

And let us begin.

ALL

Aye!

DICK

I hereby file one emotion that everyone will receive, without any reception, more seniority! Do I have your eyes?... The ayes have it!

ALL

Huzzah!

DICK

Is there any more business before we conclude this meeting of the guilds?

MARGARET (*cockney*)

I have!

DICK

Make way! Fair Margaret has some business. Speak briefly Margaret, and to the point, stray not from the tip of your main point, but keep, like an arrow to its bow, about your point, so to say, speak, but speak not longly. We wait upon you! Speak! Make us not wait!

MARGARET

The bourgeois management is always tellin' us, "break's over, get back to work!" Well I notice, nobody's yellin' at them to get workin'. So I says, we all wear earplugs all the time, that way, breaks last all day!

ALL

Here here!/Huzzah!/Etc.

DICK

All in favor have eyes?... The ayes have it!

ALL

Huzzah!

TOM (*cockney*)

But what if the gov'nors won't let us wear earplugs.

(Pause.)

DICK

Good question Cockney Tom.

(Beat.)

DICK

Then we Striiiiiiiike!

ALL

Yeah!/Striiiiike/Strike! Strike!/Etc.

(Confused rioting. DICK gavels with something.)

DICK

Order! Order!

(The room settles.)

DICK

Order!

MARGARET

More rolls!

ALL

Huzzah!

STU

I've got something to say.

DICK

Yes, yes, our good friend Stu from the bucketeer's union. Please speak. And quickly, for, as brevity is the soul of wit, and brief-cases be the smallest of boxes, make quicken thou, and show us your shortest briefs. Make brief your boxes, ay, and your boxes briefs!

STU

Uh, thank you for your time. I, uh specialize, in a uh, various medicinal herbs, and uh, I think that I should be allowed to, uh, use, and uh, sell these herbs at work. They allow me to, uh, operate the

machinery, like, a lot more mellow.

DICK

All in favor be I?... The eyes have it!

ALL

Huzzah!/Etc.

TOM

But what if, the gov'nors won't let us sell our medicinal herbs?

(Pause.)

DICK

Then we Striiiiiiiiike!

(Confused rioting, RODERICK enters.)

DICK

But who is here? Don't you know this is a private meet? Speak, villain. Who flouts our privates so?

RODERICK

It is I, Roderick, Head of Production at Duncan's Buckets, and heir to the corner office.

DICK

A chair!

(ALL gasp.)

MARGARET

Worse, a manager.

(ALL are horrified.)

MARGARET

Well, if it ain't the Man his-self, intrudin'-like on our innocent proceedin's. And what brings your mighty lordship down to this humble warehousing facility.

RODERICK

I am much abused.

DICK

Abused? Refused? Excused? Confused? I'm confused.

RODERICK

What foolishness is this?

DICK

A fool! What right is *he* to call *me* a fool? I am a union leader, and what is more, a cop, and furthermore a voting citizen, and lastly, very likely the handsomest man in New England, and sixthly a shareholder, and unfortunately, a bachelor, and to conclude, the manager of these proceedings!

(ALL gasp.)

DICK

The manatee of these proceedings!

(ALL relax.)

DICK

Call me now a fool? O you are a fool to call me thus!

RODERICK

Perhaps I am a fool, as this my yarn
Doth speak for me. Tomorrow Duncan makes
Me president of Duncan's buckets — .

DICK

You hear this fool? He thinks it foolish to be president! Ay, you are a fool, I'll warrant.

RODERICK

This presidency is but my own chopping block.
Cruel Duncan means to stick my head above the clouds
To bring my neck in view of heaven's scythe.

MARGARET

And so you bring your woes to us. Out, you bourgeois villain, with your suits and your 401K's. What do we care of your fancy problems, with your handkerchiefs and your shoe polish and fancy Blue-teeth phones? Away, scoundrel, and back to your haughty ways!

DICK

Out, thou villain, away before your wealth infects us all.

TOM

But what about our earplugs? Surely he is needy, and might agree to our demands.

(Pause.)

DICK

What say you, Signor? We, a guilded union, rightful and true, do wish for earplugs. What say you to that?

RODERICK

Earplugs? Why?

DICK

Ask not why! We wish them. Do you give us earplugs, yea or nay?

RODERICK

If to my cause you'll bind yourselves, then yea.

DICK

Then, good good Signor, we are for you! And now, we Striiiiiiike!

(Confused rioting.)

MEEK

That's fifteen, everyone.

ALL

Thank you, fifteen.

(Rioting stops, the crowd disperses.)

RODERICK

What is this? What of my cause?

DICK

Union says we break, we break.

RODERICK

My life hangs in the deathly scales.

DICK

Bylaws are bylaws, and break is break.

RODERICK

I'd like to say something.

DICK

By all means, fancy-pants. It's your fifteen too.

(RODERICK stands.)

RODERICK

Attention, honest citizens and guilds!

A word, a word is all I ask of you.

(ALL shout random words at him.)

RODERICK

Please my friends, and listen here

And do not be controlled by fear!

(RODERICK has lost the crowd.)

DICK

You are a fool, if you think your high and mighty speeches will turn this clever crowd. A right fool, you are.

RODERICK

I must be a fool.

(Pause.)

RODERICK

Hey!

Everyone listen up!

Is this...

New England?

ALL (unsure)

Yeah/Yes/Etc.

RODERICK

And in New England, do we have...

Freedom?

ALL

Yes!

RODERICK

And no one tells a free guildsman what to do!

(General agreement. Over the following, the crowd responds.)

RODERICK

If the Man says bow, I say we stand up!
If the Man says work, I say we go on vacation!
And if the Man says it's time to take a break...
I say...
We work!

ALL

Yeah!

RODERICK

For we are guildsmen!
And we take orders from no Man!

ALL

Yeah!/Huzzah!/Etc.

RODERICK

We are labor itself, and we will work,
No matter what the bourgeois managers might say!

ALL

Huzzah!

RODERICK

Will you let those in power force you to break?
Or will you seize your freedoms,
And come to work for me!?

(ALL yell and follow him.)

RODERICK

Now: to Woooooork!

(Confused rioting, RODERICK leads them out. Exeunt
chanting and yelling.)

Scene 4:

(The Office Kitchen. Enter DUNCAN, STEVE, KENT, ELIZA, KYLE, Attendants, Interns, Assistants, and Members of the Board.)

DUNCAN

Now is the fever of my discontent
Balm'd with an unchaotic succession.
So here, before all
With my head standing tall
My powers pass on without question.
My office to Kent I'm promoting;
From Rod'rick's brief post he'll be gloating.
He'll serve faithfully
And truly to thee,
Tonight it's to him you'll be doting.
Eliza takes Kent's former duties
And Steve o'er false Rod'rick's, I'm choosing;
Should calamity fall
They'll answer the call,
Look at them, aren't they beauties?
My friends and my colleagues, it's been
My honor to serve as your captain
On this, our ever-sinking ship.
A better crew I could not wish.
So celebrate while night remains.
And now, while I'm somewhat awake,
It's time for good Kent to cut cake!
Steve, pass this gold knife,
That I've kept my whole life,
And Kent, cut it quick, for my tired sake!

STEVE

As I pass you this knife, I gild it with
A little wine of my dead father's vintage.
May it cut as swift as father's tongue ever did!

(STEVE pours the vial over the knife.)

KENT

I thank you, Steve, and so with sweets commence
My presidency. Sweet be it, and equally
As winned!

(KENT cuts.)

KENT

Now cake for all!

STEVE

But wait awhile, good Kent!

DUNCAN

What's this? A piece of cake I want, and I
Shall have.

STEVE

But while Kent eats, I have prepared
A song, which some great pain I took composing,
In jest for this occasion.

KENT

Come let us hear this song, my lord.

DUNCAN

Well. We will hear it, and eat straight after.

KYLE

A wise decision, Your Grace.

STEVE

Wise Duncan, listen well, and Kent, you loose
Your teeth on sweets, for sweetness has my song,
And compliments are double-paid in bites.

KENT

I never did refuse to eat; play on, my friend!

STEVE (singing)

A man who attends university,
Has a smile and a skip in his step.
When fin'ly encounters adversity
Will find all that skipping a schlepp.

But the man who no formal schooling
Has made laziness an art,

He knows that we're all really fooling,
And dutifully plays his part.

O, fake it (my dear Kent) until they see!
Fake it with your brash vivacity!
Fake it, you'll make it, and everyone will take it!
O, fake it (my old friend) and you'll succeed!

So, Kent if you feel like a loser,
This small advice I can lend:
A beggar cannot be a chooser,
All you can do is pretend.

O, fake it (my dear Kent) and we'll all see,
A leader of the highest quality!
O, fake it, you'll make it, and never you forsake it!
Fake it and you'll lead this company!

KENT

Nay, nay, nay...

DUNCAN

Kent, I see the spirit moves you.

KENT

Howl!

ELIZA

O, what is this?

STEVE

'Tis but a song.

KENT

Howl! Howl!

How the winds of the fire do howl!

DUNCAN

Kent, what mean you this?

KENT

I see thee, bats. What mean you bats to fly
In this so high a storm?

ELIZA

Kent, are you well?

STEVE

I see no thunderclouds, what madness have you?

KENT

Madness! None, thou villain. Thy poison'd tongue
Infects our ears. Be you not a dog?

STEVE

A dog, sir, nay.

KENT

O, my mind capsizes! Bats and beasts!
O, mommy, where's my Batman costume now?
These clothes are lies, I cast them off!

KYLE

Dear Kent, this commotion does not become you!

ELIZA

Sir, I'll get you to bed.

KENT

Away, vile woman

ELIZA

I'm none!

STEVE

Sir, hold you tongue!

KENT

The dog again! O, I'll not trust you in your buried grave!

STEVE

You all see how he threatens me?

ELIZA

My lord,

Come, let us rest you away awhile.

KENT

Out, woman! Ere I do violence to you.
My skin is baggy, notice you, let none
Say it is tight, do you all note my skin?

STEVE

Take not your vengeance on so innocent a lady!
If you will fight, I will defend her life
With even this, the gilded blade that you
Herewith did slit your celebration cake!

KENT

You draw your blade on me you dirty beast?
Then I shall kill the first! The bats!
They mate with birds, the filthy bestial bats,
And ever more shall bird-bats rule the Earth!

STEVE

He's mad!

KENT

O, Mad, am I? I'll teach you madness, boy!

(KENT attacks STEVE, STEVE panics and dodges. KENT attacks again, this time as STEVE dodges, KENT catches him off-balance and strikes again, knocking STEVE to the ground. STEVE loses the knife. STEVE grabs his ukulele and whips it around at KENT, who trips trying to avoid it, and falls. On the ground KENT finds his knife, and charges at STEVE who barely manages to defend himself with his uke. STEVE finally gets a hit in, but KENT manages to grab the uke and toss it away. KENT approaches STEVE with the knife, STEVE retreats, cornered. KENT hits STEVE, and STEVE falls. KENT leaps upon STEVE, forcing the blade down to STEVE's throat. As the knife reaches his throat, STEVE barks like a dog, disorienting KENT, and sending him backward, confused.)

KENT

The hound, the hound, the hound, my heart!

(STEVE rises, and hits KENT with the uke, which breaks over KENT's head. KENT falls, unconscious. STEVE is exhausted.

ELIZA rushes to STEVE's side.)

ELIZA

My love, my love!

DUNCAN

Police! Police! Foul madness bleeds in my court!

(ANNE exits.)

STEVE

You all did see I was attack'd, I wanted no part.

ELIZA

We saw, we saw, we all did see.

No blame will come on thee good Steve; 'twas you
Who saved us all!

DUNCAN

Where are the damn'd police?

KYLE

He has no pulse. O, Kent is dead!

(Enter ANNE.)

ANNE

My King, they stand outside your gates a-marching,
With picket signs in hand. They will not answer,
They'll not investigate. With Rod'rick at
Their helm they call for earplugs.

DUNCAN

All is madness! This must have been plann'd
By Roderick, and now our Kent's unmann'd!
(*To ANNE*) Go talk to that mob.
(*To STEVE*) Come Steve to my office, and we'll cleanse thy bloody mouth.

STEVE

I follow, Duncan.

DUNCAN

All else, bear away kind Kent's body,
Anne plan a funeral for the man

Who perished before us so oddly.

(Exeunt.)

Act III

Scene 1:

(Duncan's Office. Enter DUNCAN and STEVE.)

DUNCAN

Sit, boy.

STEVE

Duncan, these strange events perplex me.
My body shakes at what my hand hath done.

DUNCAN

Torture not yourself with the doing:
There's guiltiness not, without choice.

STEVE

My Duncan, know you I have ever worshipp'd
Like your disciple, nay your own foster'd ward.
I would not win thy hate for murdering
Sweet Kent, your most respected heir and subject.

DUNCAN

Beloved Kent was an ambitious man, tis true,
And never loved but for his self-advancement.
He hath not won my favor loyally
As you have done, but only as a pawn
Did execute to my word. Tell me loyal Steve:
What would you with this company perform
If you, their ruler did become?

STEVE

I ask not for such favor.

DUNCAN

Ay, but speak.

(Pause.)

STEVE

I would your legacy retell,
And in the copy double all your virtues.
I'd study thus your deeds and bend my mind
To Duncan's logic;
As straight as heavy cannon-fire flies
I would your course re-follow forcefully.

DUNCAN

And to which virtues do you bend your mind?

STEVE

Your wisdom, which landing on an ear declares it's resonance.
Your strength, which on your visage I detect.
I will not flatter you, my lord, my King,
It is your perfect buckets, which never leak
Which so inspire your subjects and myself.
These virtues and my soul I'd bury here,
And make the name of Duncan's Buckets cheer'd
Wherever talk of buckets babbled up
'Til you and buckets were synonymous.

DUNCAN

You speak well for yourself, but lack
The quality a King most needs to yoke

STEVE

What virtue do I lack? I'll learn it.

DUNCAN

No.

It can't be learnt in book or college course.
In rulership there is no virtue,
Nor gift of tongue, as you possess, nor gift of hand,
But only will, which makes
Our lives but unmakes all our happiness.
Cruelty is the trick. Carry cruelty
On your shoulder and your ear will pus
And rot and blacken, while your will
With fuel, hazardous to touch, engulfs

Your enemies and scalds your friends with burning brands
That mark them as your stock and spur them to your power.
Your cruelty is the key, and he who fears
It owns himself but not his future.
Steve, I will not curse you as I cursed myself:
Cruel you are not, and this is to your credit.

STEVE

Duncan, thou art mistaken.

DUNCAN

I wish my lazy son were you instead,
That I might without hesitancy cede
To you the growth of my tall tree of life.
How would you like to be a CEO?

STEVE

I'd trade my soul for it.

DUNCAN

If at my side I could apprentice you,
I would in you place all my trust and favor,
And president you would become.
That would any easy ending be for me.
But wishes cannot buy a beer, nor bait
A hook, nor breed a thoroughbred.
My son who now his bach'lor's studies, soon
Will graduate to real cares and worldly pursuits.
If you were ready, 'twould be you inheriting
My stocks, my crown, my corner office, yea,
But this solution I propose instead:
On my son Henry will I leave my chairmanship,
It is a ceremonial position,
He cares not for this business, and will leave
It soon enough. Eliza, next as heir
Will president become, the face of my great empire,
and you the post Of CEO will take.
To rule behind the iron curtain of administration
You, my most entrusted three, will rule together 'til
My Henry sees you fit to steer my ship.
Then you, and your Eliza, whom I know
You love, will both together be myself thereafter.
What say you, Steve to this my bargain?

(Pause. STEVE attacks DUNCAN. They struggle. STEVE strangles DUNCAN.)

STEVE

Hot heart, beat not so loudly,
Unsteady hands, regain your stoicism.
What if the just police, unstriking, find me here?
Or someone stumble in upon this scene?
What if the crime upon my face is writ
And never now I'll see without a lens of blood?
The past is past, and future now is all.
If hell be real, make me your agent, that
I may repent this sin to you and save myself.
Now to the devil's work: this ring
I'll have, it may have use to me for cruelty
Needs an emblem of itself, and power
Bejewell'd on my finger marks me out.

(Enter ELIZA.)

ELIZA

Duncan, Steve, O, hurry!
More vile curses fester in our house:
Kent is dead indeed! Steve's blow hath snuffed his life.
And Roderick comes banging on the door
And yells of treachery and war!
But my eyes illusion me:
For here methinks my eyes are double-stamp'd
With ghosts. Can this be Duncan?
O, King, the jewel upon our diadem,
Art thou so low a thing as any stone?
O, age of Judgement come to earth,
And send the murderer to hell!

STEVE

My thanks to Jove for these your seeing eyes;
Observe what I have just this moment spied:
When call'd by cries of need, and thought I heard
The King cry, "help," and "peanut allergy,"
I, racing feet and heart, here came me thus;
To find our Duncan freshly dead!

ELIZA

Ay, my soul!

STEVE

Eliza, call an ambulance!

ELIZA

O, Steve, the more our tragedy befalls:
We call'd for them to carry Kent away,
But they decline, they strike, whilst ours lie bleeding.

STEVE

O, gods, why take this man, our lovéd father,
When his own time was almost gracefully pass'd on?
Eliza, check him, check his heart.

ELIZA

Aye, gone, he's gone, he's pass'd along.
Goodnight, our father, rest thy toiling soul.
What's this? His ring is missing.

STEVE

That he gave me ere I departed him,
To mark that I should follow him to lead
This company.

ELIZA

To thee? 'Tis I who next
Succeed to wear his crown. This is irregular,
And once when I in jest did ask to hold that ring,
He told me he would never live without his ring,
That his own soul was bound unto his ring.

STEVE

O, ask me not for reasons, he has died and left his cousin
Sorrow on my head!

ELIZA

I tell you, he would not.

STEVE

And yet he did.

ELIZA

Why do you press your lies upon me?
What cause have you to lie? Unless...
What horror hast thou done, my love?

STEVE

I cannot lie.
I took the ring from Duncan's stony finger.
It will sound stupid now, but when I took it up
I took it not for my own use or ornament.
I filched this treasure but to give it to another: you.
With Duncan gone, you are our queen, my love.
I wish to make my heart uncloth'd to you.
I would but be your spaniel, lie at your side,
And fetch your news and chase your rats away,
And execute your ev'ry love-wild wont.
With Duncan, gone, and none to blame, you become
The heir we're promiséd. 'Tis hard to rise to power thus
But I do not bejudge thee. O, I am yours,
O, pierce this ring, and let me serve you as your husband.

ELIZA

O, Steve, I know thee better than thyself.
'Twas thee who struck down Duncan, it is so.
You killed our lovéd lord and took his ring.
My Steve, I saw this hardness in your heart,
Your love is sharp like mine is sharp.
We both are married only to ambition,
But, Steve, we are two kindreds, wed in blood.
I'll not betray your crime, my husband,
I lack'd the courage for this deed myself,
But crimes the world will call your evil,
I know was done for highest purpose.
For love of me. Now give to me that ring.

(STEVE puts the ring on ELIZA's finger.)

ELIZA (ct'd)

I see thy darkness and thy light.
Now bound by bloody bond of partnership,
I take thee as my husband.

STEVE

And you, my Queen.

ELIZA

Now kiss me, Steve.

(STEVE goes to kiss ELIZA, she holds out her ring, he kisses it.)

ELIZA (ct'd)

Come, love, prepare your eyes to flood,
For now we wear our mourning public face.

STEVE

I'll act as your royal will deems good.
(*aside*) My love now intercepts my kingly place.

(STEVE and ELIZA join arms, and exit. JAMES emerges from under the desk, where he has been hiding.)

JAMES

My master slain, and Kent is wormy food.
I must to Roderick quick without a trace!

(Exit JAMES.)

Act IV

Scene 1:

(An Improvised Situation Room in the Warehouse. RODERICK presides over DICK, MARGARET, COCKNEY TOM, STONER STU, and Guildspeople.)

RODERICK

So let's review what we have learnt so far:
Steve, most trusted ally, keeper of our cause,
Hath struck the madly raving Kent to death.
Steve then was present at our Duncan's death –
Ay, much suspiciousness in that – and betrothèd then Eliza,
She who after me would be King's heir.
A well-position'd son this dawning Steve,
And all with nought but luck and pocket lint.

So now Eliza rules at Duncan's Buckets.
But whyhaps Eliza shuts her castle up to us,
While we sit stuck a-striking at her gates?

DICK

A mystery. A most detectible renigma.

TOM

But, why did Kent go mental? He was always so nice to me.

RODERICK

O, would that we knew, good Cockney Tom.
But Kent's misdeeds are not now understood.

STU

Uh, sorry dudes, if I may interject?
I may have sold to Steve some magic shrooms,
Which, hindsight being twenty-twenty,
Maybe I should not have done.

DICK

You clown! You truffer! I'll have your badge, for this!

RODERICK

Mayhap my Steve hath had a hand in Kent's
Most strange and dreamy affect.

DICK

Why I shall wring his traitorous neck and then deliver him to prison!

RODERICK

Be careful, Dick, speak not against my loyal
Steve without a careful reasoning.

(JAMES appears.)

JAMES

And let a poisoner select your seasoning.

(ALL gasp.)

DICK

Aha! An interlocutor in our myths!

RODERICK

Halt, this is James, my young apprentice, friend
To Steve, what news inside the pregnant fortress?

JAMES

Betrayal.
'Twas Steve who turnèd Duncan's wrath against thee;
Steve who cast you out and Duncan slew;
Steve whose tongue hath wormed inside Eliza's love;
Ay, Steve, whose blow hath snuff'd out Kent:
That boy hath taken from me all my hopes.
If we are still to stem his bloody flow,
It will be he, the demon intern we must damn.

RODERICK

But Steven was my staunchest loyal ally,
He did inform me of dead Duncan's plot.

JAMES

On evidence of what? Some words he whisper'd
In your heart, your weakness needed to believe?
His currency is lies, and you were bought.

RODERICK

I'll not hear defamations, James. What proof have thee?

JAMES

These eyes, which not an hour hence did witness Steve,
His hand still bloody then with Good Kent's life
Did press the air from dying Duncan's throat
And steal a crown that rightly should be thine.

RODERICK

My ears deceive me.

JAMES

O, let me rain revenges on his head.
Lord Roderick, allow me in your name
To fly to Gloucester, and so beg for arms
To carry you on wings of righteousness, back home.

RODERICK

Sweet James, you know not Gloucester's guile.
An ogre, Gloucester is, both violent and cruel,
There is no knowing what havoc he wouldst wreak upon our lives.

JAMES

Yet I will go, and if Gloucester can't be won,
Eliza I will woo, if right still beats within her breast,
Then I, by love, will gain't again for thee.

RODERICK

Then, away foolhardy child, and live yet, if thou canst.

(Exit JAMES.)

TOM

But what are we gonna do about Steve?

RODERICK

Before I tell you my plan, is everybody clear on the events so far?

ALL

Yes./Uh-huh./I guess so./Etc.

RODERICK

No questions? We've got the order of succession?
If Steve indeed betrays us
He will not know I've learnt of his deceit
I shall appeal to him with seeming friendship
And then betray the beast as he betrayèd me.
If only I knew of a way to penetrate
Eliza's guarded edifice, why then my plan I could enact!

STU

In this I can make up for giving Steve my mushrooms. I know a way, a tunnel to this lair, and this is how I seem to go from scene to scene so instantaneous-like. I'll show you the secrets, if you'll not narc on such a one as I.

RODERICK

To that snaking tunnel we will march, to see if we cannot loose the beasts of war on such a lowly prey as Steve.

MARGARET

Wait just a minute! We cannot fight, we're unionists, and we ain't getting paid for fighting, that's

supposed to be time and a half!

ALL

Yeah!/Hear-hear!/Etc.

MARGARET

We can't... (*terror*) break the rules.

RODERICK

I am just a common handyman, no King.
I started in the warehouse, just there,
And grew my stock in Duncan's eyes;
I carried Duncan's laundry in my mind.
And now he's earth, his company is ash,
The men and women I have fought beside are fir'd,
Replac'd with sycophants and interns.
So what am I to say? Let's follow now
The rules of proper conduct? Go, bend yourselves
To him who bends to none? Nay, I will not.
If all the laws must crash below my feet.
For now I have no North, but only Vengeance.

(Pause.)

STU

So, it's not a strike, it's like, a... protest.

(Pause. ALL approve.)

RODERICK

Men, we have been too long on intermission,
But now the plot begins again
Steve playéd his first act,
But now it's time for our act, too!
So follow me to Duncan's bleeding door.
We are Occupy Nantucket! Prepare your arms for war!

ALL

Occupy Nantucket!
Occupy Nantucket!
Occupy Nantucket!

(ALL exit chanting.)

Scene 2:

(A Graveyard. Enter STEVE, ANNE, KYLE, Members of the Board, Interns, masked Gravediggers, and Attendants. ELIZA at a podium.)

ELIZA

Friends, Dunc-ians, bucket-men, lend me your tears,
To mourn for our Caesar, our Lincoln, our Lear.
Our Duncan, who hath led us like a shepherd
Raising us for pasture, now is gone to his.
And so, as one made taller by a giant's fall.
I burden my poor neck with work I did
Envisage him and Kent to do,
And plant these two high men below to sleep.

STEVE

And this, the knife which Duncan had so priz'd
We lay as evidence and proof of love within their tombs.

ELIZA

My soon-time husband speaks outside his turn.
And yet his gesture is well-taken.
Steve, lay that there with Kent, and Kyle fetch
Sweet Duncan's royal lanyard, that I might bear its heaviness.

(KYLE gives her the lanyard.)

STEVE

All Hail Eliza Pitch, CEO of Duncan's Buckets,
And President of us all,
Long may she reign.
All hail!

ALL

All hail!

ELIZA

Join me, Steve.

(STEVE joins her.)

ELIZA (ct'd)

Here my right hand stands, and speaks with mine own voice.
For soon we are to marry, and then what's mine is his
And his is mine. All but my titles.

STEVE

My Queen, I lay my life upon thy mercy,
And worship at the altar of your love.

ELIZA

Arise.

STEVE

May I request one trifle of my Queen?

ELIZA

You need not my permission: me, and all I am, is yours.

(STEVE procures a FRIAR.)

STEVE

I have prepared a friar hence, to marry us today.
O, tarry not my love, for you are my eternity
And time's eternal 'til we are as one.

KYLE

This venue is not suitable, sir.

STEVE

It is a churchyard.

KYLE

It is a graveyard. Let the wedding wait.

STEVE

My love, I would not let another day transpire
Without your ring upon my hand, my crown upon thy head
My your now shared between us, and both our destinies
Bound in single flame. And let us never
Testify against each other, but only witness to our love.

ELIZA

O goodly plan. And so I shall. Friar do thy duties.

FRIAR

Do you, Steven Kilner take Eliza to be thy wife?

STEVE

Until her death or mine.

FRIAR

And you, Eliza Pitch, take you this Steve to be your husband.

STEVE

If ever husband lov'd me for myself then it be he.

FRIAR

Then, by the power vested in my by the state of New England — .

(The GHOST OF DUNCAN appears.)

STEVE

Hark! Spectral enemy, come not near me!
Who hath done this thing? It is poor in taste.

ELIZA

You jest, my sweet?

STEVE

Mock me not.
Point not thy bones at me old man, that blood's not mine.
Believe not in this joker's jape, my friends,
'Tis some witchcraftery or trick of light.

KYLE

Young Steve, your mind is troubl'd, let's be gone.

STEVE

Do you all not perceive? Or am I mad?

GHOST

You!

STEVE

Nay, silent thou!

ELIZA

Steve, you soil my mirth.

STEVE

Do you not see this monstrous sight?

ELIZA

My love has lost his head, as in mourning all are wont.
Let us retire to our funereal revelments.

STEVE

Only me, then, thou torment?

ANNE

My friends,
Steve is not well. We should retire.

ELIZA

Ill-timed is all he is.

STEVE

No, I am well enough.
Never hath I felt more wholesomely.
But I must go. This funeral is over,
And all of you dismiss'd.

ELIZA

Aye, that is my command.
Disperse!

(The mourners disperse, leaving only Gravediggers.)

STEVE

He's gone, dead Duncan, gone at last.

ELIZA

Why do you stay, my herald?

ANNE

I do hate you, girl, for all
Your cursèd deeds and blasphemies, base queen,

For careless threats and unrepentant spunk
To steer a bark that others built
And claim it as thine own, I hate thee;
But O, I love your office, which I these forty-years
Did swear my fealty for forever and forever.
My duty's to your crown, and stol'n
Or no, I must remain with thee to suffer
Til this wave do crest and then subside.

ELIZA

I ask not for your love, but only for your loyalty.

ANNE

What shall we with the madman?

STEVE

Methought I Duncan saw.

ANNE

I see him too, when look on you.
Now up you evil boy, let's get you up.

ELIZA

Let's away, this place doth giveth me the willies.
Gravediggers, you may cover the merry corpse
And valet make ready our hearse's horses.

RODERICK

Now!

(The masked Gravediggers reveal themselves to be the
Guildspeople.)

ELIZA

Who trespasses on this hallowed ground?

RODERICK

The rightful heir.

DICK

The union lives to fight another day!

(The Guildspeople sieze STEVE and ELIZA.)

ELIZA

Steve! O, aid me, Steve.

RODERICK

Nay, Eliza, thou shalt stand before a union judge,
But Steve, you are deserving of no justice.
My first act as CEO will be demoting thee.
Cast him from the fact'ry steeple tower!

STEVE

O take me not away! O see you not
How low this pious man hath brought you?
His lackeys you now are, his apes,
Why should he rule you? I am one of you:
Debase'd, improv'ish'd, lacking all but character.
Trust not this man who knows no burden's weight,
Only if we can unite as workers then can we prevail.
With me then if you so believe
Do not bend your burden'd backs to bear this man.
Let me carry you back, and rule together fairly,
Justly, as the gods intended.

(Long pause.)

GUILDSPERSONS

What?

RODERICK

Ask me not why, they all wear earplugs.
But glad I am it blunts your needle tongue.
Take him away.

(RODERICK signals to take them away.)

GUILDSPERSONS

Occupy Nantucket! Occupy Nantucket! Etc.

(The Guildspeople carry STEVE away.)

ELIZA

Steve!

STEVE

No!

ELIZA

Save me, Steve!

STEVE

My only love!

ELIZA

Anne! The hunchback is our only hope! To Gloucester!

(STEVE is dragged off.)

RODERICK

Now, to the corner office, for your judgement.

ELIZA

You are no King.

(RODERICK hits ELIZA. Beat. He doesn't like how that felt.)

RODERICK

Enough.

Occupiers, away! And bring the traitoress.

GUILDSPEOPLE

Strike-cupy! Stike-cupy! Strike-cupy! Etc.

(Exeunt, chanting, carrying ELIZA. Silence.)

(Suddenly, a knife shoots out of KENT's grave, followed by a dirty KENT.)

KENT

Howl!

Howl!

Howl!

(Lightning. Exeunt.)

[This text may act as a transition into intermission, if the company chooses to have one.]

(Enter MEEK.)

MEEK

Uh. That's fifteen.

ALL (including off)

Thank you fifteen!

(ALL drop character, and exit.)

MEEK (aside, ad-libbed if necessary)

Oh, uh, look, we get fifteen here. So, uh, sorry. Uh, can we have house lights? Great. Uh... Intermission!

Intermission

Scene 4:

(Outside Duncan's Buckets. Enter ANNE.)

ANNE

O let the boy be dead, ye subtle gods,
O let the boy be dead, for mercy's sake.

(ANNE finds STEVE.)

ANNE (ct'd)

You, boy! Do you live yet? O let him not.
Release me from my servitude, be dead boy.
Your foot, hung like a rucksack from your leg,
A broken hand, O gods, let ye be dead.
I'll touch thee.

STEVE

Ay, me!

ANNE

He lives.

STEVE

Who knew a fall of but one story
Could make my tale a tragedy?
O, touch me not, but leave me here to die.

ANNE

Alas, I'm bound to thee, if thee alive,
So up, get up now, boy.

STEVE

I'll not, I say.
But let me bleed upon my broken dreams
And die.

ANNE

I swore an oath to Duncan's face
That I'd protect his beneficiaries,
Up, now boy, I have a duty to thee yet.

STEVE

Then I release you from your duty, off, away!

ANNE

I swore a duty not to you my boy, but to your office.
I personally have no taste for thee:
I find thee crass, disloyal, surviving of the self,
And Kent you slew with treachery, deny it not.
I hate thee boy, an intern over-reach'd,
But oaths I swore and swore upon Eliza's throne,
Are not dismiss'd by some ungrateful boy.
So, whither to, your Grace?

STEVE

To Gloucester.

ANNE

To Gloucester? That damnèd hunchback?

STEVE

Do you obey your boy's command, or nay?
To Gloucester, I say, now bear me up.

ANNE

Aye, your Grace.

(ANNE helps STEVE to his feet, he stumbles.)

ANNE (ct'd)

You have no legs to travel with, your Grace.

STEVE

You shall be my legs.
Now bear me, kind Anne, away to Gloucester.

ANNE

A most abhorrent task for Duncan's ouster.

(STEVE leans on ANNE, and they begin to exit. A noise,
offstage.)

ANNE (ct'd.)

But hark, I hear the bearing of a man.
Enhide, we must, thy broken parts

For fights and flights thy body's spent.

(STEVE attempts to hide, but trips at the last moment. ANNE hides. JAMES enters, and sees STEVE.)

JAMES

The bastard's legs abandon him,
As all his allies do. What, ho, intern?
I never thought I'd spy thy smirk again,
Methought I was to die by Gloucester's hand,
And never wrack my vengeance from thy corpse,
But now I see that Jove is merciful,
For we shall both get Grace upon this thicket road.

(JAMES draws a tape dispenser, which he holds like garrote wire.)

STEVE

Nay, my friend, you know me not.

JAMES

I know

Thee well enough, and know thy work too well.

STEVE

It was not I betrayèd Roderick.

JAMES

Then who was it betrayèd Roderick?

STEVE

'Twas thee! Informing on your friend to Duncan!

JAMES

I would not break had not thee first.

STEVE

I did not break, but stay'd my mouth zipp'd up.
Duncan tested thee for truth, and seem'd
To have confessions of me pastly got,
But I had told him naught, and merely play'd
The game with thee, who, ever faithless to
Thy friends, assum'd the worst in me instead.

JAMES

Then who was it that slew the King?

STEVE

Eliza, she who rules. Why thinkest thou
I crawl along this path a broken man?
She made me marry her, then threw me from the tower,
The more to snatch from me my royal claim.

JAMES

And Kent?

STEVE

A madman, you have heard it, no?
I only rais'd my hand in self-defense.

JAMES

I know to not believe in thou.

STEVE

Do not "believe or disbelieve," but spare my soul,
For evil as you think me, James, I am a man,
And thou art not an evil creature, not as thou seest me.
Be good then, like good Rod'rick, and Duncan from before,
And walk along, and leave me here to suffer, nay to die
By nature's creeping hand.

JAMES

Thou liest intern, they story's full of holes,
Why didst thou not berate me after seeing Duncan,
If secrets I so spill'd when thou didst lie?
And what became of Kent? Some poison thine, I know.
Most likely Rod'rick threw thee from the tower
Upon discovering thou murder'd lovèd Duncan.
Nay, I'll kill thee, and rid the world a demon.

STEVE

I am the things you say, but thou art not:
In thou I see no heartlessness, no guile,
You are no killer, just or otherwise.
To take my soul is like to lose your own;
Be not like me, my friend, but give a mercy.

JAMES

Well thou hast turn'd my purity to pain.

(ANNE reveals herself.)

ANNE

Halt thy hand there, boy!

JAMES

Can it be thee, old Anne?

O, I am Happiness to look on thee!

What, wilt thou accompany my youth

To Gloucester's ear? Mayhaps you'll sway him to

Our Rod'rick's cause? Why do you balk?

Good Anne, stand you aside that I might slay

The traitor.

ANNE

Duncan chose him, and Eliza,

And I will protect them both from thee.

JAMES

This is the monster that your Duncan slew.

ANNE

That is not known, but Duncan's faith was in him,

That is all that I require for my allegiance.

JAMES

Why then, you are a fool, and I will slay thee both.

(JAMES advances on ANNE. JAMES and ANNE fight. ANNE defeats him.)

JAMES

Art thou not an old woman?

ANNE

Art thou not a stupid boy?

(JAMES dies.)

STEVE

No time, no time, I must to Gloucester now,
Before they find my injured ass,
To save a wife and damn a mutineer.
An I survive, let any wear the crown
But traitor Roderick.
Come help me crone of bucket-men.

ANNE

To Gloucester, die for twenty ducats, then.

(Exeunt.)

Scene 5:

(GLOUCESTER's Office. There is an empty throne. Enter a
BUCKETHEAD soldier leading ANNE, who is assisting
STEVE.)

STEVE

What place is this?

(The BUCKETHEAD exits.)

ANNE

'Tis said that Gloucester castrates their mouths,
'Tis said they think no thoughts but to obey.

STEVE

What else say they?

ANNE

That madness walks these halls.

GLOUCESTER (*offstage*)

Why dost thou slander madness so?
She is my legion, mistress, and my love,
She teaches me the flexibility
To over-pass all obstacles.

ANNE

Hunchback! Show they skin, for we have need of thee.

GLOUCESTER

My help, you need? Why speak and I shalt
Pour my load until thy coffers fill.

STEVE

Duncan's dead, and Kent dead too, and Rod'rick rules instead.
We two, and my dear wife Eliza should be bosses,
But no, we bleed while Duncan's death lies un-reveng'd.

GLOUCESTER

But what need thee two of little me?

STEVE

Force, to take back what is ours.

GLOUCESTER

But why come you to my domain?
You must have closer friends...

ANNE

You own the final shares of Duncan's Buckets,
Your stake in this is rulership as well.

GLOUCESTER

O, do I now?

STEVE

Old Duncan told us of your deal,
To leave the company to you
To see who then would rule under your yoke.

(GLOUCESTER laughs.)

GLOUCESTER

We made no such deal.
Some foolish love test he hath made for you.
The doddering old fool.

STEVE

If you will give us force to fight our way
Into our place of office, defeating mighty Rod'rick,

Then this same deal we will make with thee.

ANNE

Nay, Steve!

GLOUCESTER

And you shall have it.

GLOUCESTER

But which of you shall have command?

STEVE/ANNE

Me.

GLOUCESTER

It seems we have some disagreement after all.

STEVE

Nay. For I will follow Anne.

ANNE

And I will follow Steve. We both shall share the reins.

GLOUCESTER

But I did not offer forces to you both.

One of thee shall have love, the other, then my hate,

And you must choose.

STEVE

Then it is me, as next in heirloom's line.

(GLOUCESTER, the hunchback, appears.)

GLOUCESTER

I have not the face to court a looking glass,

Nor gait to shuffle through the public square.

How then have I accrued this wealth?

This company is ambitiously nam'd:

'Tis "Gloucester's Twenty-Ducat Buckets," call'd,

And how do I so cheaply make my stock,

That I for twenty ducats trinket them?

By madness. I only one thing love

And it is neither beauty nor gods' grace,

Nor the pleasures of my workers' tongues.
I love efficiency, and madness is
The whip I joyously employ
To jog my household to its oars.
So I will make a test of madness,
For whomever rules will need that most of all.

STEVE

Say on.

GLOUCESTER

If you would rule, why then eliminate your competition.

(GLOUCESTER produces a letter opener.)

CLOUCESTER (*ct'd*)

A sacrifice to the gods of high ambition.
The one of you shall rule, and one of you shall die.

ANNE

You fool, for I have only now save'd this poor intern's life!
Our bond is stronger than your bribe of pow'r.
Only the lowest soul would pay a mercy back with malice.
We stand here undividable, aye Steve?

(But STEVE is looking at the letter opener.)

GLOUCESTER

You have misjudged him, love, he is all malice.

(GLOUCESTER places the letter opener in STEVE's hand.)

GLOUCESTER (*ct'd*)

You wanted to be a King, well here's your scepter.
All that's left is for your hand to take take it.

STEVE

I'm sorry, Anne, but I am not like you.
Some men have some compunction for their fellows,
But I am but a creature of the hunt.

ANNE

Steve, do not this act perform.

How will you sleep with such a bloody mind?

STEVE

By weariness.

GLOUCESTER

Enough, Steve, make your choice.

(STEVE limps toward ANNE.)

ANNE

Steve, what if Eliza, whom you love, did find my body here,
And saw 'twas you who slew my life.
Would not such knowledge terrify her soul?

(STEVE stabs ANNE.)

STEVE

She help'd me slaughter Duncan, fool, and kiss'd me afterward.
What I do now I do for love as much as hate.
Now die, and let me claim my fate.

ANNE

I see you now. I see the beast.
You vile and violent boy. A curse on you.
May you be haunted by good Duncan King
And all you slew in this your bloody quest.
Away I shall, but on your heathen head
I here anoint you with whatever villain's venom
My poison'd heart can bleed.

(ANNE dies.)

GLOUCESTER

I am much proud of you, my boy.
Soon you will be the man you always sought.
Bucketheads, arouse!

(Gloucester's BUCKETHEADED SOLDIERS assemble.)

GLOUCESTER

Now seize the instrument of your power.

(STEVE holds the blade aloft.)

GLOUCESTER (ct'd)

Now you must give to us what we have never had:
Passage past the doors of Duncan's barbèd gates

STEVE

With this my lanyard we shall penetrate.
And if I may consult a certain stoner,
Rod'rick I'll dispatch ere any know our plot.
Come minions, to seize a throne and kill a crown
With me to blood, and bile, and renown!

GLOUCESTER

A goodly lord you'll make, I'll teach you more
Steven, you have won my heart.
Come, let's to war, and I will do my part.

(Exeunt.)

Act V

Scene 1:

(An improvised courtroom in Duncan's office. Enter KYLE,
dragging ELIZA, who is tied to a rolling chair with tape.)

KYLE

Be quiet, my Lady.

ELIZA

Free me, subject.

(KYLE starts to tie down the chair.)

ELIZA (ct'd.)

My Kyle, what happened to your ruddy laugh,
Your japes and jests which did delight us all?
Why have you turn'd into this silent creature,
Bound only by the smile of your commandant?

KYLE

May I impart a secret to your ladyship?
I hate this job. I hate it more than life.
But you are out, and Roderick is in,
Why do I not defect? To where? To whom?
Where shall a fam'ly man like me find
Generosity in fallow fields of business?
I bow, for only tall men lose their heads.

ELIZA

You are a fool.

KYLE

Nay. I think you have my title taken up.

(KYLE has finished tying her up.)

ELIZA

Please. Your Roderick will kill me, trial or no;
If you have heart of flesh, then let me go.

(Pause. KYLE looks around, unsure. Enter RODERICK, MEEK,
Guildespeople, and Attendants.)

MEEK

All hail, Roderick the Wise.
President of Duncan's Buckets
Chairman of the Board
Chief of Executive Officers
Union Magistrate,
Protector of the Buckets,
And Wielder of the Great Stapler of Chattanooga
May he reign a thousand years.
All hail!

ALL

All hail!

MEEK

Ye may be seated.

(ALL sit.)

RODERICK

Let's do the dirty business quickly, read hence the charges.

DICK

"For violation of union rules, poor customer service, general mismanagement, and the murder of Duncan."

RODERICK

Let us come to order.

ELIZA

I do not recognize this court of kangaroos,
I appeal to the rightful laws of Nantucket
To show me evidence of these alleged crimes.

RODERICK

I am the law, milady.

MARGARET

While police and judges be striking, there is no law but union law.

DICK

And this be a union house.

ELIZA

I have no representative.

DICK

Let me be her representative! Why, I will defend you lady with all the fervor of Lady Justice, blind in one eye and balanced on her scales. Why I will argue unto the court until they all do weep to hear your tale. What is your tale?

RODERICK

It seems you have your representative.

ELIZA

I would rather represent myself, than carry this flamingo.

DICK

Thank you, Lady!

RODERICK

As you wish. How answer you these charges?

ELIZA

I am no murderer.

RODERICK

So, you concede the rest?

ELIZA

I concede that I will never rest until you feel my cold knife between your ribs.

RODERICK

Threats will do no service here.

What evidence have you of your innocence?

ELIZA

To prove a negative, 'tis hard, but aye methinks I can.

I suckèd not the life from Duncan's dying pipes,

But rather came upon his corpse

His murderer still a-breathing o'er the body.

RODERICK

Why would you let the killer flee? What culprit do you serve?

ELIZA

Because I knew the man. You all do know him.

RODERICK

Aye, I believe we do. But will you name him?

ELIZA

Aye, but if I name him, will my testimony then be coil'd around my neck?

RODERICK

Nay, you are clear of crime, if you do speak his name.

ELIZA

I would have your written signet, Roderick.

RODERICK

You may have better: here's my seal upon your pardon.

I'll lay it on your head when once your utterance is spoke.

ELIZA

I am afeard. For he is cruel and powerful. With many men behind his back.

RODERICK

You have my word, as President of Duncan's buckets.

ELIZA

Men do swear and swear.

RODERICK

Then on my very life I swear: speak but the murderer's name, and you shall be free.
But speak me true, and yea you are delivered.

ELIZA (*pointing at Roderick*)

There he sits. The very monster, there upon his throne.
You swore me up and down to say 'twas Steve,
But now my oath to honesty doth override your cunning breath.
'Twas Roderick whose heels I caught careening from the crime:
The traitor you seek is thee.

MARGARET

Can it be true?

RODERICK

Nice try milady, but I'm alibied already.
I was with these unioners whence Duncan died,
Or had thou forgot'st?

TOM

Aye, I remember it.

(Beat. ELIZA tries to escape. She is seized.)

ELIZA

An I get free, I'll hang you all!

RODERICK

My board of colleagues, you've heard this case
And seen debated evidential points
The which, I hope, you've ponder'd carefully,
For a woman's life hangs in your scale today.
My colleagues, in accordance with the law
Laid out in Duncan's Handbook of Employee Guidelines

And acting as a temporary magistrate
Of union bylaws, I find thee guilty.
I hereby I pass this sentence: death,
To strangle from the taughtness of this holy rope.

ELIZA

You fools! If this is justice which of you is next?

MARGARET

Quiet, you gutter-snipe, you namby-pamby!
We'll stop your cunning tongue.

(They string up ELIZA.)

ELIZA

Roderick, but look whom you've become.
You once had honor, now but tyranny.

RODERICK

Let the sentence be executed.

(Flourish of trumpets. ACTOR LAURENCE enters, and Actors
on a wagon, masked.)

MEEK

What's this? What's this?

LAURENCE

Your majesty, your gracious liege, may we
Intrude upon your personhood to perform
A play which we have taken many pains
To writ for victorious celebration of
Kind Roderick's rise to throne?

RODERICK

Delight

I not in my position, celebrate me not
And give me no indulgence for
The bloody means of my ascent.

LAURENCE

But, we have memorized it sir.

MEEK

Your Grace, it is a union play.

LAURENCE

And I've been practicing my words all day.

RODERICK

Alas, you tire me with honors,
So I must let you dote.
Go to, then, teach us how to laugh again.
Eliza, this last joy you may imbibe.

LAURENCE

My lord, we shall, and for your merry-most amusement, here present, a comical and most merry tragedy indeed. 'Tis the cheery story of lord Hamlet, Prince of Danishes, whose most delightful romp through spooky woods to meet his fathers' ghost, and hilarious murder of his uncle, shall be met with much laughter indeed. But first, your Grace, we enact the masque: let this dance of mimetry depict for you what must unfold hereafter.

(Music. Actors enact a short version of “Hamlet.” A masked and limping STEVE plays Hamlet, LAURENCE plays Gertrude, RODERICK is enlisted to play Claudius. At some point STEVE poisons the chalice. In the end, STEVE offers RODERICK the poisoned chalice. RODERICK is about to drink it when the GHOST OF DUNCAN enters.)

STEVE

Nay, fiend, keep you away!

RODERICK

What is it boy? You are not to speak now.

LAURENCE

O dumb apprentice, silence your tongue.

DUNCAN

You.

STEVE

Not I?

MEEK

Your line is: “Hamlet hands the goblet to Claudius.”

DUNCAN

You.

LAURENCE

Oh, very well! It's just that, the prologue is over!

[*Aside to STEVE*] No smoking on the job, Stu!

And now, act one, scene one, of Hamden, Prince of Marklet. Which is to say, Hamlet, Prince of Markdom.

STEVE

Away specter!

MARGARET

Wait a tick, where do I know that voice?

RODERICK

And that limp! As if 'twere broken in a great fall! Dick, unmask him!

(DICK seizes STEVE's mask.)

RODERICK

Thou livest.

STEVE

I more than livest, I givest life. I takest. Attack!

(Marching sounds. Bucketheads enter, followed by GLOUCESTER.)

LAURENCE

You're ruining the illusion!

RODERICK

Union brothers, seize this man!

(Roderick's FORCES and Gloucester's BUCKETMEN commence an epic office battle. The GUILD is about to win.)

STEVE

That's fifteen, everyone!

GUILDSPERSONS

Thank you, fifteen!

(Guildspersons disperse.)

RODERICK

My friends, do not, let not this vulture turn
You to surrender!

TOM

Sorry, gov'ner. Rules is rules.

(Exit Guildspersons.)

STEVE

And now I see the day is won, and you
Are overwhelmed. Now free my wife.

(RODERICK seizes ELIZA.)

RODERICK

I have you now. If you love her, lay down your arms.

STEVE

Roderick, you tempt me to rashness.

GLOUCESTER

Men, kill him.

STEVE

Wait. Roderick, release her, and I will spare you.

RODERICK

No you will not.

GLOUCESTER

Why do you hesitate?

STEVE

Can I not spare a useless death?

RODERICK

Come not closer, or she dies!

STEVE

Roderick, you were once a man of honor.

RODERICK

And now a creature of survival.

GLOUCESTER

Men, kill them both.

STEVE

Halt. Roderick, save one life yet and let her go.

RODERICK

I'd rather we all burn than you walk free.

STEVE

I beg, you friend.

(RODERICK laughs. He is about to kill ELIZA. Suddenly, KYLE stabs him.)

KYLE

Enough. You have made a killer of a fool.
I quit.

(KYLE bows to ELIZA. RODERICK dies. KYLE exits.)

STEVE

Eliza!

ELIZA

My love!

(STEVE and ELIZA embrace.)

STEVE

Good Gloucester, you have my thanks.

GLOUCESTER

But thanks is not enough.
I have now here the last remaining rule
Of Duncan's buckets. My last competitor.
Why not should I just kill you both,

And burn this building to the ground?

ELIZA

What wouldst thou have of us?

GLOUCESTER

Of us? Of him. You promised me your madness.

It's this I ask. If a rival I

Would make of thee, let he be mad as me.

So kill this woman, here, and take thy crown.

And I'll be satisfied.

ELIZA

What cruelty is this?

STEVE

I understand it now. Old Duncan tried

To warn me that the path to leadership

Was strewn with bones of those I lov'd.

GLOUCESTER

When first you set your sights on this high job

You knew each heir would have to die

And knew you then Eliza was such a one

This is the moment you have craved for.

Why do you wait? Kill the final heir, and be the rightful King.

ELIZA

Steve...

(Pause.)

STEVE

I'm sorry, good Eliza, this is my destiny.

ELIZA

Do not be sorry. I understand. I am like you.

I know what 'tis to be driven by a stoic whip

You have to take my life, you have to seize your own.

An if I wore thy weighty shoes I would most likely do the same.

It is an honorable death, my love. Be not sad

But strongly grab your destiny by bullhorns

And be the man I know you are.

(Pause.)

STEVE

I'm sorry Gloucester, I'm weaker than I thought
For there is one life left I kind of like
So I guess I won't be your good servant boy
But likely die a free man, and an intern.

ELIZA

This is a folly.

STEVE

Aye, but a goodly folly.

GLOUCESTER

Eliza then. Do you have courag'd hand
To take what's yours by right.

ELIZA

If I do not then you will kill us both?

GLOUCESTER

It would be sport. So choose: your life or his.

STEVE

Eliza. I love thee as I love myself.
So take from me my beating heart if you
Have need, and I will die a happy husband.

ELIZA

I love you Steve.

STEVE

And I, you, wife.

(ELIZA stabs him.)

STEVE

My father, ere he died, raised dogs to hunt.
But every brood or two there was a one
Whose teeth were sharper than his kin,
Whose nose was arched in such a way to smell

A whiff of blood upon the wind,
Who snapped at human fingers
Ate more than his share and
So we did not know who was his prey
The quarry or ourselves.
In such a case, it fell to me
To bid the over-eager pup into the wood
And since his gift endangered the hunt
For our protection I did cut his throat.
And such a dog was I. And such a dog was I.

(STEVE dies.)

GLOUCESTER

Burn this wretched place to dust.

(The Bucketmen set the building on fire.)

ELIZA

But Gloucester, what about our deal?

GLOUCESTER

You should have gotten it in writing.
Goodbye Eliza, Queen of ashes.
May ghosts accompany your soul to hell.

(Exeunt all but ELIZA. The world burns.)

ELIZA

There are no stories left to tell
No tellers left who have the time
No visions, curses, dreams, nor spells
No patience for a well-turned rhyme.
This tale we tell's an office romp:
Though tragical its end may be,
We have not got the Grecian's pomp
Nor Jacobean filligree.
But when you next an intern rear
Remember Steve and his high mind,
For he is but the scapegoat of the year,
And ye were he upon a time.
And so goodnight, go catch your bus.
Enjoy your cheery drinks this eve,

But pour an extra one for us,
And one for piteous Steve.

(KENT enters, and slits ELIZA's throat. She dies.)

KENT

Howl! Howl! Howl!

(Flames consume them all.)

END