

Stirring the Broth

Student 3: Low Merit

NZQA Intended for teacher use only

Where were they? The icy whisper of the Scottish dawn chill crept into the hall as Katherine stood at the stone hearth, stirring the morning broth. Alone.

2 The event was her daily ritual. The only time she had not made the broth was when she had given birth to young Fleance, and even then, she was back to hearth stirring her broth within the week.

She pulled back her dark hair with a dainty hand and wondered once again about Banquo's absence. Two days since, Banquo and Fleance had ridden back from Inverness after attending the royal banquet to honour Macbeth. No one had seen or heard from them. She stared out the narrow window, hoping to see them riding out of the morning mist. But no, the road was empty. "Surely they'll be home soon," she said out loud, as she stirred the broth. Once, twice, and thrice round the cauldron went the worn, wooden ladle. And then, almost as if the third stir had announced it, Katherine heard a voice.

5 "Worrying about the family are we, love?" it cackled.

"It would appear so, my sister," croaked another.

4 "Who goes there?" gasped Katherine, holding the ladle before her like a sword.

"Who we be, my dear, is not of importance. It's the secrets we have come to share about your Banquo and bonny Fleance that should interest thee", hissed the third voice.

Katherine's hand grew white at the knuckles as she tightened her grip on the ladle. Mustering every ounce of courage she harboured behind her delicate appearance, she cried, "Be out with it you imperfect speakers!"

"Look into the broth, sweetie, for there is the truth about Macbeth," enticed the first voice.

7 Katherine slowly turned back to the broth and almost immediately her piercingly blue eyes widened as she caught sight of three shadows, crouched behind a rocky pass, whispering amongst each other, on the bubbling surface of the broth. She barely heard a word the three were saying except the name 'Macbeth'. The sound of horse's hooves began to echo around the rocks, the glow of torchlight began to fill each angular crevice. Banquo and Fleance on horseback! Suddenly three men sprang out from the shadow of the rocks, startling the galloping horses. Banquo's horse threw him to the hard ground, raising its front hooves into the air, almost in surrender to the men and their swords. All she could hear was Banquo's cry piercing the night, "O treachery! Fly good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!" The sound of horses hooves once again echoed around blood-splattered rocks. Tears ran down Katherine's face as she watched her beloved son become enveloped in the night's embrace.

3 "For what purpose have you shown me this? Speak!" demanded Katherine. But all that she heard in reply were the fading whispers of a name that would haunt her forever. "Macbeth."

6 Macbeth? Brave Macbeth, Banquo's boyhood friend? It made no sense, she thought as she paced the floor. Then suddenly she remembered the riddle that Banquo had told her and Fleance on his return from battle, "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater. Not so happy, yet much happier. Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none." The foolish words from the old women on the heath. They had laughed about it at the time. Banquo had made a paper crown for Fleance... She shivered. "Your line shall be kings," Macbeth had told Banquo

4 quietly, looking at him straight in the eye.

"Lady," the servant's voice broke into her thoughts. "Lady, there is grave news from Inverness. Your lord has been slain by robbers. Your son has fled. The king has promised to bring those responsible to justice." Katherine said nothing. "I will have him unseam'd him

1 4 from the nave to the chaps," she thought.