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Dramatic Publishing

THE WITCH'S LULLABY

by
Martha Bennett King

Based on "Malcolm Macbeth"
by
John Storm



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(THE WITCH'S LULLABY)

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THE WITCH'S LULLABY

A Play in Three Acts
For Four Men and Eight Women, doubling

CHARACTERS

GERTRUDE }
G'THA } the last three witches in Scotland
GORINA }

MALCOLM MACBETH . a young Scottish Highland lad
JEAN Malcolm's younger sister
BETSY another younger sister
MRS. MACBETH his mother
MR. MACBETH his father
CONSTABLE of the town
A JUDGE (played by Malcolm's father in Act III)
MRS. MCTAVISH (played by Malcolm's mother in Act III)
TWO VILLAGE GIRLS (played by Malcolm's sisters in Act III)
MISS FITCH a town gossip
A SHOPKEEPER

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

The kitchen in the Macbeth cottage in Scotland.

ACT TWO

A rocky ledge in front of the witches' cave.

ACT THREE

A village street.

NOTE:

Bagpipe music is all off stage.

Recording: "Scottish Bagpipe tunes (recorded in Scotland) played by Major John MacClellan. Folkways Records EP17 or, Decca Records 175 "Bagpipe Selections."

Music for the "Witch's Lullaby," "Wi' a Hundred Pipers an' a'" and for "Leezie Lindsay" in back of book.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The kitchen of a modest, thatch-roofed cottage in the Highlands of Scotland. There is a cooking stove, cupboard, table and benches, and bagpipes hang on the wall. One door opens to a bedroom. Another opens to a world of silence broken only by the baa-ing of sheep. Shadows of mountains bring early nights. Silver fogs descend without warning. Winds sigh in the larch and oak and pine trees. It is a lonely land where ghosts and witches roar.*

AS THE CURTAIN OPENS: *JEAN is stirring porridge on the stove. BETSY kneels on a bench by the table, studying a big family Bible. MALCOLM enters with wood for the big family stove. JEAN helps him put it on the floor. He brushes his sleeves and goes over to rumple BETSY's hair.*

MALCOLM (*teasing*). So now you are reading the book.

BETSY (*smiling shyly*). You know I can't read.

JEAN. We've been waiting for you to go on with the tale.

MALCOLM. When I've finished the work outside.

JEAN. We'll help you. (*She takes a shawl from a peg on the wall. A pig squeals outside. BETSY jumps up.*)

BETSY. There it is again.

JEAN. Malcolm. Did you hear? A pig squealed.

MALCOLM. We have no pigs.

BETSY. It's the witches.

MALCOLM (*scoffing*). Has Granny Burns been telling you shiver tales again?

JEAN. Oh, Malcolm. She's seen them! Three of them.

BETSY. One squeals like a pig.

JEAN. And one barks like a dog.

MALCOLM. Whoosh with your talk. I have work to do.
(*He goes out.*)

JEAN. Let's go with him.

(They run as if afraid to stay alone. BETSY dashes back to put the blue ribbon from her hair on the table. Darts out. There is a scuffling outside the door. A dog barks. The door swings open and G'THA enters stealthily. She motions and GERTRUDE and GORINA enter. GERTRUDE moves to the center of the room and leans on her broomstick, but the OTHERS examine everything.)

GORINA. I've forgotten what we're looking for.

G'THA (*hissing*). One horny toad. One white rat. One newborn lamb.

GERTRUDE (*to the air*). You won't find them here.

G'THA (*ignoring GERTRUDE*). One feather from a rooster's tail. One pinch of snuff. One blue ribbon.

GERTRUDE (*waving a claw*). You won't find them here.
(*GORINA sees the blue ribbon. Pounces on it and waves it over her head.*)

GORINA. Blue ribbon. See that?

G'THA. There ought to be a pinch of snuff. (*Opens everything she can. GERTRUDE sinks slowly to the floor, seeming to slide down the broomstick handle. Stares straight ahead.*)

GORINA. She's done it again. (*Tries to pull GERTRUDE up.*) Get up.

G'THA (*pulling the other arm*). Get up. (*They lift GERTRUDE a little way but she's like a limp ton of flour and sinks right back. They stand back, arms akimbo.*)

GORINA. What's the matter with you, anyway?

G'THA. You haven't been helping all day.

GERTRUDE. I don't want to help.

GORINA (*pleading*). But it's such a beautiful ship we're going to sink...just as soon as we get everything for the spell. (*Waves ribbon.*)

GERTRUDE. I don't want to sink a ship.

G'THA (*exasperated*). Well, why not?

GERTRUDE. I don't feel like drowning a lot of sailors.

GORINA. And pray what do you want to do?

GERTRUDE (*deadpan*). Go to sleep.

G'THA. Something's got into you. You used to be the worst witch in Scotland.

GERTRUDE. I want to go to sleep.

GORINA. Witches aren't allowed to sleep.

GERTRUDE. I want to go to sleep for nine hundred years. (*Wail.*) I want to be de-witched. (*GORINA and G'THA scream with laughter.*)

G'THA. De-witched. Listen to her.

GORINA. Once a witch, always a witch.

GERTRUDE (*angry*). Don't you be too sure. (*They sit down on either side of her.*)

G'THA (*mock sympathy*). Just who would de-witch a witch like you?

GERTRUDE (*defiantly*). Somebody might. (*The TWO cackle with glee.*)

G'THA (*sharply...trying to put some sense into GERTRUDE's head*). It takes a plain, ordinary, everyday

mortal to do a good deed for you. That's the only way you can be de-witched.

GERTRUDE. I know it.

G'THA (*rocking crazily*). A plain, ordinary, everyday mortal...(*Gives a giggling shudder*)...a plain, ordinary, everyday mortal would take one look at you and die of fright. (*The TWO howl with delight after each statement they make. Practically.*) One good deed wouldn't be enough anyway. It would take a whole sack full to de-witch you.

GORINA. She's forgotten what she looks like.

GERTRUDE (*grimly*). No, I haven't. I looked at myself in the Loch of Clyde just twenty years ago.

GORINA (*with a fiendish grin*). Did you see the great patches of hair on your face? (*GERTRUDE nods bitterly.*)

G'THA. It would take one good deed just to get those off.

GORINA. And another to get rid of those popping eyes.

G'THA. And another to shrink your horrible hump. (*They thump her. She yells.*)

GORINA. And another to lose that hook nose.

G'THA. And those ghastly yellow teeth. (*The TWO lean down to look at GERTRUDE's teeth, then shudder.*)

GORINA. And those claws. (*EACH grab a hand and hold it up.*) Just look at those claws.

GERTRUDE (*shaking herself free*). Keep quiet. I know I don't have a chance. I know I scare everybody who looks at me. (*Rocks miserably.*) But I hate being a witch. I hate it. I hate it. (*She puts her head on her knees and moans. The other TWO lean on each other in spasms of laughter, then begin a shuffling, rocking dance to their Witch's Lullaby.*)

G'THA. I love it. I love it. (*A sing-song voice.*)

GORINA. So do I. So do I. (*Mimicking the style.*)

G'THA. I wouldn't be de-witched for all the gold eggs in the eagle's nest.

GORINA. Nor would I. Lullaby.

G'THA (*sings*).

I LOVE TO PINCH BABIES AND HEAR THEM
CRY.

GORINA and G'THA.

LULLABY. LULLABY.

(*GORINA and G'THA move in rhythmic dance.*)

G'THA.

AND STEAL LITTLE PIGS FROM THE OLD
PIGSTY.

GORINA and G'THA.

LULLABY. LULLABY.

G'THA.

AND HANG LITTLE BATS IN THE OLD
CHURCH STEEPLE.

GORINA and G'THA.

LULLABY. LULLABY.

G'THA.

AND SCARE THE WITS OUT OF GIRLS, BOYS
AND PEOPLE.

GORINA and G'THA.

LULLABY. LULLABY.

(*They hum and rock.*)

GERTRUDE (*has lifted her head sharply as if listening. Suddenly she jumps to her feet. Sharply*). They're coming. (*The THREE grab their broomsticks and fall over each other getting out the door.*)

(MRS. MACBETH enters. Hangs her shawl on a peg and stirs the porridge. The GIRLS and MALCOLM enter. BETSY runs to hug MRS. MACBETH.)

BETSY. He's going to read to us now.

MRS. MACBETH *(smiling)*. Good. Have you seen your father?

MALCOLM. He's not down from the hills. *(He sits on a bench and begins to study the big Bible. BETSY leans against him. JEAN sits alone. MRS. MACBETH picks up her knitting and sits down, too.)*

BETSY. Is it about David and the giant Goliath?

MALCOLM. It is. *(He begins slowly, almost stumbling as he reads from Samuel II:17.)* "And there came a champion out of the camp of the Philistines named Goliath whose height was six cubits and a span." *(He stands up and reaches above his head to show the GIRLS how tall Goliath was.)* "And he had an helmet of brass upon his head and he was armed with a coat of mail...and he had greaves of brass upon his legs and a target of brass between his shoulders. His spear's head weighted six hundred shekels of iron and one bearing a shield went before him. He stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, 'Choose you a man and let him come down to me.' " *(MALCOLM stands up again and says the next by heart.)* "Saul and all Israel were dismayed and greatly afraid. Then the young shepherd David came and said to Saul, 'Let no man's heart fail because of him. Thy servant will fight this Philistine.' " *(Reading.)* "And Saul said to David, 'Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, this giant. Thou art but a youth and he a man of war.' " "But David said unto Saul, *(By heart again.)* 'Thy servant kept his father's sheep and

- there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock. I went after and slew both the lion and the bear.' "
- BETSY (*wide-eyed*). What if a witch had stolen a lamb?
- MRS. MACBETH. Hush! (*She turns to MALCOLM with a smile.*) You read well, Son. It is a pity we have only one book in the house.
- MALCOLM. The Fergusons have fifty books in their house.
- JEAN (*proudly*). They'll be coming for their holiday in the Highlands soon. Then you'll be able to read their books again.
- MALCOLM. Aye. I shall learn all that Mr. Ferguson will teach me.
- BETSY (*admiringly*). Every since he took Mr. Ferguson fishing and rode in an automobile and ate his supper from plates with silver knives and forks and touched all those books...every since then he thinks only of reading books.
- MALCOLM (*intensely*). In London there are whole buildings filled with books. Nothing but books. Mother, I must go to school like the Ferguson boys and learn to read all of the books.
- MRS. MACBETH. Aye. I have always wanted a son of mine to go to school.
- BETSY (*suddenly alarmed*). You wouldn't go away from home, would you?
- MALCOLM (*boasting*). Oh, I'd come back with money in all my pockets and a trunk full of fine things...silver spoons for my mother, dresses of silk for my sisters... and books. (*He waves his arm.*) We'd have books all around this room.
- BETSY (*throwing her arms around him*). None ever had such a brother as you.

(MR. MACBETH opens the door, steps in then looks outside once more. Closes door as the GIRLS run to him. He sits down on a bench at the side and they help him pull off his boots. MRS. MACBETH goes to the stove.)

MRS. MACBETH. You were gone a long time.

MR. MACBETH *(puzzled)*. A strange fog came suddenly around me...so thick I scarce could find my way...and a dog kept barking...no dog I know.

THE GIRLS. The witches.

MALCOLM. All they can think of is witches. *(MR. MACBETH walks to the table, stocking feet.)*

MR. MACBETH. No mind. Come and sit down everyone. I have something to say which concerns us all. *(They gather in surprise. MR. MACBETH doesn't know how to start...finally does.)* It is time for Malcolm to be going to his Uncle Alex. *(MALCOLM stiffens.)* He will be going in the morning. *(MRS. MACBETH gasps. MALCOLM stands up quickly.)*

BETSY. In the morning? *(MALCOLM starts to speak. MRS. MACBETH holds up a hand to warn him to silence. MR. MACBETH does not look at any of them.)*

MR. MACBETH. He will stay there the spring and the rest of the summer...the winter, too, if his uncle has need of him. His uncle will pay me well for the help and when the lad returns he'll be a proper shepherd. *(He pauses. MRS. MACBETH is watching MALCOLM who seems stunned. The GIRLS look appalled.)* When ye get up in the morning, Son, ye'll put on your kilt. Your mother will have your sack ready and plenty of food for the journey. *(MALCOLM turns desperately to the window.)* Listen well to all that is told ye. Be re-

spectful of your uncle and your aunt. Be kind to everyone who crosses your path and may the good Lord keep you strong and fearless. That is all. *(No one speaks. Then MALCOLM turns from the window, swallows hard and speaks very respectfully.)*

MALCOLM. If you please, sir, I'd like not to go to my uncle's place.

MRS. MACBETH *(interrupts gently and apologetically).*

It's learning the lad wants, John. Whenever he's alone and there's no work to be done about the place, he's forever reading from the Bible...*(EVERYONE waits breathlessly. MR. MACBETH gives no clue to his reaction.)*

MALCOLM. The Fergusons will let me read their books this summer and I want to go to school.

MR. MACBETH *(without looking at anyone).* We've not the money. *(MALCOLM turns tensely back to the window.)* It was the same when I was a lad. I did not want to be a shepherd in the hills. *(A pause.)* But it was the only way to take care of my dear ones. Now. Ye'll be making an early start in the morning. We'll eat our supper and go to bed. *(MRS. MACBETH moves quickly to the stove and begins to put porridge in dishes. JEAN helps. MALCOLM walks outdoors. BETSY starts to follow.)* Let him go. He'll come back when the fog has softened the hurt in him. *(Porridge bowls are placed on the table. The FOUR sit down, say a silent blessing and eat.)*

MRS. MACBETH. We'll be getting his things together. Jeanie, you will find his knapsack. Betsy, you will bring his clean clothes. *(THE GIRLS go into the next room. MRS. MACBETH opens the cupboard and takes out a scarf.)* Here is his scarf and the silver brooch to fasten it.

MR. MACBETH (*proudly*). He'll wear the plaid well. It's a proud clan, the Macbeths.

JEAN (*bringing the knapsack, also a dagger*). Here is his dirk.

MR. MACBETH (*takes the dirk*). Aye. I gave him this dirk when he was but a lad of six. He will wear it in his stocking. The Macbeths are good fighters.

MRS. MACBETH. Thank goodness there is no fighting to be done these days.

BETSY (*whispering to JEAN*). He could use it if he met any witches.

MRS. MACBETH. Whish with your foolish talk. Where's the lad's sporran?

JEAN. It is here.

MR. MACBETH (*holding out a shilling*). Then put this in the pocket.

BETSY. A whole shilling?

MR. MACBETH. If it should rain in the night, I would have the lad stop at the village by the Loch Drumna-drochit. Good people will care for him there and he must give them the shilling for their goodness and trouble.

JEAN. I wish he would come in now.

MR. MACBETH. We'll not wait up for him. (*MRS. MACBETH motions to the GIRLS. They kiss MR. MACBETH and start toward the bedroom. A dog barks and a pig squeals outside. The GIRLS throw their arms around each other. MR. MACBETH stands up, too. Then walks to the bagpipes on the wall.*) Have ye forgotten the power of the pipes? There's not a beast of the fields nor the forest...no, nor any witch of the land, does not fear the skirl of the pipes. They will protect ye this night. (*The GIRLS go, fearfully. MRS. MACBETH is ready to*