

Fourth Hag

She tries the cold water because that works with the wine on your linen slacks. But no, she says in her sleep, that won't do it, it won't come out.

Still asleep, she goes to the front door and looks out. The hills fall away on every side, some toward the tossing sea and some toward the tangled woods. From the woods comes the sawed sound of her murders.

Ouch, she says, burning her hand on the candle stub she carries. It burns fast into her fist and the sweet of it stirs her dream. Hers is in ermine and whalebone and sperm, and laid before her is the king, succession-dead, and his blood-stunted boys. On his knees, her stained and humiliated husband.

Fetch me my scepter, he'd said, staring only at the spirits. Break me my fast, he shouted, My cock crows. Make me the man I'm supposed to be.

Yes, she says, in her living sleep, his ambition spilled on the sand. Yes, she says, never to bear him. Yes, my liege, my prick, the name that's never spoken.

Then she's on the moor, astride of her dream. There's her sword, and the stain on her hand is not shame, or sorrow. I'm free, says the death on her gown. There's no meaning to the woods, no drive for the sea, the soldiers and their semen blots.