

LA CORBIE

from MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS GOT HER HEAD CHOPPED OFF by Liz Lochhead

ACT ONE

Scene One

Scotland, Whit Like?

Music. An eldritch tune on an auld fiddle, wild and sad.

Alone, our chorus, LA CORBIE. An interesting, ragged, ambiguous creature in her cold spotlight.

CORBIE: Country: Scotland. Whit like is it?

It's a peatbog, it's a daurk forest.

It's a cauldron o lye, a saltpan or a coal mine.

If you're gey lucky it's a bonny, bricht bere meadow or a
park o kye.

Or mibbe...it's a field o stanes.

It's a tenement or a merchant's ha.

It's a hure hoose or a humble cot. Princes Street or Paddy's Merkit.

It's a fistful o fish or a pickle o oatmeal.

It's a queen's banquet o roast meats and junkets.

It depends. It depends...

Ah dinna ken whit like *your* Scotland is. Here's mines.

National flower: the thistle.

National pastime: nostalgia.

National weather: smirr, haar, drizzle, snaw!

National bird: the crow, the corbie, la corbeille, le corbeau,
moi!

How me? Eh? Eh? Eh? Voice like a choked laugh. Ragbag o a burd in ma black duds, aw angles and elbows and broken oxter feathers, black beady een in ma executioner's hood. No braw, but Ah think Ah hae a sort of black glamour?

Do I no put ye in mind of a skating minister, or on the fit, the parish priest, the durty beast?

Ma nest's a rickle o sticks.

I live on lamb's eyes and road accidents.

Oh, see, after the battle, after the battle, man, it's a pure feast – ma eyes are ower big even for *my* belly, in lean years o peace, my belly thinks my throat's been cut.

CORBIE laughs and is suddenly surrounded by the whole COMPANY who mill and circle, stop and pose, striking attitudes, looking the audience in the eye – one moment confrontationally, another suspiciously, then the next with the frank and open curiosity of children. Now CORBIE takes, from out of their ranks, the twa queens by the hand, parades them like a ringmaster or a barker would a pair of his carnival acts or a cabaret emcee his star burlesque strippers, showing them off.

Once upon a time there were twa queens on the wan green island, and the wan green island was split intae twa kingdoms. But no *equal* kingdoms, naebody in their richt mind would insist on that.

For the northern kingdom was cauld and sma. And the people were low-statured and ignorant and feart o their lords and poor? They were starving! And their queen was beautiful and tall and fair and...Frenchified.

The other kingdom in the island was large, and prosperous, with wheat and barley and fat kye in the fields o her yeoman fermers, and wool in her looms, and beer in her barrels and, at the mouth of her greatest river, a great port, a glistening city that sucked all wealth to its centre – which was a palace and the court of a queen. She was a cousin, a clever cousin, a wee bit aulder, and mibbe no sae braw as the other queen, but a queen nevertheless.

Queen o a country wi an army, an a navy and dominion over many lands.

Quick burst of a sad or ironic jig.

Twa queens. Wan green island. And ambassadors and courtiers came from many lands to seek their hauns...

