

PIETER-DIRK UYS

MacBeki

a farce to be reckoned with

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CONTENTS

A playwright's note	v
Stage history.....	viii
About the play.....	x
Characters	xi
<i>MacBeki</i> – the play	1

A playwright's note

—written on the eve of the first performance at the Little Theatre, Cape Town, by the UCT Drama Department directed by Christopher Weare on 25 February 2009

After nearly forty years in this business of theatre, I was a playwright for the first time. Sitting at the table in a room attached to the legendary Little Theatre off Orange Street, the group of young actors, guided by their director, read the text of my new play *MacBeki*. I heard it for the first time and like a member of a future audience, shared the imagination and enthusiasm of the young performers.

I have written many plays since 1969. Most of them had me as director of the first production. Some had me as actor, even actress! But this reading was a luxury I could as yet never afford. To just listen to the words, sense the structure, detect future deletions, enjoy their enjoyment. By July 2008 I had this new play on paper. It seemed a logical progression as a combination of the best of drama as inspired by William Shakespeare and the worst in politics as signalled by Thabo Mbeki. Since his bizarre denials of the link between HIV and Aids and his fatal collaboration with his Minister of Health to demean the seriousness of the virus – which led to the unnecessary deaths of over 350,000 South Africans in the last seven years – I have been convinced that he was not the right comrade for the job of building on the legacy of Nelson Mandela and the achievements of the ANC since 1994. (See www.pdu.co.za/archives)

Entertainers must entertain. My fury and frustration had to be filtered through that essential definition of 49% anger and 51% entertainment. And so it came to pass in my one-man shows *Foreign Aids*, *The End is Naa* and *Evita for President* that one referred to Thabo's Mbekivellian intrigues and that South Africa found itself in its own production of *MacBeki*. After seeing a Broadway production of the Scottish Play in 2008 with Patrick Stewart leaving

Star Trek to partake in murders most foul, the echo of our political circus, so aptly captured by Zapiro's cartoons, came flooding back. Shakespeare's play is the ultimate battle-plan of political power games and fascist greed. We know how Macbeth and his lady come to a gruesome end. In my play no one dies; they go back into the collective leadership.

Imagine my surprise when President Mbeki was thus swallowed and replaced. A daily pattern of scanning the news became essential. Who was the President today? The political landscape was changing so quickly that a play, as opposed to a satirical revue, was in constant danger of being outdone by events. On the contrary. Through the Polokwane Rubicon, Mbeki's ouster, Motlanthe's interim-age and Jacob's Zunami, MacBeki not only kept its satirical edge but gained in dramatic appeal. No longer was it just a mirror-image of what was around us. It was now a play with three-dimensional people, caught up in a spider's web of intrigue, lies, entitlements and corruption. Not at all to be compared to the elegant democratic way in which our ruling party in South Africa was enhancing the Constitution with respect and dignity.

Time to find a theatre. Plays cannot be produced overnight, while a one-man show can. As a graduate of the UCT Drama Department, it was logical for me to contact Chris Weare, who is the Captain of this remarkable starship 'Enterprise'. His enthusiasm and encouragement inspired this production for February 2009. He would direct the play and his final-year students would make up the ten performers. As most of the company had studied the Shakespeare play, they enjoyed the echoes of that tale emerging from my text. But a knowledge of the classic is not essential. *MacBeki – a farce to be reckoned with* replaces the legendary characters of The Macbeths with MacBeki and Lady Manta. Ramabanquo, Prince McTrev and the eventual victor Lord MacZum take us on a new highway of comedy, shock and awe, reflecting the familiar confusion of patriotism, greed, bluster and ego that seem to make up our daily political fare.

Chris Weare has invited me to sit in on rehearsals. As I start my

national tour of *Elections & Erections* within days, this playwright is very happy to leave the director alone. He and his cast know exactly what to do and where to go. I'll manage a day off to come back for the opening of *MacBeki* on the stage of the Little Theatre on 25 February. For the first time in my theatrical life I will be able to sit in the auditorium as a member of the audience and watch the magic of theatre transport us all to the fantasyland of intrigue, guile, spin and laughter, a combination that our politics sadly still lacks.

Pieter-Dirk Uys

Stage History

Presented by the UCT Drama Department 25 February–21 March 2009

Director *Christopher Weare*

Lighting design *Daniel Galloway*

Costume design *Leigh Bishop*

Sound design and recording *Oskar Brown, Marco Frontini*

Set painting *Jon Keevy*

Wardrobe assistant *Sherna Botto*

Publicity *Little Theatre, DIVA PR*

Photography *Rob Keith*

Stage managers *Oskar Brown, Philip Rademeyer*

Crew *Dean Kniel, Andreas Juries, Mandisi Sindo, Siyabulela Sikawuti*

Lighting operator *Katherine ten Velthuis*

Sound operator *Phume Ngcobo*

THE CAST

First Witch, Businessman Angla, Rosencrantz *Rosa Whitcher*

Second Witch, Businessman Sosal, Guildenstern *Mpho Kgosana*

Third Witch, Businessman Giltfelds, Nurse *Trudy van Rooy*

MacBeki *Themba Mchunu*

Lady Manta, Winnie *Lerato Motshwarakgole*

Ramabanquo *Gerald Dhunrajah*

Maduba, Praise Poet, Messenger, Celebrating Comrade *Abongile Kroza*

McTrev *Rudi Swart*

Porter, Celine Dion *Gabriel Marchand*

MacZum *Chase Downs*

Guards, Servants *Mnadisi Sindo, Siyabulela Sikawuti*

Presented by The Market Theatre Johannesburg from 1 April 2009

Director *Pieter-Dirk Uys*

Set and costume design *Nicholas de Klerk*

Lighting design *Declan Randall*

Publicity *Market Theatre, BUZ Publicity*

Photography *Ruphin Coudyzer*

Stage Manager *Sibusiso Ndumndum*

THE CAST

1st Witch, Businessman Sosal, Rosencrantz, Servant *Renate Stuurman*

2nd Witch, Businessman Angla, Nurse, Messenger *Meme Ditshego*

3rd Witch, Businessman Giltfelds, Doctor, Guildenstern *Kenneth Fok*

MacBeki *Fezile Mpela*

Lady Manta, Winnie *Nthathi Moshesh*

Ramabanquo *Mpho Osei-Tutu*

Maduba, Celebrating Comrade *Arthur Molepo*

McTrev *Coco Merckel*

Porter, Celine Dion *Lizz Meiring*

MacZum *Sello Sebotsane*

About the play

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a grand drama known to most people. The story of ambition and power, deceit and decay, in which lives are taken and lost, blood flows and murder is committed most foul and frequent, is universal and entertaining. Pieter-Dirk Uys has taken his main inspiration from this Shakespearean tragedy and structured a satirical play round it, with the focus on a familiar local political setting, enriched by many laughs.

MacBeki is the story of one leader making way for another. Ambition, intrigue, gossip, rumour and political manipulation are the order of the day. The old king is replaced by the younger energetic Lord MacBeki who, with his companion Lady Manta, guide their ambitions towards the Crown and Absolute Power. The Pretender to the Throne, Lord MacZum, gathers strength and support. Confrontations become more ominous and inevitable.

Three witches, cleverly disguised as journalists from major newspapers, predict power to MacBeki and present riddles about those who oppose him. Most of their predictions come true and when the MacBekis are sovereign lord and lady of the land, it seems nothing can stop them. However, soon cracks appear in the foundations of power. The people are waiting for delivery of promises and employment. A virus sweeps through the land taking no prisoners. Arrogance and corruption divert attention from the success of many aspects in this Kingdom.

Unlike Shakespeare, Pieter-Dirk Uys does not spill blood in his play. He spills the beans. He challenges political correctness and sycophantic denialism. He makes us laugh at the transparency of the ruling elite who lie to protect themselves at all costs and so dig an ever-deeper trench in which they inevitably will fall. All the characters in *MacBeki* are fictitious and any resemblance to political figures, past or present, in South Africa are purely coincidental and should not be taken seriously.

MacBeki is a comedy. It is a farce to be reckoned with.

Characters

First Witch

Second Witch

Third Witch

MacBeki

Lord Ramabanquo

Maduba the Old King

Prince McTrev

Lady Manta

Lord MacZum

Servant

Porter

First Businessman Sosal

Second Businessman Angla

Third Businessman Giltfelds

Doctor

Nurse

Guildenstern – from another play

Rosencrantz – from another play

Comrades, Guards, Bodyguards

Messenger

Winnie

Celine Dion

Celebrating Comrade

Act One – In Better Days

Scene 1

The Porter steps forward.

Porter Thus spake Wikipedia: ‘Macbeth’ is among the best known of William Shakespeare’s tragic plays. It tells of the dangers of lust for power and the betrayal of friends.

Well, as you will see, our play has nothing to do with Shakespeare. In our farce no one dies; they just go back into the collective leadership. If you thought thus that you would see murder and bloodletting most foul, you are wrong. This is Theatre. Bloodletting and murder most foul happens outside in real life.

If you think I am the Porter at Luthuli Castle, you are right. But there is more to me than meets the eye ...

But wait, forsooth, the Press Conference beginneth!

The Three Witches of Shakespeare’s Macbeth appear. Here they are journalists that represent three familiar newspapers – possibly the Sunday Times, Sowetan (or City Press) and the Mail & Guardian.

1st Jrnlst When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning or in rain?

2nd Jrnlst When the hurly-burly’s done,
when the battle’s lost or won

3rd Jrnlst That will be ere the set of the sun

1st Jrnlst Where the place?

2nd Jrnlst Upon the heath

3rd Jrnlst There to meet with MacBeki?

1st Journalist's cellphone activates.

1st Jrnlst My editor ... (*Speaks.*) I'm on my way to get a scoop to make the day.

2nd Jrnlst *Sunday Times*? What do you know.
It takes the *M & G* to crow;
Freedom of speech, no stone unturned

3rd Jrnlst *City Press* affirmative news,
Let us give the land its good and bad dues

All Fair is foul and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air

The Porter brings in a tray with beers

Ah!!!!

Porter Here cometh Prince McTrev, Keeper of the Coin!

Prince McTrev enters.

McTrev A few words off the record, comrades and friends. Feel free to ask any questions you like. Full transparency is the order of the day. Our beloved King Maduba is still abroad, but be assured we will leave no stone unturned. Make yourselves at home. You are welcome. Forgive me, I have mundane matters of state to attend

to. (*To 2nd Journalist in passing.*) I liked your story last week ...

He exits.

1st Jrnlst Where have you been?

2nd Jrnlst African Union summit.

3rd Jrnlst And?

1st Jrnlst More hot wind.

2nd Jrnlst I'll give you a wind. 'Zim!' (*Like a burp.*) Pardon.

3rd Jrnlst And I. 'Dafur' Oops, sorry.

1st Jrnlst No one will read the writing on our walls.

3rd Jrnlst The end is nigh.

2nd Jrnlst Revolution calls.

All (*Laugh.*) Revolution!?

1st Jrnlst A 4x4, a drum, MacBeki doth come.

MacBeki and Ramabanquo enter.

MacBeki 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen.' (*Qualifies the quote.*) Shakespeare.

Ramab 'Eish!' Me. (*Sees the journalists.*) What hideous creatures are these? Are you alive?

MacBeki Don't flatter them. They are called media, because they are never well-done nor rare. Begone, Third Force!

1st Jrnlst MacBeki. Hail to you, Comrade with dream deferred.

2nd Jrnlst All hail, MacBeki. Hail to you, oh Native Intelligence.

3rd Jrnlst All hail, MacBeki, oh future King!

Ramab Good Comrade, why do you start and seem to fear things that sound so fair? (*To the journalists.*) You bring such good predictions for my friend, but you say nothing to me?

1st Jrnlst Hail!

2nd Jrnlst Hail!

3rd Jrnlst Huil!

The other two Shhhhh!

1st Jrnlst Lord Ramabanquo, you are lesser than MacBeki, but greater.

2nd Jrnlst Not so happy, yet much happier.

3rd Jrnlst Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.

All So all hail MacBeki. And Ramabanquo.

MacBeki Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more. For thirty years I have sweated and worked for this moment where I now am. The power of structure behind the throne of flaccid reconciliation. But king? We have a

king, a legend and a world leader. For me to be king is absurd. And even if my comrade here wanted to, he is from another royalty and cannot usurp the throne of a vast local majority. Why do you spread such rumours?

All Rumours? Rumours?? Rumours!! (*They see the breaking news of their cellphones.*) Xenophobia! Credit Crunch! Joost van der Westhuizen!!

They exit.

Ramab Where did they disappear to?

MacBeki Into the air, if not back to the bar. Would they had stayed.

Ramab The things they uttered. You? King?

MacBeki You? Happier?

Ramab Forsooth and ... eish! (*His phone rings. He listens, then:*) It is news for thee. The King is pleased with your excellent late-night slogging over reports and affairs of state. He has rewarded you.

MacBeki ‘Thane of Cawdor?’ (*Qualifies quote.*) Shakespeare.

Ramab No. ‘Deputy King of Tshwane’. Vodacom.

While Ramabanquo takes another call on his cell, MacBeki steps towards the audience.

MacBeki I feel a poetic moment coming on:
I would sit in Brighton after classes,
Sussex University was the place.

Studying UK history and farces,
Meanwhile dreaming of the day
I would be only second in line to the rainbow throne.
It is now all coming true.
But there are some in my way, like you.
Comrades always, star or runt,
Comrades in a collective front.
But surely they can be deployed ... elsewhere?
But where? Where? Where? (*The poetic moment is over. He turns to Ramabanquo.*) We are in the service of our King. 'Tis all we can strive to be.

Ramab Amandla.

MacBeki Awethu.

Scene 2

The setting: In the throne room.

Porter gives a deep period bow as the King enters in his Madiba shirt.

Maduba Has execution been done at Codesa? Comrade McTrev, have those in charge returned?

McTrev My King, they have not yet returned, but I have spoke with one who saw it all happen. The former de Clerk openly confessed that he was always on your side and begged Your Highness's forgiveness. All he wanted was golden handshakes for his men and pensions for his army. It seems at last affirmative action can become the fashion of the land.

Maduba De Clerk? Alas, there's no art to read a man's mind by just looking at his face. And to think I trusted him completely.

McTrev 'Tis your magic that makes the magic, Lord.

MacBeki and Ramabanquo enter.

The Porter goes into another ornate period bow, to the irritation of all.

Maduba Worthy comrades! I feel guilty that we have not thanked you enough. Lord MacBeki, you have done so much for us, while we were in the world repairing bruised egos. In that House so White, helping Big Bill zip up his trousers. In the Palace of Buckingham, helping a noble queen accept her annus horribilis. And you burnt the midnight oil in Luthuli Castle, keeping the wheels of our young state moving. We thank you and owe you more than we can repay.

MacBeki The chance to serve you and the party is its own reward, my King.

Maduba You are welcome here. And by making you my Deputy in all but reputation, MacBeki, I have planted the seeds of a great future for you. And our favourite comrade, Lord Ramabanquo? You deserve no less than MacBeki here, for you know I regard you as my choice to one day lead the land. (*To all.*) But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine on all deservers. Let us call it ... what shall we call it? ANC?

Ramab COPE?

All COPE???!

MacBeki NAC?

McTrev JSE?

Porter BEE.

They all look at him amazed. He spoke!

Maduna He still has a voice? Very good. We shall call it BEE!

All Viva BEE!!!

MacBeki I will go ahead and alert my wife to the good news. You are leaving the Left Wing of the Castle to celebrate with us, surely? So, humbly I take my leave.

Maduba Ah, that's very good ...

While all converse in the background MacBeki talks to us.

MacBeki McTrev is now Prince of SARS with influence in the Principalities of FNB, Standard and with intimate access to ABSA. To become King, I'm either going to have to step over him, or give him up. He's in my way, too.

'Stars, hide your fires;

Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The eyes wink at the hand, yet let that be

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.'

Shakespeare.

He exits.

Maduba ... and you are right, faithful Ramabanquo. Lord MacBeki is such a great spirit, and that in so small a

frame. And the compliments he smothers me with? Eish, it is like slaughtering a cow for me – let’s go to his new apartments. He who has already gone to welcome us, there is a true man of our party.

He quotes here in Xhosa a struggle slogan.

Porter Not Shakespeare?

Maduba No, Umkhonto weSizwe!

They exit with the King.

Scene 3

The setting: The MacBeki apartments.

Lady Manta enters, reading an email.

Lady M Was this the only email from my Lord? But he is but only in the Right Wing of the Castle? Strange being here in this place. (*She shudders.*) There are many boxes still to be unpacked in the other chamber, Porter. My medical books, journals and my priceless recipes. Take care. One hint of damage and I will have your spleen with which to feed our cheetah. You may go.

The Porter makes elaborate bow and exits. She reads her email.

‘There were three from the media, horrible creatures, smelly and unkempt, but they predicted what came true. I am just a heartbeat away from the seat of power. This I have thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightest not lose the

dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness has promised thee ...’

Eish! Always quoting this damn Eurocentric bla-bla. But MacBeki and I have been close for over forty years, through thick and thicker, seldom thin. Surviving life in foreign lands as exiles, and yet never far from our dream of what could be. Johnny Walker in hand, we plotted and planned. Through Africa, in Leningrad and outside London. And now he is but a step away and I will be the official keeper and dispenser of the muti.

Enter the servant with tray and whisky in a paper cup.

Servant Your muti, Mama. And our King comes here tonight?

Lady M Tonight? Here? But look at my place? Is not thy Master with him? Porter? Why was I not told? Why am I always the last person to be informed? Look at my hair? I must find a gown. There is no time to have one made, or flown in from France! And what will we feed the King? He is so fussy. Won’t touch our caviar.

Servant We have African potatoes, beetroot and garlic, Lady Manta.

Lady M No garlic. It remains on the breath and a conversation is nigh impossible. Wait! I feel a plan develop in my brain, as yet not quite besodded by the golden nectar of madness. Go, rouse the staff. Fly the new flag. Hide the silver.

Servant exits. Lady M replaces the paper cup with a crystal glass from the box and throws the whisky in it.

The King comes to me and mine. He stands between us and the power. The land. The continent. Free Voyager miles.

‘Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from Crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty ...’? No. Andrew Lloyd Webber would work better for this, but I hate small talk. As my Lord MacBeki would say: I feel a poetic moment coming on: (*Speaks to the whisky glass.*)

Mirror mirror in my hand
Who is the slyest in the land?
To leave the past and fly above
The things that stand in all our ways?
So spirits of the past, give me a beard and muscles to be
A man in strength, while a mere woman is she
who sits and strokes the brow of her man.
Come to my woman’s breasts.
Come and take my milk for garlic sauce,
Come, thick night, and make the sight dark
so that what I do, will not be seen for what it is,
but for what it gives.
Power.
And better hair ...

MacBeki enters.

Lady M And? My Lord?

MacBeki I’m absolutely finished.

Lady M As you can see, I still have a lot to do. Dear Comrade. I am so excited. I waited for you to return before I celebrated in our traditional way. Porter? I’ll have a double on the rocks.

MacBeki But the King cometh.

Lady M And when doth he leaveth?

MacBeki He sleepeth over. Leaveth tomorrow-th.

Lady M That morrow will never come. Your face also betrays strange feelings, dear Comrade, and the people will be able to read it like a book. You must always appear the way they expect you to look. Greet the King with welcome in your eyes, your hands, your words. Quote Shakespeare, Woolworths and Thesaurus. You should look like the innocent flower, not like the snake that hides underneath that bloom. Let me handle tonight's imbizo. Tonight will change every moment. Forever.

MacBeki We will speak further. I must catch 'Isidingo'.

Lady M And as your friend Shakespeare says: 'Only look up clear. To alter favour ever is to fear.'

He looks perplexed.

It's on the T-shirt you brought me from Stratford-on-Avon last year after you saw that production of *Macbeth*. A silly play of pointless violence and confusion. Besides, this T-shirt was the only way you could bring in my extra luggage via SAA, wrapped up carefully and so hidden from official scrutiny.

MacBeki Ah. The least I could do for you, my dear ...

Lady M Leave all the rest to me.

MacBeki exits. She turns to the Porter.

Make yourself useful, boy. The King is coming. Fix the place up!

She exits.

Scene 4

The setting: A passage.

The King enters in another garish ethnic shirt.

Maduba This part of the castle hath a pleasant seat. The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses.

Ramab Indeed.

Maduba Dis lekker op die plaas.

Ramab Some of our people are not yet used to their freedom.

Maduba But you could develop those freedoms into a future. Ah, see, see, our honoured hostess comes.

Lady M enters.

Lady M King Maduba!

Maduba Sometimes the love my subjects bring me is inconvenient, but I still accept it as love. My dear lady, you look well.

Lady M Everything you see here in your honour is small in comparison to what you have bestowed on us.

Maduba Where is MacBeki, the new voice in the land of Tshwane? I believe he arrived before us as there is a glow of satisfaction in your eyes.

Lady M Merely the candlelight, my Lord.

Ramab Ten-year-old and stored at a special temperature?

He does not like her and will use every chance to make a snide comment. Lady M hisses under her breath.

Lady M Guard your tongue, outsider. I have heard your predications do not promise great hope of glory here, only hints of happiness. Shame.

Maduba You must speak up, I cannot hear everything.

Ramab In the Great Hall the band is playing loudly, oh King.

Maduba Yes, I love music.

He does a small Madiba dance.

Lady M Yes, I was just saying to my dear Comrade here that with him at your side, nothing can go wrong in our land.

Maduba That's very good. *(He looks off at the band.)* Can this band play any Annie Lennox songs?

Lady M A good friend of yours left all her songs for your enjoyment. Two hundred songs!

Maduna Ah, that's very good. Who? Madonna? Tina Turner?

Lady M Celine Dion!

Maduna Ah, that is very frightening! She visited us recently and terrorised us with her love. And brought her family every time. And sang so loudly we could not think. The oxygen was thin ...

They exit laughing to the great hall and the band.

MacBeki enters although we have seen him lurking out of sight but watching the proceedings.

MacBeki If it were done well when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.

No one expected that I would be the one who would keep the files and the secrets. I, who was the first to engage the enemy over Tassenberg and boerewors in Dakar. I, who encouraged enraged comrades to love their enemy and so ruin their reputation. The intellect can often overwhelm the most bloodthirsty ambitions. The enemy trusted me. They saw me for what I displayed for their scrutiny. But remember, I was educated in the Sussex halls of hallowed wisdom and so I can act like them, while thinking like me.

They say 'Coconut'? No. Coconuts fall off a tree. I will become that tree and all who follow me will be rich as golden fruit and empowered beyond their dreams. They who stand in my way, I shall just ignore. Ignore it and it will go away, from an uncontrollable virus to a crisis of illumination. I will dazzle with words, quote phrases from my beloved Shakespeare who said: 'To be or not to be King, that is the question.' Indeed.

But to the issue of now. The King must be removed.

Not in the traditional sense of murder most foul, but by diverting with charm and guile. Flattery and optimism can also unweapon and level the most fearsome moral high ground.

Whatever, I cannot be seen to be involved. The heavy wheels of intrigue must be moved by shadows. Those who will not turn against us, must remain for us. Let me think. Where is my pipe ...?

The Porter hands him his pipe. Lady M enters.

Lady M My Lord, you look too calm and pensive. This frightens more than rage or confusion.

MacBeki We will proceed no further in this business. He hath honoured me of late ...

Lady M Were you drunk when you came back so hopeful? You want that crown so badly and yet you plan like a coward. Always saying 'I dare not' after trumpeting 'I would'?

MacBeki Please stop! I can only do what is proper for a man to do. He who dares do more is not a man at all.

Lady M Then what sort of small animal will he be? Rat? Dog? Cockroach? Dassie? Your excitement showed the muscle of a man. Your doubts wave like the small whiskers of a mongoose. If you did what you could do silently and cloaked in darkness, imagine how the world will respect you as King. No one will imagine that you were behind so sad a deed?

MacBeki Sad? Bloodletting is more than sad. It is terror.

Two courtiers pass. The conversation stops. Suspicion. Paranoia. Once the two are gone they carry on the conversation.

Lady M Who said blood? To get where we want to be, we will step upon the smiling faces of small babes, or reverse the 4x4 over the wheelchairs of old folk. We did not fight a struggle to remain poor. That is surely what we promised ourselves in the wilderness of want, when the top of the trees seemed so far, far, away. We are now just below the highest leaf. Pluck that old leaf and put it in a frame for the world to see and honour. Then we become the new leaves.

MacBeki And if we fail and fall?

Lady M Have we ever tasted autumn yet? Did I not say be humble and helpful in the shadows of power and so learn all there is to use against those ahead of you? And you did. And today they fear you more than the plague? Did I not say the contentious A does not lead to the destructive B?

MacBeki But hundreds of our people are dying of something.

Lady M And see how easily thousands can be removed without a finger to point at us, because it is all natural and incurable. My good Lord, do not underestimate my magic potions. Who needs poor or sick, lame or lazy? Yes, the contentious A leads to the destructive B, which then adds up to deadly C. C stands for the corpses which will become rich earth to give bloom to the new world. Our new world. Besides, whatever evil that happens to the kingdom, we can blame the servants for. After all, many of them are foreign and here without the correct papers or permission.

MacBeki You go in, dear Lady and let me think. I have read enough to understand the need for original thought. With my genius and your recipes, we will conquer all fears and the land will be ours.
'Away, and mock the time with fairest show.
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.'

Lady M Hey?

MacBeki Get thy arse back to the banquet!

She exits back to the great hall.

Ramabanquo enters with an iPod.

Ramab There you are. I brought this with me to show the King. It is a new discovery that can hold all the music of the world. We know how the King loves music.

MacBeki But that is no larger than a powder compact.

Ramab From the First World.

MacBeki I wish they'd butt out. This is my field in which to play. Do they have any Vivaldi? It sooths my native intelligence.

Ramab Every classical composer, light, tango, African and, of course, all his favourites.

MacBeki The ones he invites to give concerts in his vacation palace?

Ramab All of them.

MacBeki The one that always carries the cross of concern while selling his records in its shadow?

Ramab Yes, Bono. The King is early to bed. I thought I would take this to him so that he could listen to his favourites.

MacBeki I will go to the King. I am his host. You go to sleep.

Ramab Explain to him it's very easy to operate.

MacBeki Unlike politics.

Ramab Unlike 'fair' politics.

He exits.

MacBeki Is this an iPod I see before me? Come let me hold you.
I cannot see the millions of musicians within you and yet they are here pounding into my head with rhythm and sound. I don't have you, but I can still see you.
Fateful apparition from the First World,
Can I touch you too?
And you don't need oil to fill the world with your power.
I can see you and you look as real as any dagger or pistol at my disposal.
You are leading me to the place I was already going to, where I need to use a weapon.
But nothing as powerful as you.
Oh, final weapon of mass distraction
Knives cause blood and delete life.
You will warm blood and defuse thought.
You will fill the spirit with love and care
And take away from the controls of power
Those hands that I wish to put back in irons.
But I need not.
You will be the irons I need.

Thank you, i and Pod.
I believe you are the answer.

Lady M calls off.

Ah, my Lady, reminding me to get on with it. I never thought this would be so easy. My King? *(He calls.)* I have something special for you ...

He exits as Celine Dion's song fills the space.

Scene 5

The setting: MacBeki's office, the next day. Celine Dion sings at full volume. The Porter has his tray with coffee and Bloody Mary and pills.

Lady M enters and takes the pills, drinks the Bloody Mary and takes the coffee.

Lady M What American Idol is this in the heart of my hospitality? Who sings so that the mirrors crack and the milk goes sour?

MacBeki enters. Takes a packet of Grandpa headache powder. Empties it on a glass surface and with a credit card lines the powder like cocaine and sniffs it. Then puts Geronsan C tablet into a glass on the tray and drinks it.

MacBeki That's better. *(The Dion singing gets him down too.)*
What ho?

Lady M Yes, that racket. I'm worried we'll wake everyone up and the deed is not yet done.

MacBeki But I have done the deed. Did you hear a noise in the night?

Lady M I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry. And then that! Who is that, Porter?

Porter A Canadian songbird who, they say, can sink an ocean liner.

Lady M Yes, yes, I also watch the History Channel! My Lord, I don't understand ...

MacBeki You know how much the King loves to stand up for issues that cloud our horizon. I will not tolerate his interference in the affairs of my state. So let him wave to the crowds and appear on Larry King Live. But through this introduction to the music of his heart through the magic iPod, he has agreed to only serve one term as King and to step down.

Lady M That is so unlike us. Look at your old Uncle Bob across the river. We usually hang in till hacked up or drowned.

MacBeki The King has vacated the throne and I will be the next Maduba!

Lady M But that wily Ramabanquo stands in your way. We all know he is the chosen one.

MacBeki I have plans there too.

Lady M Music?

MacBeki Money.

Lady M But look at your hands? They are covered in blood?

MacBeki No, your beetroot and African potato salad was on a tray next to the King's bed. I spilt some beetroot juice.

Lady M Go get some water and wash this faulty witness from your hands. We must show a united front.

A knocking is heard.

MacBeki Who could that be?

Lady M The neighbours complaining about Celine Dion, too loud for sleep! Retire we to our chamber. A little water clears us of this deed. How easy it is then! Damn. They will wake the King with that knocking.

MacBeki The iPod is deaf to world noise.

Lady M Away. I hope there's some Tina Turner on it? You mean, just Celine Dion? Eish! Poor King.

MacBeki Poor former King.

Lady M Ex-King?

MacBeki Previous King?

Lady M Yesterday's King!

MacBeki King without a Kong!

*They exit arm in arm, laughing.
The knocking continues.*

Porter Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have become old turning the key. Knock, knock, knock! (*Calls.*) What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'm coming, yes anon anon.

(*To the audience.*) I pray you, remember the Porter. When nominations are announced for theatre awards throughout the land, remember me. An example of the surfeit of transformation in theatre. Not only do I have so little to say, but I have to bring my own costume and food. I studied Shakespeare and know the style. I wanted to be a classical actor and studied so, but there is no job, so this is my do. Were I a politician, I would be within wearing the latest BBBEEE-bling. Woe oh woe, I am of the lighter ethnic hue. There is no part available for me, other than that of Porter. What is Porter? Houseboy, servant, slave, not even concierge. Why the servants in this cast have more to say than I and that is because they are affirmatively acceptable. Even the Chinese! Can't speak. Can't wear a costume. Don't pick up anything in the dressing room, oh no. It is I with my discipline of theatre, alas, something of the past. Oh, the past. Then I could have played Hamlet or King Lear. Wouldn't have turned down a Goneril or a Portia either. But this is now my lot. To be or not to be Porter to this lot. Alas and alack, life's a female dog.

He goes to open the door as Lord MacZum enters.

MacZum Bring me my machine-gun! Did you go to bed so late to get up with such trouble? Do they pay you well? You must join a union. You must support me. You will get a raise, bigger pension, health care. A car! For I am a man of the people.

Porter Faith, Sir, there has been much feasting till 3 a.m. And, as you know, such intake stimulates desire, but hinders performance.

MacZum You cannot believe the bla bla bla in the press. Here was no forcible sexual assault. She was a known womb to me. We had consensual relations.

Porter But she is with contentious A and destructive B. You could get the deadly C. Did you protect your penetrative member?

MacZum Huh?

Porter Your machine-gun?

MacZum Fear not. I have no need for a plastic bag. After the act I had a shower. Is your master awake?

MacBeki enters.

My knocking has roused him. Good morning, Comrade.

MacBeki MacZum? Are we to meet today?

MacZum Is the King awake? I wish to pay tribute.

Porter Yes.

MacBeki No. (*To Porter.*) Are you sure he is awake?

Porter He did command to call timely on him. I have almost slipped the hour.

MacZum Let me to him.

He exits.

Porter Zounds! The dark has been unruly. The barn owl made noise all night. That predicts calamity and disaster. Then the screaming voice of a banshee filled the air.

MacBeki And all in Canadian French? Yes, it was a rough night.

MacZum enters with the King's ethnic shirt. It is covered in what looks like blood.

MacZum O horror horror horror. This is beyond words and belief! See! A murderer has broken into our world and upturned our hopes. Blood!

Porter Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
The life o' the building!

MacZum What the hell is wrong with you?

Porter The Bard. (*Winks at audience.*) Fleur du Cap? Naledi Award?

MacZum Bard off and make some coffee for us!

Porter is appalled and swishes off.

MacBeki You are holding the King's symbol of power and state.
Where is the King?

MacZum A big red lake of the redness of his life. See, Comrade MacBeki, the King has been murdered as this blood on his ethnic robe indicates

MacBeki No, man, that's beetroot juice.

MacZum From your Lady's recipes?

MacBeki The King's palate has humble expectations. Since his days in prison, bread, jam and maybe some chicken are his grateful fare. This beetroot salad was a treat. It must've spilled on his robes when he was listening to his voices.

MacZum Voices? The King has gone mad?

MacBeki No, he has gone home to his vacation palace with his iPod. He left that ethnic symbol of his reign here. (*He takes the shirt.*) In my hand. I am now the Chosen One.

MacZum I don't know what to say. I am humbled by your intellect and guile. You have a university degree and, according to the media, I have only Standard Three. Even though I studied for years while in solitary confinement like all of us – but not you.

MacBeki No.

MacZum Not you.

MacBeki No. Thank you. Don't rub it in.

MacZum It must have been a great disadvantage. Knowing that the King and all his Comrades were imprisoned for

their noble beliefs, while you sat anonymously in a foreign land, sipping cocktails and meeting girls?

MacBeki Not all of us could languish in prison, Comrade MacZum. Someone had to be there to answer the phones, collect financial support, study at Moscow University and plan the success of our Struggle.

MacZum And that is where you met your Lady?

MacBeki She was a nurse in Leningrad.

MacZum Yes, she gave me a gold watch that she found there in a second-hand shop.

MacBeki Ah. Yes, she has some remarkable souvenirs from her days in exile. Watches, rings, earrings, brooches. Even some dentures.

MacZum The Soviet anaesthetic must have kept her patients out for hours. I'm surprised she didn't find more goodies.

MacBeki They say she might need a new liver.

MacZum Too much beetroot?

MacBeki Too much Johnny Walker, I'm afraid.

Lady M enters.

Lady M What's all this noise so early in the day. You could wake the dead! Ah, look what the impi's dragged in. Gentle MacZum, welcome.

MacZum Gentler Lady, if it were possible to wake the dead. See, a terrible thing has happened. And in your guest room, too.

Points to shirt. Lady M gives a small telling gasp. Lord Ramabanquo enters, sees the shirt and is angry.

Ramab Who does your laundry here? Some local? If so, get a foreigner. They are superb!

MacZum The King ...

Ramab The King does his own laundry?

MacBeki The King is no more.

Ramab O woe, woe, the King is slain? And he has not yet personally autographed his book for me.

Lady M Never fear, we have a warehouse of signed books and original paintings. Take your pick.

MacZum It seems voices chased the King away.

Lady M That voice of Celine could even chase viruses away. Hello? That's a thought ...

MacBeki The iPod.

Ramab My gift to the King!

Lady M And I thought it was a fire alarm.

Prince McTrev enters with the Porter.

Porter And then he dresseth and maketh his way to the door and the 4x4 and goeth into the darkness-th.

McTrev And you say it was all in something called iPod?

Porter Aye, Prince McTrev. Smaller than a rat and costlier than ratatouille. I take my leave.

McTrev Yes. Go.

Porter I reverseth out of the room.

Lady M Yes, yes, just shut up and go.

Porter My sceneth is endeth.

MacZum Where is my machine-gun?

Porter flees.

McTrev How do we explain to the people that their King has left them for Celine Dion?

Lady M We will blame the Third Force.

MacBeki The Media.

MacZum The Rightwing Conspiracy.

McTrev Winnie.

Lady M Who's Winnie?

McTrev I don't know, but isn't there always a Winnie?

Lady M I feel faint.

McTrev Porter? Bring my Lady some water!

Porter enters with the drinks tray and glass.

Porter The right help is at hand. Double on the rocks.

McTrev Take her arm. She is not well.

Lady M It is my liver. I contracted an ailment while in the jungles during the Struggle. My liver has never been the same since.

Ramab Mixing Leningrad vodka, British gin, Scottish whisky and Blanko-blitz would send any liver into exile.

Lady M Haai voertsek!

Porter *(To audience.)* Bitches!

MacBeki and Porter leave with Lady M.

McTrev MacZum! It looks like MacBeki will become king? With an intellect too?

MacZum I never understand what he's saying and you never know what he means.

McTrev Just say yebo and nod. Believe me, stand in his way and you end up as Ambassador in Kabul, or Caracas.

MacZum You could be King.

McTrev No, I am not of the right ethnic combustion. But I can count. And I have the combination to the national safe. Ignore me and you cannot pay for the new coaches of transport or botox treatment for one of your wives. Remember, a Helen Zille forehead is not cheap.

MacZum I must make myself scarce.

McTrev And I must hasten myself to the old King and see what stone is left unturned. Be strong, Comrade. Remember I am on your side, whichever one it happens to be.

MacZum And I depend on you to keep the hounds and scorpions away from me and mine. On second thoughts, leave the scorpions out of this!

MacZum exits.

McTrev To devalue or not to devalue the currency. That will make the wrong people poor. I must embellish the ambitions of my comrades with gilt-edged promises. Delivery is easy. It takes one BEE appointment to keep them all in the kraal. And I will do all this manually to make sure that not an ingot falls between the cracks. Unless, of course, the cracks lead to a Swiss Bank Account in the name of the Poor. The Needy. The Helpless. I will become a beacon of fairness and balance. He who is not for me, is tomorrow's garden-boy!

McTrev exits.

Act Two – Some Weeks Later

Scene 1

Luthuli Castle.

The setting: In the throne room.

Lord Ramabanquo enters, talking on his cell.

Ramab No, I'm holding on ... (*To us.*) Our new king's honeymoon is over. When our great Maduba came out of the darkness and gave us light, we all celebrated. The square peg was successfully now in the round hole. The nation was reconciled and prepared to take each other's hands and go together into a future filled with hope and optimism. Ah ... (*Into phone.*) No, King MacBeki doesn't try and fill the footsteps of the Great One, (*Aside.*) ... which is impossible because his feet are so small. But he brought a new energy of intellect and guile ... I'd say little charm and no small talk, unless he needed the support of the people. Then he would sit on their floor and eat their food and play with their babies. All for the sake of the image ... Yes, afterwards he would vomit for hours. Allergic to the people. But don't quote me ... (*End of call.*) You might notice, Porter, I carefully stand outside the Royal Court, me and a few others, who watch this MacBekivellian Renaissance with some dismay. You can always marvel at the beauty and sleekness of the cobra, when you stand out of the range of its fangs. Will he remember, as I do, what the three smelly journalists foretold? That his crown would not go to any son of his, but to my offspring instead? Don't worry, I will watch my back. And my front. And here, right on cue, as if his mentor Shakespeare had written it to be so, enters the King, MacBeki, with his Queen.

MacBeki enters as King with Lady M as Queen.

MacBeki Here's our most important guest.

Lady M If he had been forgotten, it had been as a gap in our great feast, and yes, that wouldn't be nice.

MacBeki Tonight we will celebrate the new Millennium and we want you to be here too.

Ramab Your wish is my duty, Sire.

MacBeki How goes it with our former King? We hear he has visited every land in the world three times over?

Lady M He must stick to organising all those nice little 4711 pop concerts and stay out of the hustle and bustle of political comment.

MacBeki My dear, his comments run down our backs like a duck's water. Is he well?

Ramab He is well, considering his age and the infirmity that years in the darkness cursed him with.

MacBeki I wouldn't know about that.

Lady M Our dear King here didn't have that luxury of uninterrupted thought in the solitude of a retreat.

Ramab The former King was in a terrible prison, my lady. There was no luxury in solitary confinement and torture.

Lady M Well, our present King is not in prison. He is in power. He is here. And so are you. Aren't we lucky ...

MacBeki Get thee to thy quarters, Lord Ramabanquo, and prepare for tonight.

Lady M Join us for drinks on the battlements at sunset? The last one of a dying century.

MacBeki We will also have some interesting guests who very urgently want to meet you.

Ramab My Lord.

He exits to a flourish and bow from the Porter, who follows him.

Lady M Who's coming to meet him? For heaven's sake, he's yesterday's hero.

MacBeki But still a threat to our security on the throne. The evil-smelling media witches predicted that he would be happier than I. How can that be? To be King is nothing if I'm not safe as the King. I am very afraid of Ramabanquo. There's something noble about the man that makes me feel lesser to him.

Lady M I can always give him an injection while he sleeps.

MacBeki No, that will make him immortal. Let us use the fashionable recipe of reconciliation.

Lady M The way I do it best?

MacBeki Yes. With garlic, this time.

Porter enters.

Porter My Lord, three sinister businessmen wait without.

Lady M Without what?

Porter Outside. Wait outside. It is the language of the time, Your Majesty. 'To wait without.'

Lady M Irritate me not so! Bring them in. You're the damn porter, aren't you?

Porter They don't want anyone to see them here.

Lady M I'm not anyone. I am the Queen! I can't abide traders and hawkers. They're so common. So un-me ... My Lord MacBeki, promise them everything and give them nothing. (*She sweeps to exit.*) And as for you? There's only room for one queen in this Court.

She exits.

Porter Do you want me to stay, Your Majesty? In case of need for refreshment, or such delights?

MacBeki No, you're not needed here.

Porter Is it because I'm white?

MacBeki No, it's because you're a porter.

Porter exits.

Three businessmen enter: Sosal, Angla and Giltfelds.

MacBeki Gentlemen, how come you enter like three murderers?

Sosal Ja-nee, we are just businessmen.

Angla We know nothing about politics.

- Giltfelds** We hope to be of use to the future of our Kingdom.
- Sosal** Because we are from the old structures, we don't want you to disregard our expertise or talents.
- MacBeki** You realise that those structures of the past cannot be tolerated any longer. Our people have been marginalised by minority-greed and manipulation.
- Sosal** You want us to work together, Your Majesty?
- Angla** We will be happy to contribute to your coffers.
- Giltfelds** We just want what is good for the Kingdom.
- MacBeki** Very well. I wish to see more of us represented at the helms of your businesses.
- Angla** Ah yes. Transformation.
- Sosal** Ja-nee. Empowerment.
- Giltfelds** Oi-wey. Affirmative action.
- MacBeki** We have a great man among us, who will be instrumental in adding noughts to your profit margins. As well as allow us to look kindly on you when we decide to invite tenders for our needs. Make him an offer he can't refuse.
- Sosal** Ja-nee, let us confer.
- They confer.*
- Angla** We have conferred.

Giltfelds And, let me tell you, consulted a broad spectrum of players.

Sosal Ja-nee, it is now all on the table.

Angla Tell us who we have employed as our Executive Officer?

Giltfelds The one who will make us richer?

MacBeki Lord Ramabanquo. Offer him the posts of CEO, Managing Director, Chairman of the Board. Influence your associates to do the same. Give him a focus in his life, so that he can truly contribute to our future what he contributed in our past.

Sosal Ja-nee, let us consult.

Angla Let us confer.

Giltfelds Let us not have a nervous breakdown!

Sosal Ja, we have decided, Majesty.

Angla We're right in there.

Giltfelds We're out of here.

They exit quickly.

MacBeki The deal is closed. So, noble Ramabanquo, if your soul is going to make it to the Stock Market heaven, tonight's the night.

He exits.

Scene 2

The setting: A passage.

The Porter crosses, engrossed in a Zapiro cartoon annual, laughing at the cartoons.

Lady M sweeps in.

Lady M Has Lord Ramabanquo gone to prepare for tonight's banquet?

Porter Yes, your Majesty. He is a good-looking man.

Lady M Hush. You have no freedom to editorialise. (*She takes the annual.*) You are just ...

Porter Just a porter. I know, my Lady.

She pages through the cartoons without a sign of any humour. The Porter is convulsed with laughter. Eventually.

Actually in the old days I was rich and famous.

Lady M Why? Who were you?

Porter Pieter-Dirk Uys.

Lady M I've never heard of you.

Porter I used to be a comedian. One of my best lines was: hypocrisy is the Vaseline of Political Intercourse.

Lady M That's not funny.

Porter I used to tell jokes about politicians.

Lady M Well, my dear, you won't get away with that here. We'll just employ the best lawyer in the land and sue you for 5 million a cartoon.

Porter Is there no freedom of speech in our kingdom, my Lady?

Lady M There is a lot of freedom, darling, but as far as speech is concerned, terms and conditions apply.

Porter I was just wondering ...

Lady M How dare you wonder or think? Who do you think you are? Yesterday's Upstairs is now the new Downstairs.

Porter Hey?

Lady M Go and clean the toilets!

Porter leaves.

House-clowns are the last thing we need. Because they sit at the foot of the throne, they see the small cracks of corruption appear first.

MacBeki enters.

MacBeki Do we need all those cooks and servants and entertainers? It's only a banquet to celebrate a new century.

Lady M The days of KFC in a paper bag are over. When we celebrate now, we spend. And when we spend, the people see us for what we are. Besides, you are King. Stop behaving like a meek civil servant.

- MacBeki** I am surely in the service of my people.
- Lady M** And let them stay exactly where they are. Still in their shacks and slums. The moment you rouse them from their poverty-induced slumber, they will rise and demand a place at your table. Poverty is shocking, but so is the birth of a child. Lots of pain, screams and blood. But then the ultimate reward.
- MacBeki** What do the poor get as a reward?
- Lady M** You on the coins. Or should I say The Coin, as few have more than one. You must tell me about the secret meeting with those brown-noses from Sosal, Angla and Giltfelds. Come on, gentle my Lord, relax and smile. Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight.
- MacBeki** So shall I, love, And so, I pray, be you. Give Lord Ramabanquo your special attention. Talk to him and look at him in a way that will make him feel important.
- Lady M** Which way? This way? *(She demonstrates.)*
- MacBeki** No, too coy.
- Lady M** This way? *(Another pose.)*
- MacBeki** No. Not seductive enough.
- Lady M** This way? *(Starts undressing.)*
- MacBeki** No, keep yourself covered! Just let your charm make it happen. You're good at that.

Lady M I'll need a pick-me-up. You know I cannot stand that ...
Lord.

MacBeki We're in a dangerous situation. We have to flatter
Ramabanquo and hide our true feelings.

Lady M I still think an injection in his sleep ...?

MacBeki Oh, full of scorpions is my mind.

Lady M No, my dear, your Scorpions are the last thing we want
now.

Scene 3

*The setting: The men's cloakroom and the millennium banquet.
The three businessmen at the urinal.*

Sosal Do you have a light?

Giltfelds Smoking not allowed ... oi. Hold this?

Sosal Thanks. Oh, can you hold this for me? Dankie.

Angla Sorry, old chap. I'm finished.

Sosal Nee, man, wag ...

Giltfelds I'll take care of that. Ah. Finished.

Sosal Klaar.

They all three zip up.

Sosal Luister, man, are you sure you've off-shored enough?

Angla My dear friend, be assured, all the diamonds have been moved abroad.

Sosal Ja-nee. But what about our nuclear involvement with ...

Giltfelds Shhh! Oi, don't mention the name of the country. I'm sure this place is bugged.

Sosal Ja-nee, it used to be bugged in the old days. No reason to think they've removed all the things that were aimed at them. If you know what I mean.

Angla Alas, they've learnt so well from your old structures.

Sosal Hoe nou? You were also part of them.

Giltfelds Get a sense of humour. Do me a favour. So it's from the frying pan into the fire. It could have been worse.

Sosal No man, what could be worse?

Giltfelds We could still be in control! It's nice to point a finger for a change.

Lord Ramabanquo enters. Lights change: they are in the throne room for the banquet.

Ramab I was told there would a Millennium Reception on the battlements?

Porter These are the people who want to meet you, my Lord Ramabanquo. If you asked me my opinion, I would tell you, but I'm not allowed an opinion, so don't ask.

Ramab Go away.

The Porter exits.

Gentlemen?

All Sosal. Giltfelds. Angla.

Sosal Ja-nee, we believe you once were told your fortune?
That you would not be king, but would be very happy?

Angla And, I believe, very rich?

Ramab They didn't say very rich.

Giltfelds They didn't have to. As true's God, to be happy is to
be enriched. We have a proposition for you, good our
Lord.

Sosal Ja-nee, we suddenly realised we needed a new CEO.

Angla And we are looking for a Managing Director who
brings class and elegance to the table.

Giltfelds Oi, and all we can offer is Trustee, but with great
rewards and advantages.

Ramab Why do you tell me?

Sosal Ja, wel, we are offering you all these gems.

Ramab I am not a businessman. I am a patriot.

Angla Sadly the one either cancels out the other ...

Giltfelds ... or merges to be the answer to the question.

Ramab And what is the question?

Sosal Man, what are you going to do with your life? Are you going to hang around the Court of King MacBeki, knowing you could have done a better job in the private sector?

Angla Will you become bitter and vicious like all the others, overlooked by the leadership?

Giltfelds Let us walk along the battlements, Lord Ramabanquo, and the fresh air will clarify our muddled and foggy thoughts.

Ramab You overwhelm me, gentlemen ...

They leave. The Porter appears, having listened to it all.

Porter And so goodbye, my Lord. Don't say I didn't want to warn you. Death by cholesterol awaits thee out there in the rat race of greed. Oops, here come the Draculas.

MacBeki and Lady Manta enter. Also McTrev and MacZum, who sit at the table.

MacBeki Porter? Set my box!

The Porter sets the box and MacBeki climbs on it.

Dear friends, comrades, members of the Diplomatic Corps. You know your own ranks: sit down. At first and last, the hearty welcome, from the highest to the lowest. We are all equal here. Some are only more

equal than others because they must lead. It has never been my ambition to lead. It just happened. The Queen greets you, too.

But she has had too much to drink and waves him to carry on.

Lady M Welcome, welcome. I love you all. Oh, shit, Lord Ramabanquo is not here yet? Hey, Porter? Fetch our honoured guest!

The three businessmen enter, happily folding signed contracts.

MacBeki What are you three doing here? You have not been invited.

Sosal Ja-nee, just wanted to report back. He was easy to turn, your Majesty.

Angla We just said, it was in the service of the people.

Giltfelds More effective than being a mere Deputy-Lord in your Court, if you get my drift?

Sosal Ja-nee, he is now the richest man in the land.

Angla A socialist fatally compromised by the trappings of wealth and affluence.

Giltfelds As true's God, he will never eat KFC out of a paper bag again.

MacBeki What? You all succeeded? And in such short time?

Sosal Ja-nee, my Lord, your 'Big Problem' will now only pay super-tax to your Treasury.

MacBeki Go. Sit and eat. Drink. Can we organise something special for you? See my Head of Security, General Selebi. He will be of assistance. Your every wish is our pleasure.

They join the gathering either in the audience or round the table.

Lady M What the hell was all that brown-nosing about?

MacBeki Big business.

Lady M I thought I smelt something.

MacBeki Ramabanquo is gone.

Lady M You did it? You actually did it?

MacBeki He will not bother us again ...

The garish ghostly apparition of Ramabanquo appears.

Ramab MacBeki! MacBeki! Look at me!

MacBeki What was that?

The apparition vanishes.

Lady M Nothing. We were just laughing about your old Uncle Bob across the river. His country is fucked, his people are starving and yet you still send him gifts and support.

MacBeki A ghost!

Lady M What ghost?

MacBeki I saw him!

Lady M You invited Bob and Grace?

MacBeki Ramabanquo!

Lady M No, my dear, he's feasting on the fat of the land. We won't see him hanging around here like some hungry mongrel. Relax and have a drink.

We see Ramabanquo again.

Ramab MacBeki! Listen to me! You have condemned me to the wilds of capitalism and stock exchange intrigues. I am now so rich, I cannot leave my house to go catch trout in my favourite rivier, in case someone burgles my house and robs me. I curse you for diverting my passion to serve my land. I am now a Fat Cat! MacBeki, I see you ...

MacBeki No, no, no, leave me.

The apparition vanishes. MacBeki turns to the others.

Which of you has done this?

Lady M Done what, my Lord? (*To the others.*) He must have eaten something ...

MacBeki shouts up at the emptiness.

MacBeki You can't blame me! It was not my idea. I had to do something. I protected you against an injection while you slept. Thank me for your new easy life! Where are you? Coward! Show yourself!

Lady M My Lord, you are rambling. Please sit down. The people are staring at you. (*To the people.*) Relax, my worthy friends. My Lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth. Pray you all, keep your seats. The fit is momentary; upon a thought, he will again be well. Remember, he comes from a frugal background of affection and is often speechless in the face of such adoration and love. (*Under her breath to MacBeki.*) Are you a man?

MacBeki Ay, and a bold one.

Lady M Eish! Nonsense! This is just another of those hallucinations that you have been having since you cut back on the spirits. Drink properly like you used to and see the world as it is. Shame on you. Imagine what the press will report.

MacBeki But look. There! It is Ramabanquo come to taunt me again! Behold. How say you?

Ramabanquo is making gestures, pulling his finger across his throat.

Lady M Then drink a toast to him, this absent guest. This virtual ghost. Be gracious. Be a King.

MacZum Bring on the imbongi!

Porter Hey?

Lady M The King's Praise Singer!

The praise singer comes on and praises.

MacBeki I drink to the general joy of all here, and to our dear friend ... (*Looks around nervously but does not see Ramabanquo.*) ... Ramabanquo, whom we miss.

Lady M I know not what ails your mind, but if you have managed to banish the happy Lord to a wilderness of accountants and corporate meetings, you have found the ideal way to clear the room of any rival. The days of bloodletting are over. Just open a bank account for them, get them a discount on the latest BMW, let them fly first-class, stay in five-star hotels, eat, drink, fuck, and hopefully they will die of excess. Meanwhile you will be surrounded by the ones who nod and agree, agree and nod.

MacBeki sinks into the throne, exhausted.

You have really wrecked a good Millennium Celebration with your weird behaviour. It is time you made a proper rousing speech to just make us believe that all is well. Go on, my Lord, dazzle us with your native intelligence!

MacBeki Eh ... As we all know ... eh ... and the result of all the concern is obvious, as I have said before ... et cetera and so forth ... and yet, the essence of ... if not the essence, then surely the definition of what is best ... as I have said ... et cetera and so forth ... wherever it comes from and notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, as we know ... eh ... and as I have many times needed to articulate ... as I do now... et cetera and so forth...

Porter The King is not lucid.

Lady M Porter? I pray you, speak not.

She sees MacBeki lose it.

And yet he grows worse and worse. Everyone, please leave now. Don't bother to greet us, just go. And, please, leave the silver. We can clean that ourselves.

Sosal Are you all right, your Majesty?

Giltfelds My son is a doctor.

Angla Can we do something?

Lady M Please! Questions just enrage him. Fuck off!

Businessmen, McTrev and MacZum exeunt.

MacBeki Tomorrow while it's still early, I will go and see the witches. They will tell me more. My own safety is the only important thing now. I have some schemes in my head that I'm planning to put into action. I have to do these things before I have a chance to think about them.

Lady M You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

MacBeki Hey?

Lady M I have a potion of printer's ink, sheep's breath and dassie-kak. It will make you sleep.

MacBeki Yes, I must sleep. My strange madness comes from inexperience. After all, we are just beginners when it comes to white-collar crime. Et cetera and so forth.

Lady M and MacBeki exeunt.

Porter There's an old saying: the dead will have their revenge. But worse than that is if the living need not seek revenge, because they hold the weapon of bitter shaming laughter. The banquet has been curtailed. Good my Lords and Ladies, Comrades and friends. It is now interval. Go out and partake of refreshment and ablute yourselves. And yes, those who must, may blow smoke up anyone's arse. But outside. Be back in twenty minutes and fasten your seatbelts. I promise you (*Does his Bette Davis impersonation.*) ... It's going to be a bumpy ride!

INTERVAL

Act Three – Some Years Later

Scene 1

Luthuli Castle.

The setting: A media briefing.

The Porter and three TV reporters enter.

Porter Please respect the dignity of the Castle and the impartiality of this media report-back. Ah, Prince McTrev ...

McTrev enters coldly.

McTrev A few words off the record. If you have not submitted your questions in advance, there will no answer from His Majesty. And also no questions from the floor. Avoid your TV lights shining in his eyes. We have WiFi for your laptops. The King will be here shortly. By the way, today is the third anniversary of his ascension to the Throne of Tshwane.

No applause till the Porter leads it. McTrev exits.

First Did you submit questions?

Second Yes.

Third Will he answer them?

Second No. Did you touch on the arms deal?

First Arms Deal, Gravy Train, Shaky paroles ...

- Third** So into the Web. It's all there ... (*They all open their laptops.*) Round about the internet go
In the poisoned entrails throw.
- Second** Rumour that under cold scrutiny
For a month has oozed poison and mutiny
- First** Facts that swelter in the light of dawn
Boil first in the media pot, bloody and torn
- All** Double double toil and trouble
Fire burn and cauldron bubble
- Third** Buy a gun, pay for a tank
Bang-bang rockets clear the Bank
Contacts fat and overblown
Arms-deal deals? Integrity flown
- All** Google Yahoo Facebook Send
Rubble Kebble soil and Bend
Truth can burn and flesh shall bubble
Trouble trouble five-star-trouble!
- Second** While no Cure, there is still Care
Sense and Logic are still rare
Forget the minefield, all have died
An easy culling, new genocide
- All** ARV beetroot cocktail double
Health will burn and immunity bubble
- First** Ministries ten, just one in three works
Finance, Defence, kickbacks and perks
The shop window looks so neat and wealthy
Back in the kraal nothing is healthy

All Rubble rubble foil and hovel
Townships burn and hatred bubble

Third Divide and rule, allow all to cross
People from the North, our own job loss
Attack the guests, just loot and burn
Black today, tonight a white's turn

Second All we need is: announce The Lie
Breaking news, the truth will die
Gesture Politics, fashion of today
Unreality. Solution? Trauma and dismay

First Government for the People
Of the People
By the People
Led by one who can't stand people?

All Et cetera and so forth!

MacBeki enters.

MacBeki How now, you noisy, corrupt and lazy hags? What do you do?

All A deed without a name.

First Something there isn't a word for.

Second Something that we cannot live without.

Third Something without which we are doomed.

MacBeki Which is?

First Money?

Second Power?

Third Cellphones?

Second Gucci?

First Lamborgini?

MacBeki Truly yes, most of my Court believe so.

All No. We commit The Truth.

MacBeki That's very funny. Now tell me what I want to know.

First Witch looks at SMS.

First There is an SMS for you – ‘MacBeki! MacBeki! Beware Mshowerlozi of the Thousand Hill Valley. Beware MacZum!’

Second Witch also looks at his SMS.

Second I have one too – ‘MacBeki! Laugh at the power of other men, because none of woman born shall harm thee.’

MacBeki Oh good, then I don't have to bother about MacZum. I'll fire him, but keep him happy. And alive. Is there anything on your contraption, you evil-smelling scribe?

Third Witch looks at his SMS.

Third 'MacBeki will never be defeated until Polokwane Forest marches to fight you at Luthuli Castle.'

MacBeki How could that happen? That a forest so far up north could march down all the way to the centre of the city? These are good sweet omens. Just one more need from me. Will Ramabanquo's line ever reign in my Kingdom?

First Why do you ask us? We are not soothsayers;

Second Or witches;

Third We work for SABC News;

First We can't predict things;

Third We make them up;

Second Or tell you what you want to hear;

First We are just who we are.

Second And what we are is what we will always be and stay.

Third And because we stay, any tyrant will shudder. Because we stand for ...?

All The Truth!

They dance around him.

Google Yahoo Facebook bubble
Truth will out,
And then comes trouble

They see breaking news on their cellphones.

A farmer! Osama! Obama!

They exit noisily.

MacBeki Where are they? Gone? Let this evil hour be marked forever in the calendar as cursed. You? In the shadows? Come hither!

The Porter comes hither.

Did you see the weird demons?

Porter Just three local TV reporters, my Lord.

MacBeki But those three mad evil-smelling opinionated fools?

Porter As I said: journalists, my Lord.

MacBeki There is more to them than meets the eye. I suspect conspiracy and intrigue against us and our position. Against the very essence of our rule. Everyone is against us. No one loves us any more.

He exits.

Porter Paranoia. Ag shame.

He exits.

Scene 2

The setting: Outside on the battlements.

McTrev and MacZum enter with umbrellas.

MacZum You want to talk? This is the safest place.

McTrev Let us hold fast the mortal sword and, like good men,
Bestride our downfall and birthdom.

Comrade MacZum, one thousand of our people die each day of the deadly C because of his denials. You were supposed to be in charge of that vital information. And then you take a shower after the act? This is absurd and laughable.

MacZum I don't know what you are talking about.

McTrev I will avenge whatever I believe is wrong. And I'll believe whatever I'm sure is true. And I will put right whatever I can when the time comes. The financial world will also look at us in the same light as they see him who has taken us down this circus path to insanity. There is much work to be done.

MacZum McTrev, my detractors say I only have Standard Three.

McTrev Yes, that could be good. Maybe intellect has to take second place to passion.

MacZum But you are too deep in the forest of commitment, Prince McTrev. Your policies have become the bedrock for this tower of confusion, this Babel of bla-bla. I have lost my hopes of convincing you to fight against MacBeki.

McTrev I beg you, don't interpret my suspicions as slander against you. You must understand that I want to protect myself. You may really be honest, no matter what I think. I don't completely distrust you. I just think we are both sinking under MacBeki's oppression. Our country weeps, it bleeds, and each day a fresh cut is added to her wounds. I also think there would be many people willing to fight for me.

MacZum Comrade, with respect, your intrigues are more complex than your confessions.

McTrev I have always admitted my faults, dear Comrade. My Struggle credentials speak for themselves. But with respect, there seems to be no end to your sexual desires. Your many many many wives do not seem to satisfy your lust. Surely it is better for MacBeki to rule than people like you. Or I?

MacZum We are both guilty of just being men. But the tyrant has little humanity. He does not lust or covet. He doesn't acquire secret wealth or connections. He seems to believe in the terrible commitment that he is right and everyone else is wrong. And thus we are all against him, no matter how loyal we stay in the light of the truth of our lies.

McTrev MacZum, this passionate outburst, which proves your integrity, has removed my doubts about you and made me realise that you are really trustworthy and honourable. Deep down. But let me partner your passion with plain talk. All my confessions about the negatives in my heart were pure invention. I wanted to distance myself from ambition by declaring my unsuitability. As I'm sure you have done too?

MacZum No, I love women. Especially a woman wearing a short skirt. She is indicating that she wants union with a man and it is my duty as a man to give it to her. And she gets breakfast and taxi fare to boot!

McTrev Stop! My talk could be regarded as treason. Your talk could sell many Sunday newspapers. We must not even trust the silence here.

Porter enters.

What are you doing there, lurking in the rain?

Porter I am but awaiting my cue to speak, Lord McTrev. You were supposed to say: ‘Well, more anon – comes the King forth, I pray you?’ But you and the other Lord just went off at a tangent. None of it is as it should be said. Thou hath adlibbed for too long and therefore I could not enter and say my four words.

McTrev Okay, okay, don’t lose your temper. Okay ... Comes the King forth, I pray you?

Porter runs off and comes on again.

Porter My Lords, the King sleeps.

MacZum Five words.

Porter (*Counts.*) My-Lords-the-King-sleeps. Oh shit. Sorry (*He goes out and comes in.*) Lords, the King sleeps. Four. Okay?

MacZum nods.

McTrev How much of our conversation did you overhear, Porter?

Porter I hear nothing other than that which my ear is paid to hear.

MacZum We were discussing our country, in case you thought we were conspiring against the King.

McTrev Hush, MacZum, don't converse with the serving staff.

MacZum The serving staff, as you so contemptuously call them, are the ordinary people who have made me what I am. I will never talk down to someone who is smaller than me, weaker than me, pinker than me and less of a man than me. Porter? Umlungu? Speak.

Porter Greetings and viva, Comrade.

McTrev Be not too familiar too soon, dog.

Porter Alas, our poor country. It is too frightened to look at itself. This is no longer the land where we were born; it's the land where we'll die. Where no one ever smiles, except for the fool who knows nothing. Where sighs, groans, and shrieks rip through the air, but no one notices. Where violent sorrow is a common emotion. Where the funeral bells ring, people no longer ask who died. Good men die before the flowers in their caps wilt. They die before they even fall sick.

MacZum Your comments are nearly too poetic for a porter, but it all sounds so true.

McTrev And for someone who bewails the lack of freedoms, you still never stop telling us how to go about our business.

Porter Playing the victim is still a new experience.

MacZum Be not a victim, but a victor. Support me.

McTrev The rain has stopped. We must travel up north. I know of a forest where we can hide and prepare. Till then, Porter, keep your silence in more ways than one. We will remember your small sorrows, for we too have shed tears for our loved ones lost in this present fog of fear.

MacZum Methinks MacBeki is ripe for the picking. We'll just be acting as God's agents.

McTrev Well, MacZum, cheer up as much as you can.

MacZum A new day will come at last.

McTrev After you, MacZum.

MacZum No no, after you, McTrev.

McTrev MacZum!

MacZum McTrev!

They exit.

Porter And what could be the next horrible thing to happen to us? (*The lights go out.*) Oh fuck! Eskom!

Scene 3

The setting: In the throne room at midnight.

Doctor It's been two hours and nothing has happened. Nurse Phumzile, when last did you see her sleepwalking?

Nurse Since our King Lord MacBeki has spent the last two years overseas, Doctor Castro. You will remember he has visited 45 countries, 28 conferences, 22 celebrations and 7 funerals in other lands and that was only during the last seven months. He comes back occasionally on a short state visit, but his Lady is so stressed, she cannot eat, she cannot sleep. She cannot even find the energy to be horrible to me.

Doctor That is indeed worrying.

Nurse I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take out some paper, fold it, write on it, read it, seal it up and then return to bed.

Doctor She could be filling in her Lotto ticket.

Nurse Yes, true, and yet all this while in a most deep sleep.

Doctor It's unnatural to be asleep and act as if you're awake. Unless you're the Minister of Home Affairs in the King's Cabinet. Have you heard her say anything during this slumber agitation?

Nurse I dare not repeat it, Doctor, for you will have me committed to an asylum.

Doctor Dear Lucifer, what could it be?

The nurse sees Lady M approaching, offstage.

Nurse Look you, here she comes. This is what she always wears and – I swear it – still fast asleep. Watch her.

Lady M enters holding a candle, eyes wide, mouth silently moving.

Doctor How did she get that candle?

Nurse Constant load-shedding necessitates candles in each bedchamber.

Doctor I see her eyes are open.

Nurse Yes, but she sees nothing.

Lady M puts the candle down and rubs her hands.

Doctor Look how she rubs her hands. Is she also Jewish?

Nurse Fie, Doctor Castro. She keeps doing that, as if they need to be washed.

Lady M There's still a spot here!

Doctor She speaks. Hold the cellphone. I can record what she says and what she looks like and send it direct to the necessary people.

Nurse Psychiatrists?

Doctor Oprah.

Nurse YouTube!

Lady M Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two, yes, it's time to do it now. Hell is murky! Fie, my Lord, fie! A soldier of the Struggle and afraid? Why should we be fearful, when no one can lay guilt upon us? But who would have thought the old man still has so much life left in him?

Doctor Did you hear that? She refers to the former King.

Lady M What? Will these hands never be clean?

Doctor Nurse, you better go before you hear too much.

Nurse Never! This is better than 'Desperate Housewives'!

Lady M Out damned bloody beetroot-spot! All the priceless perfumes in Grace Mugabe's closet will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!

Doctor What a heavy sigh ...

Lady M Wash your hands! Put on your nightgown! Look not so pale! I tell you yet again: Ramabanquo is forever buried. He cannot come out of his credit grave.

Doctor Is this true?

Lady M To bed, to bed. There's a knocking at the gate. Come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

She exits.

- Doctor** Will she go to bed now?
- Nurse** Yes, and lie there till dawn.
- Doctor** Evil rumours are going around. This woman needs a priest more than a doctor. Where is the Archbishop?
- Nurse** They won't allow him in. They sneer at him and call him a meddling old man.
- Doctor** That's too too bad. Maybe it's time for her new liver. Look after her Majesty. Remove anything she might hurt herself with. Bottle openers, corkscrews and such implements. And a strict diet! Watch her constantly. And now, goodnight, good Nurse Phumzile. I must go and find a liver. There are long lists of patients desperate and waiting for donors who are all too rare.
- Nurse** The cook has a healthy 23-year-old daughter. Her liver would be fine.
- Doctor** When did the poor girl pass away?
- Nurse** Whenever we decide. Good night, gentle Doctor Castro.

He exits left and she exits right.

Scene 4

The setting: Somewhere in the forest of Polokwane.

We hear songs from the two factions on opposite sides, offstage.

McTrev and MacZum enter.

McTrev The Comrades are gathering from all the nine provinces of our land. They burn for revenge. The wrongs they have suffered would make dead men rise up and fight.

MacZum It is good that we all meet here in Polokwane Forest. I see the overweight Politburo of the King arrive in their Hummers and 4x4s, hooting at the ordinary people in humble wagons and on tired donkeys, making an entrance like Emperors on a hunt. There are also many boys here too young to have beards, but who will have joined our battle before they will be men. They are not impressed by the imbalance.

McTrev What is the King MacBeki doing of late?

MacZum We speak seldom. He is careful to embrace me when there is a camera around.

McTrev Who can blame him for acting crazy, when in his tortured soul he condemns everyone for what he has done? And what will become his legacy?

MacZum Well, let us keep marching and give our loyalty to that which truly deserves it. Our country and our party. We are thus gathered here in the Forest of Polokwane. Viva!

McTrev Viva!

All Viva, MacZum!

They exit while singing.

Scene 5

The setting: MacBeki's office – some days later.

MacBeki comes in with the doctor and the nurse.

The Porter has a pile of newspapers.

MacBeki Don't bring me any more newspapers. *Sunday Times, City Press, Citizen, Sowetan, Mail & Guardian.* Go! (*Porter goes.*) I don't care what they say. I have been deserted by my Comrades. But you see, Doctor, until Polokwane Forest moves down to Luthuli Castle, I won't be affected by fear. And that upstart MacZum? Wasn't he born of woman?

Doctor We are all born of woman, Sire.

MacBeki Exactly! That's what the witches told me: 'Fear not, MacBeki. No man that's born of woman shall ever have power over thee'. (*He shouts off to those we can't see.*) So get out of here, you whimpering cowards. Run across and join the weak and decadent. My mind and courage will never falter with doubt, or shake with fear.

The Porter enters, agitated, with bad news.

And you? May the devil turn you black, you white-faced fool! Why do you look like a frightened goose?

Porter Mmmmmm ... Majesty!! There are ten thousand ... eh ... gggggg ...

MacBeki Geese, you idiot?

Porter Struggle veterans, Sir. Trade Unions. Youth League.

MacBeki Look at your pale little white face. Go and put on some rouge, lipstick and mascara, Porter. Surely you haven't forgotten those old tricks of your trade. Dress up as one of the grand horizontals of your decayed white society and entertain us while we wait for the fates to deliver the enemy. Like cordon bleu geese-a-la-king.

*He laughs and the doctor and nurse feel forced to join in.
Porter exits.*

Nurse Can I get you something, my Lord?

MacBeki How is my Lady Manta?

Doctor She is not sick, Majesty, but troubled with endless visions that keep her from sleeping. It seems the new liver has been embraced by the body and is working well.

Nurse She was not an easy patient, Sir.

Doctor Nurse Phumzile, hush! Telleth not the details of your workings.

MacBeki No, let her speak. I want to be aware of the suffering of this woman who has been so instrumental in my present and dire situation. So she treated you badly?

Nurse I am used to the contents of her bedpan in my face, sir. But while we were preparing her for the delicate operation, she demanded a drip.

Doctor Only to comfort her.

MacBeki I don't understand. Surely she had the best medical treatment available?

Nurse She demanded a special drip.

Doctor And, of course, she got the Johnny Walker.

MacBeki At least the operation was a success.

Nurse She may never touch beetroot or garlic again. Otherwise, she will be fine.

MacBeki You know she will never give up her muti. Pharmaceutical medicines are for the dogs. She still believes she can cure the nation with her traditional ingredients of life.

Nurse Then, Majesty, I can assure you the liver will reject the body!

Porter enters out of breath.

Porter All rumours ... have been confirmed, my Lord. There ... there is overwhelming support for the other side. The ... the only solution is an electronic vote, which will be geared to come down in your favour. It did so with such success in the Land of McDonald. You recall Florida?

MacBeki I am no Bush. I'll fight until they tear the BlackBerry from my hand. Give me my armour. (*The Porter hands him the Madiba ethnic shirt.*) I said armour, not fancy dress! (*He puts on his suit jacket.*) Where is the red ribbon for my lapel?

Porter My Lord! At last you admit that A leads to B? And results in C?

MacBeki No, of course not. I will never compromise my dissidence. I wear the red ribbon to keep away the tokolosh.

'I am in blood
stepp'd in so far that ...
should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er ...'

The Porter mouths/echoes the words with him eagerly.

Eish! Now who is here to give me comfort and compliments ...

He exits.

Doctor I must hurry. My transport leaveth within the hour.

Nurse Where to?

Doctor Where do you think? Polokwane!

They exeunt.

Act Four

Scene 1

The setting: The forest of Polokwane.

Enter McTrev, MacZum, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

McTrev Congratulations, Comrade.

MacZum Not so fast. If he will not come to us, we will go to him.

McTrev The electronic vote has been rejected by the majority of our comrades. Manual counting took time, but, while that system proved itself to be cumbersome, it was successful. The people have spoken. We have won the battle.

MacZum But now we must fight the war.

G'stern Rosencrantz? What is the name of the forest behind this venue?

R'crantz Polokwane Forest, Guildenstern.

MacZum Tell every Comrade to break off a branch and hold it in front of him. That way we can conceal who we are from the prying media who are here waiting for bloodshed and mayhem.

McTrev Bastards. Let me at them with my traditional cultural weapon!

He waves his umbrella.

MacZum If you hit shit, it splatters in your face. Let them be. We will see to them once this dust has settled.

G'stern And, Rosencrantz, the branches will also conceal how many of us there are.

R'crantz Yes, Guildenstern, and then Hamlet's spies will give him inaccurate reports.

G'stern Rosencrantz and I have no news, Comrade. Except that the overconfident Hamlet, in spite of the overwhelming vote against him, has retreated to Elsinore Castle, challenging you to lay siege.

McTrev He wants us to lay siege? Hamlet??

R'crantz Wherever his Comrades have a chance to leave him, they do, whatever rank they are. Ask Guildenstern. No one fights with the King against us, except those who are forced to.

G'stern And their hearts are not in it.

R'crantz Definitely not!

MacZum We shouldn't make any judgements until we achieve our goal. Let's go fight like hardworking comrades. Bring me my machine-gun! Umshiniwam...

All Umshiniwam Umshiniwam ...

They exeunt.

Scene 2

The setting: MacBeki's office.

MacBeki is at his computer. The Porter takes up a sword.

MacBeki What are you doing, Porter?

Porter I am protecting you, my Lord.

MacBeki Have you now been recast as a soldier?

Porter No, my Lord, royal soldiers are usually not available in my ethnic hue. The ones you had have all gone over to ... to smoke on the other side of the moat.

MacBeki I have googled, wikipediaed and yahooed and no one makes mention of my situation. I am the King. I should have support from all the leaders of the world who shook my hand, gave me a box to stand on so I wouldn't look ... too young. They invited me to all their G8 meetings.

A piercing woman's scream off.

MacBeki What's that noise?

Porter Once again foreign women are crying, homeless and hungry.

MacBeki I've almost forgotten what fear feels like. There was a time when I would have been terrified by a shriek in the night like that. The hair on my skin would have stood up when I heard a ghost story. But I think I have become immune to horrors. They are so familiar they don't startle me.

The nurse enters.

Nurse Your Majesty ... the Queen ...

MacBeki What was that cry? And why looketh thee so dismembered?

Nurse Lady Manta is ... You see, the new liver. It ... It evacuated her body. I have it here in this pyrex. We have put Lady Manta into the deep freeze till after the issues of the day have been settled. And then we will see if we can retransplant the organ.

Porter He is not listening, Nurse. He is surfing the internet. Leave the liver here. Get the Queen's carcass into the deep freeze before she goes off.

Nurse Then what happens to me?

Porter Sell your story to *YOU* magazine.

She exits, pleased.

MacBeki sighs and looks at his screen.

MacBeki I'm looking at pictures I have here on my computer. Of me and my Lady Manta, back in the days when we had so much to look forward to. She would be a great doctor and I would be a teacher in economics. We laughed a lot, you know. She was like my sister. Together we would heal the world. What went wrong? (*He closes his laptop.*) Out, out, brief candle. Life is nothing more than an illusion. It is a mere story told by an idiot, full of noise and emotional disturbance, but devoid of meaning. That went wrong. Where is the Nurse?

Porter She left to see to the ... the storage of ...

MacBeki You know, I'm suddenly quite hungry.

Porter That's a good sign, Sire.

MacBeki Yes. I want something substantial. I'm sure you could slip out of your Porter character and become a Cook. It shouldn't take very long and I will guarantee you a raise and you can keep the costume.

Porter Am I now an SAA steward? Chicken, beef or dagga?

MacBeki No, I feel like ...

While he thinks, the Porter can't help a glance at the audience.

Porter Eh ... maybe nice fried liver with onions? Mmmm?

MacBeki Just no garlic.

Porter Promise.

The Porter exits with the pyrex as a messenger enters.

Messenger Your Majesty, I have a message for you. I could just give it to you and run. Or I could try and explain it to you and you may let me walk away alive. Or I could just faint.

MacBeki Speak, my son. We are calm. Be calm.

Messenger Okay. Well, as I was standing on the battlements of this castle, and I admit I was tired, my Lord, I looked up and saw on the horizon the sun edging up towards

the day. I thought: eish, this is a beautiful land. I was so filled with hope for the future, good Sir, my King.

MacBeki These are all good words, boy, but can't they wait for another time?

Messenger Hau, gracious King, wait. That is just a preamble of good news to cushion the bad.

MacBeki Go on.

Messenger As I looked towards the horizon, I thought I saw movement.

MacBeki My dear Messenger, everyone with a grudge against me is out there with a placard calling for my recalling. You will see when day breaks, the streets outside will be filled with people. All coming to say goodbye.

Messenger Oh? Where are they going?

MacBeki The horizon was moving, you say?

Messenger Yes, my Lord. And I know that part of our province is built up with factories and apartments and townships. There is scarcely a tree tall enough to be seen over the hood of a hijacked vehicle.

MacBeki Tree? You said tree?

Messenger I am from the north, the great Forest of Polokwane, oh King, that gently moved with the winds of change. Now it has moved in a different way. I saw my forest on the horizon!

MacBeki Have you been smoking anything illegal, Messenger?

Messenger Not while on duty, my Lord. I never mix fun and boredom.

MacBeki Then you are lying. Liar. Slave!

Messenger Punish me if it is not true. Three kilometres from here, you can see it coming. A moving forest!

MacBeki If thou speak'st false
Upon the next tree shall thou hang alive
Till famine cling thee.

Messenger Hey?

MacBeki If what you say is true, I'll hang from the branch next to you.

Messenger exits.

(MacBeki speaks into a small tape recorder.) 'The King's Blog. 5.30 a.m. My confidence is failing. I've been starting to doubt the lies those devils told me which sounded so like the truth and gave me such confidence. But now predictions are ringing true. "Fear not till Polokwane Wood do come to Luthuli Castle." And now it is on its way? If what this youth says is true, there's no use running. Or staying here. I'm starting to grow weary of life and I'd like to see this ungrateful world plunged into chaos. No matter what happens, I am still King and this testament will remain for history to absorb.' *(Switches off.)*
Ring the alarms! Blow, wind! Come, rain!
At least we'll depart not mad, but sane!

Scene 3

The setting: On the outskirts of the city.

Thunder. Everyone has a branch in front of them.

McTrev Comrades, we're close enough now. As soon as you see the CNN cameras ...

G'stern Or our BBC ...

R'crantz Or even their own SABC ...

G'stern Although, Rosencrantz, I fear they are still in the armpit of the King.

R'crantz Ah Guildenstern, you are so right.

They high-five.

McTrev Excuse me, but who are you?

G'stern We go to entertain our Lord Hamlet at his castle of Elsinore. I am Rosencrantz ...

R'crantz And I am Guildenstern.

G'stern No, sorry, I am Guildenstern.

R'crantz And then I must be Rosencrantz. Or am I?

McTrev I think you're in the wrong play. But stay. In that other one you come to a sticky end. (*He carries on giving instructions.*) Comrades! When you see the television cameras, throw down your branches and show the world who we really are. The Youth League will take

the ultra left, the Trade Unions the centre and the Woman's League come up in the rear. Ah. Winnie?

Winnie appears, beautiful and serene.

All Viva, Winnie, Viva!

Winnie Didn't you say, there will always be a Winnie?

MacZum Blow all the vuvuzelas, let them all speak
And give courage to the timid and meek.
Not bad for a herdboy who could soon be King, hey,
Winnie?

Winnie hooks her arm into his.

Winnie Let me talk to you while we march. We have to focus
on redistribution of land. And then there is the issue of
education. Not to mention ...

They exit and everyone exeunt, leaving the two comrades.

G'stern Where do we go?

R'crantz Will we cope?

G'stern Into battle?

R'crantz Or boredom?

G'stern At the end of a rope?

Both Australia!

They exeunt the other way.

Act Five

The setting: The throne room. Sound of vuvuzelas and crowd noises.

MacBeki enters in a Springbok rugby jersey.

MacBeki I have been standing in the thick of it all. Both sides screaming encouragement to their teams. I stood there on the field ready to receive their thanks or their condemnation, but both teams just walked past me. They treated me like a linesman. When I was on the front page of every world newspaper, I looked so like a King. Porter?

The Porter has entered with a suitcase on his way out.

Porter Yes, Your Majesty?

MacBeki My Box! Maybe that will help them remember.

He stands on his box. The Porter takes up his suitcase and exits as Julius, a celebrating comrade, enters in school uniform.

Comrade We won! Viva! We will kill for Mshowerlozi! And what is thy name?

MacBeki Thou shalt be afraid to hear it.

Comrade No, I shan't. Even if thou were a foreigner coming here to steal our jobs and our women.

MacBeki My name is MacBeki.

Comrade MacBeki? How terrible for thee.

MacBeki Terrible?

Comrade Thou should change thy name immediately. To carry the same name as he who nearly destroyed our land with his intrigues, denials and careless governance is a great disadvantage. Besides, thou art far too tall to be confused with him, a man small of stature and charm. I will just call thee Comrade. Viva our victory, viva our Youth League!

He exits viva'ing.

MacBeki At least I still know that 'he who was not born of woman' cannot exist. My crown is secure.

He stays on his box throughout the next scene – everyone ignores him completely. More cheers from off.

MacZum enters by now in full tribal glory.

MacZum Where is he? Ha! His foundations are still here. (*He kicks at the box, MacBeki nearly falls off.*) We must look closer to the ground and then we might find him hiding under a desk or a chair.

The celebrating comrade enters.

Comrade But he was here, that cockroach, dog and poodle, standing on that box. I thought he is nobody, but now you say he is somebody?

MacZum Was somebody.

McTrev enters with others.

McTrev Come, MacZum, celebrate with us all. The castle is ours. The little man has probably retreated to his lair and his Facebook friends.

MacZum It is not right to ignore his fate like this. After all, he was chosen to be King by our great Old One. We cannot ignore the reality of history, the truth of facts. I always pretended to be his friend. I cannot reject him so easily.

Ramabanquo enters. He is very fat.

Ramab Congratulations. Drinks are on me. (*They embrace carefully.*) Oops, careful of the Armani. Don't step on the Gucci. I have meetings with the tycoons of world finance in a few minutes. Just wanted to pop in and say: don't hesitate to call me if you need anything. Or email me: fatcat@gravytrain.com. My dear McErwin ...

Embraces McTrev.

McTrev I am Prince McTrev.

Ramab How silly of me. Of course. And the winner, our great comrade companion Mac ... eh ... help me here?

McTrev MacZum.

Ramab Ah. Forgive me. Economic Empowerment and Big Business sometimes wipe the tapes of memory. Anyway, I'm off to the World Bank Birthday Bash. Too-dee-loo, Comrades. Amandla Awethu Viva La Cuccuracha ensovoorts. (*As he exits past Winnie.*) Ah, Albertina ...

He exits with wobble and flair.

MacZum It's good to see someone doing so well. From bread and water once a day to caviar and cholesterol! We hope they will look kindly on us poor pathetic career politicians and not try and seduce us into their world of business and wealth.

McTrev There is much work to be done. Our land is in great need of sustenance and support.

Winnie is there with a file.

Winnie Well, I don't want to piss on the picnic here, but we have millions of houses to build ...

MacBeki I built millions of houses!!

Winnie Those already built are so badly designed and constructed, they fall over in the rain. We need a decent education system ...

MacBeki I gave the land three variations of an OBE system!

Winnie We know the chaos in schools we now have. Not even the teachers know how to teach. Our eleven languages are totally unbalanced in delivery to our people.

MacBeki No, no, I speak some French and Lady Manta spoke Russian!

Winnie Our Department of Home Affairs is a joke. Our borders must be secured. Home Affairs needs more than just restructuring. It needs to get into a state of emergence.

MacBeki Nobody told me this. Why did no one tell me this?

- Winnie** We have spent billions buying warships that don't sail, jets that can't fly, tanks that won't shoot because, firstly, no one is qualified to steer them and, secondly, we have no enemy.
- MacBeki** Yes, we do! The enemy is within. You and you and you! The media! The international cabal! America! The rightwing conspiracy ...
- Winnie** And then most urgently, it must be official: A leads to B. (*Applause from all.*) And it results in C. We will no longer cure with beetroots.
- MacBeki** How could I have said those things. I don't know anyone who is suffering from A or B. Or anyone who has died of C!
- Winnie** No one needs to die of C. There are medications. There might not be one single cure, but there is Care!
- MacBeki** I always cared. I went to Sudan and pleaded for their lives. I was in Somalia and took them some grain. I quietly protected my old Uncle Bob across the river and kept him in his palace. I cared!
- MacZum** Thank you, Comrade Winnie. We decree that every member of our household will adopt an orphan child and show that it should be done. Let us embrace the needy and the fearful.
- Winnie** Do you still want your machine-gun, Comrade MacZum?
- MacZum** No, I want decent walking shoes and a warm coat. Come. Let us go back to the people. They have not seen leadership in a long, long time.

MacBeki I am here! Damn you! Damn you all!

MacZum It's over at last. (*He looks up at MacBeki.*) You can keep the box.

He exits.

MacBeki You are wasting your time. I lead a charmed life, which can't be ended by anyone born from a woman.

Winnie Did you not know? The miracle of his birth?

MacBeki Hey?

Winnie Comrade MacZum was born through Caesarean means. He was surgically delivered before his mother could give natural birth to him! Look at his cranial appenditure?

MacZum re-enters with the shower attached to his headdress.

MacZum Surrender, Comrade, and we promise we will not put you in a political freak show, to appear on reality television as the man who had so much to do and did so much to undo what had been done.

Maduba enters in his ethnic shirt.

Maduba Ah, you remember me? Hello ... yes ... very good ... very good ... ah ... (*He meets everyone.*) I am so happy everything has been sorted out. It pains me so when my people are weeping. I weep with them. But at least in my retirement, I have managed to meet every pop star in the world. And also informed the youth about the dangers out there in the minefield of life. (*He wags a finger at MacZum.*) You were very naughty.

MacBeki I am willing to go to jail for life. I will not surrender.

Maduba Of course not. Who wants you to surrender? We love you, Comrade MacBeki. You have been part of our collective leadership and now the focus has moved on to another who will represent us. But, Comrades all, I have brought something comforting for Lord MacBeki in his retirement.

Celine Dion enters, and then speaks to the audience.

Celine Remember the Porter? Add to that: Best Actress! (*It is the Porter in drag. Winks. Then 'she' makes for MacBeki.*) Hello petit cheri, I'm Celine Dion and I have been so excited to meet you. My dreams have come true! Have I got things to sing to you? Morning, noon and night, you will hear me in the bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen, the lounge, the car, the garden, the toilet, the courtroom, The Hague and the retirement duplex. Come here. No, I won't hurt you. Imagine you are on the prow of a great ocean liner and you open out your arms like a bird and I sing ...

The song from Titanic fills the theatre as she mimes it. She and MacBeki freeze in a statuesque pose.

Maduba What do you do with an ex-King that you never really wanted, anyway? You can lock him up and he could become as famous as me. You could pension him off and give him asylum in our capital, like with so many other tyrants who are already living there. You can banish him to the United Nations as our Ambassador. Or you can introduce him to Celine Dion. That is punishment enough.

He ends the play.

Maduba Whatever happens, we will all cope in one way or another. Let the Rainbow come back. The terrible hailstorm, at last, is over.

The rainbow appears.

End