

Damn Spot
by Lucy Rose

A C T I

The first witch spoke thus. 'Her name is Marion.'

'Marion,' the second echoed.

'Marion,' and then the third one too.

The witches chanted. The word Marion danced on their lips and tongues as they lingered in the long grasses of the Scottish mountain marshes. Rain cut through the air like nails as mist hovered low to the earth. The first witch was called eyes, the second witch was called hands and the third was named lips – they'd forgotten the names their mothers gave to them and settled comfortably into the titles the wind and wilds had given them. The names became unbreakable bonds between the three and together, they saw a world yet that to rear its head and then delivered it.

'The child of envy and greed will one day wear Scotland's crown,' they all said as one. 'Though she will not wear it for long.'

No matter how hard she scrubbed, the blood would not sever from the fibers of her dress. Like ruby-soaked milk, it spilled from Marion's nose and bloomed into the white cloth resting atop her collarbones.

How she'd come to get the nosebleed would remain a secret. If her father knew she'd been sparring with the farm boy, she'd surely be punished. Tavish could smell lies on the air the way you can smell distant coals burning on a bonfire.

Marion peered at her own reflection in the bronze plate. Her gentle eyelashes were still, and her glassy eyes were scattered across the warped girl beheld by the plate. She was a restless sea, ever calm and complacent on the surface, but something stirred and burrowed beneath her skin.

She enjoyed the way she looked. Especially so as the blood bounced from her lips and dribbled down her chin like beads of crimson dew. If her heavenly father could see her now, he'd think her possessed by darkness, but even a thought as cruel as that made her smile and as she did, blood washed her teeth like wine.

Most would stop and wonder how it was that someone so settled could be covered by such filth and not be at the slightest unease, but Marion loved feeling like a creature so wicked. Unlike most, she had philosophies of her own. She believed that just like the magpies and the thistles, that she too was just an animal and so when she wasn't before her parents' watchful eyes, she'd behave just so.

Taking one last look at her true form, Marion rolled her skull around on her neck, stretching it back so her neck relaxed into a line that looked like mountains. She took a deep breath, ran her fingers through her hair and pulsed her fingertips across her cheeks, spreading the blood like war paint.

Tracing her bloody finger across her lips, she lapped up a single drop and savored the small morsel and its taste. That single drop tasted like so many things. War and ambition most prominently.

O' how she loved the taste of her own blood.

ACT II

The dining room was as grand as it could be for a family on the brink of Earldom. Oak beams supported the roof the way that Marion imagined her lovely bones held up her skin and organs. Saoirse, her mother, and Tavish sat either end of the table, as far from one another as possible. Their intimacy had faded over the years and their bond was now something more equal to that of strangers than lovers.

This is how Marion knew that love did not exist. It was another human invention; too quick and fragile to mean anything to someone like her.

‘Soon, my daughter, you will marry Macbeth,’ Saoirse said. Her father pressed a vicious stare into Marion that bore the weight of iron and steel. The weight of the family. Inside, under her skin, her heart’s rhythm slowed to something of a pulse. Like a serpent, she was still and calm – waiting for the day that she could lurch and bite his beating heart. ‘Macbeth?’ she questioned. She knew the name well. She’d heard the name echo down the halls of the house. She’d heard it on the breath of her father’s witless negotiations, and she’d seen it inked into written decree of marriage proposals. ‘Are there not daggers in his smile?’ Marion said under her breath.

‘Why would you say such a wicked thing?’ her father scolded. ‘You are not to speak about your master that way.’

I’ll never have a master, Marion thought, and her face straightened into the picture of submission. A mask. To everyone else such an expression was a charming thing to behold. A delightful smile stitched atop something sinister, although her eyes could never lie. They rested like empty stones in her skull.

Saoirse looked into her daughter's eyes and saw the same ambition she'd once had herself but daren't say a word of the germinating cunning within her daughter. Saoirse had always chosen the ignorant path and ne'er let herself stray. To be content is to ignore.

Tavish stood from his wooden chair and slowly crept around the table with his blade in hand.

Will it tear my flesh this night? wondered Marion, anticipating what rubies might spill and if indeed they spilled, would her mother bat an eyelid?

'Why do you smile?' His blade rested upon her cheek; its steel pressed into her skin. 'I am musing over my future,' she said. The knife resting snugly in her flesh felt at home. His lingering palm cupped her chin and coiled into her hair.

'You will know your place,' he murmured into her ear and he made sure to relish leaving his hot breath behind to hover on her skin.

Saoirse evaded looking her daughter in the eye as her monstrous husband held her child like meat.

'I would like to take leave, my lord,' Saoirse said, and she departed, not sparing even a pitiful glance to her child.

'Stand,' Tavish's voice echoed about the room, bouncing between the wilting rafters. Marion obeyed, standing before her father. He circled her. 'Pull back your wimple,' he said. Marion pulled it back, knowing the stain it hid from her ventures with the farm boy. His animal-like fingers clawed the wimple away from her neck, leaving her bare skin and dress to behold.

'A spot of blood I see,' he said.

'I bled from my nose.' Marion did not feel need to lie but concealed her time sparring. 'And how did a woman, by any grace, come to have the lords drink come from her skull?' 'I do not know,' she lied.

'Deceitful child,' he whispered as he paced by her.

'I do not harbor secrets.' Marion kept her eyes on her feet.

'And this mud beneath your fingernails, did you bring it forth from the garden or the glen?' he said, taking her wrist in his grasp.

Marion said nothing, she only peered into the eyes of her father and wondered if he was the same kind of creature as she.

'You were born to serve. You will do well to remember that.' Tavish pulled Marion's arm behind her back and pushed her to the ground. Her nose met with the chilled slate lining the floor and pressed up against its callous surface. 'Will you bare the weight of the lord's prayer, or will you stay silent?'

'O' God, who by the grace of the Holy Ghost hast poured the love into the hearts of thy people and pulled the sin from thy lips. 'Take mercy on me,' Marion whispered into the floor, hoping that her father's hold would loosen. She would not whimper, and ne'er would she cry. Tavish, holding her by the scruff of the neck now, soaked her in the darkness and shame.

'Are you a sinner?' he asked.

'No,' she said, buckling under his weight and holding close the verses of the retribution she wished upon her family.

Tavish let her go and she stood. 'Leave now,' he said, returning to the table and sitting with his mead.

Marion obeyed. She left the light of the open hall and thought of anything else but her father's hands on her skin. The way the slate floor held ripples of stone on its surface and the way the rafters held up the weight of the house.

ACT III

Marion yearned to feel the morning sun on her skin.

She wandered down from the house and into the gardens, her dress catching on all the fumbling stinging nettles and bramble bushes and let the long grasses graze her palms. She spotted hemlock and foxgloves. She took to their stems and gathered as much as she could carry in her pockets.

The morning dew coated everything, and prickling heathers and thistles escaped from the ground and left sore marks where her skin should have been a milky white. The beautiful rhythm of the flora around her sounded like a symphony – so much so that when she closed her eyes, she could imagine seeing everything. Even past the horizon. She could hold it all if she so wished. She held the winds that rushed through the glen and she held each thistle and each creature that lived upon it.

'The sun compliments you,' the voice of the farm boy spoke.

As she opened her eyes, she studied his face, for she knew it could be the last time she'd take in the features of her only friend.

'I hope you brought your wits with you today,' the farm boy said, brandishing wooden swords.

'I think it be you that needs wit,' she whispered into the breeze as she stole a sword from his grasp.

Without even a thought, as though the sword was an extension of her spirit, she pounced forward and took a strike, but the farm boy was quick to defend her blow. 'You should never go

for the obvious kill,' he said. They were mere moments apart, frozen in time as neither of them dare to pull away their weapons.

A stale mate.

'If I wanted you dead, you'd be on the floor,' Marion said as her eyes scattered across his face. There was something callous in her glare, as though she truly wanted to see his blood spill. 'You look like such an innocent flower, but underneath I see the serpent you really are.' Marion pulled back and took the sword to his ankle.

They sparred in the glen for hours, as they always did, and she relished each time she felt the dirt kick up from the ground and coat her skin in earth.

Breathless though they were, they'd rarely stopped – except for today. They rested beneath the oak.

'Do you think me strange?' she asked as she pricked her finger on a thistle. A bubble of blood balanced on her finger before she sucked it off her fingerprint. 'I want all of this, all these wilds, and for them to belong only to me.'

'Ambition will be your undoing if you only want with your eyes,' he said. 'You must want it just as much with your head and be smart.'

Marion's head leant back against the bark of the tree as she lost herself to thought. 'Do you imagine that god will smite us for wanting these things that are his?' she asked but the farm boy only shook his head. There was a long

silence shared between the two as they listened to the wind dancing with the clearing's heathers. 'I am to marry Macbeth,' she said, and the air carried her words to the witches of the glen.

'Lady Macbeth,' the farm boy practiced the words on his tongue. 'It sounds treacherous.'
'His reputation must proceed him,' she mused. 'One day, perhaps so will mine.'

A C T I V

When Marion returned, she cleaned herself up in the bronze plate that held her reflection and pinned her wimple back around her face - painting herself a vision of modesty. 'Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth,' she whispered as she gazed at her reflection in the bronze. Her lips, not yet guilty of stealing a kiss, whispered her future husband's name and she wondered what kind of man he would be.

Would he belong to the wilds like she, or would he be wrapped in tradition? Would he have a strong sense of self, or would he be weak-minded and easy to manipulate? These questions danced around her head and spun a web of wicked things. Would he be the vessel to carry her to greatness, or would she him?

After every secret meeting with the farm boy, she always looked the same. Mud clung to her flesh where it shouldn't, and blood smeared across her skin. Somehow, she could never bring herself to wash it away. She left the hemlock and foxglove to dry and then ground it to a fine grain.

The family shared another evening meal in silence. As Marion played with the meat on her plate, her father's cool stare raptured across her face. He took in each small detail, each pore resting upon her cheeks, each growing wrinkle and each tiny movement. 'I can see you've been taken by the wilds,' Tavish grunted.

Marion seized. 'I did not wander beyond the fence,' she lied, keeping her lips in a straight line and holding her nerve.

'Stand then, fair child, and show me your clean hands.'

Marion stood and paced towards him, hoping her confidence might fool his wisdom. Tavish took her hand in his and scowled at her fingernails and the mud they kept hidden in their beds.

‘What is it you are looking for?’ Marion asked. Taking her fingers and grazing them against his chapped lips, she found them spooling with his spit as he tasted all her deceit. ‘You cannot lie to me,’ he growled. ‘I can taste the mud on your hands.’ ‘It is not deceit you taste on my fingertips,’ Marion said.

Tavish stood firm, gripping her wrist with the tightest clasp he could summon, painting her hands the shade of a plum. ‘You sin against your sex. This mud is not the nectar a woman should bare.’

Not letting her nerve buckle, Marion remained silent.

‘Do you hunt? Is that why you are so wild?’ his lips grazed her forehead and his jaw clenched as he spoke. While her father glared at her, she slipped her hand into her pouch and took a handful of the grain she had made and sprinkled it into his broth.

‘I do not hunt,’ she spoke quietly. It was always the way, the restless sea beneath her skin began to stir and wrestle but she would stay as demure as a flower from the clearing. ‘Will you both sit? The dinner table is no place for such conflict,’ Saoirse said, standing. Tavish spun to glare and let loose his grip of Marion.

‘You dare to speak to your master with that tongue,’ he shouted.

Saoirse stayed still and evaded his gaze, but he lurched towards her, grabbing her by the scruff of her neck and pushing her against the stone wall.

‘I relinquish you. You will not eat this night.’

Saoirse, subdued as her soul had become, left her husband and child and Tavish returned to his seat and continued to sip away at his broth. It took six spoons worth of broth for him to know what was becoming of his toiling insides. His face began to go red, pulsing ruby at his cheeks as his

throat began to close. His eyes bulged out from their sockets and he coughed and spluttered at the foxglove and hemlock poisons that coiled their way into his blood.

To Marion, it sounded like a symphony.

Tavish wilted over the table, unable to hold himself steadfast and then soon, he was gone. Marion stayed still, relishing in the image of her father's corpse over the table. She watched him for twenty minutes before she moved and when she did, she took his half-filled bowl and head towards her mother's chamber. Saoirse's ignorance would be her end. Marion, for the first time, brandished her ambition with pride.

A C T V

Marion, orphan child of the almost-Earl Tavish, painted herself as innocently as she could. She stepped forward towards her husband. Underneath those wide doe-eyes, were a set of iris stones waiting to be fed and they were hungry.

She had promised herself the crown and she'd not stop until it sat atop her head. Macbeth cast a dark shadow across the slate floor. He was an image of deep anger repressed by graces and charm. A man who was bound by the same anger as her father, but Marion was not her mother. She would not be idle. A soft smile bounced across his lips as he gazed at his new wife like a feast to be consumed.

'O' my sweet lord, never has a master treated me so kindly,' Marion said, reaching out her hand to Macbeth as he knelt before her.

‘And never have I seen a creature so fragile and pure,’ he said, pulling his lips away from her hand.

Using ink soaked with cruelty, she signed her chosen name for the first time. No longer was she Marion – that name had been stripped from her. Now she had a new name. A name of her own choosing. Lady Macbeth.

When Macbeth let go of her hand, and she stole a quick glance at her fingers in the light. Her gaze trailed to the back of her hand before she turned it to see her palm. There it began.

It started as a small pinprick of blood pooling in her hand.

She closed it into a tight fist and ignored the small ruby pool.

Damn spot, she scolded herself and she felt it lift from its home in the creases of her palm.

Viper and murderess, the Lady Macbeth smiled for she had won over her conscience. *All hail to thee, Lady Macbeth, although imbued by dark, it is she who is sworn to be queen*, the witches chanted from marshes so far away.

‘All hail to thee, Lady Macbeth,’ Macbeth whispered to his wife.