LADY MACBETH
"They met me in the day of success, and I have learnt, by the perfect'st report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burn't in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanish'd. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all-hail'd me 'thane of Cawdor,' by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me and refer'd me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that shalt be.' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou might'st not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promis'd thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell."

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily, wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries "Thus thou must do" if thou have it,
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.
Enter a Messenger

What is your tidings?

MESSENGER

The king comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH

Thou'rt mad to say it. Is not thy master with him, who, were't so, Would have inform'd for preparation?

MESSENGER

So please you, it is true. Our thane is coming. One of my fellows had the speed of him, Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more Than would make up his message.

LADY MACBETH

Give him tending. He brings great news.

Exit Messenger

The raven himself is hoarse, That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements. Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood. Stop up th' access and passage to remorse, That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between The effect and it!
Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall,
you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry, "Hold, hold!"

Enter MACBETH

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.

MACBETH
My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH
And when goes hence?

MACBETH
Tomorrow, as he purposes.

LADY MACBETH
O never
Shall sun that morrow see!

"Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers = Lady Macbeth now invites the evil spirits that she wishes to serve her (the "murd'ring ministers") to nurse from her, but not to drink milk from her—instead to drink gall, which is bile, bitter stomach fluid associated with murderous rancor. This is not her first or last reference to mother's milk or to nursing. But where Lady Macbeth is pictured as a nursing mother, it is plainly not a picture of nurturing goodness. Rather, it is a demonic parody of motherhood—a foul image in place of a fair one.

"sightless" = invisible

"You wait on nature's mischief" = wait your turn to bring mischief into the natural world

"Come, thick night" = Having finished invoking dark spirits, Lady Macbeth now invokes dark night to assist her. Observe that her request echoes Macbeth's similar request—"Stars, hide your fires"—made in the previous scene. Note here, too, that Lady Macbeth speaks in apostrophe, for she addresses the night (a concept or condition, not a person) as though it could hear her and reply. Her address to the "murd'ring ministers," however, should not be pegged as apostrophe, for she believes that she really is addressing conscious beings (even though invisible) that can hear and do reply by accepting her invitation. This is a case of welcoming vampires, as it were, into one's home.

"pall" = The word is normally a noun referring to a black cloth or blanket commonly used as a coffin covering, but here it is applied as a verb.

"dunnest" = darkest

"That my keen knife see not the wound it makes" = so that my sharp ("keen") blade cannot see the gash it leaves. Here also is an echo of a line spoken earlier by her husband—"the eye wink at the hand."

"Hold" = stop

"Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter" = Soon, as Lady Macbeth would have it, Macbeth will be hailed by all people, and hailed as king, not a mere thane.

"transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant" = Macbeth's news has excited his lady so much that she feels as though she has already been transformed into the queen of Scotland, a condition of which the present moment (that is, those of the present moment who are not in on this secret) is unaware ("ignorant"). She feels it so strongly, indeed, that it is as if the future event is taking place right now ("in the instant").

"goes hence" = leaves here

"purposes" = intends

"never / Shall sun that morrow see" = This line may be read in two ways. In one sense, Lady Macbeth, her grammar elliptical, can mean that Duncan will not see tomorrow's sun because, of course, he will be dead. In this case, her line could be paraphrased as, O never shall he see tomorrow's sun. A more interesting reading, though, is that of the sun not being seen tomorrow by anyone—this because kings are traditionally identified symbolically with the sun, for it supplies to the world all the blessings that a king, correspondingly, is meant to supply to his realm. The king metaphorically is the sun. This reading has the advantage of emphasizing the unnaturalness of the deed that the thane and his lady would do. They would, in effect, be putting an end to daylight—a condition, incidentally, that becomes a key image later in the play.
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time. Bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue. Look like th' innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for. And you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

MACBETH
We will speak further.

LADY MACBETH
Only look up clear.
To alter favor ever is to fear.
Leave all the rest to me.

Exeunt