

Paint the Bluebells Red

A short play by Bryonna Edwards

[Stage right, Ailis, age 15, is pregnant and sitting in the middle of a sacred circle drawn in salt within the forest. There are stones in each cardinal direction within the circle. She holds a small ceremonial knife and the Queen's hairbrush as she speaks to the night sky. In another part of the forest, stage left, Queen Catherine, age 20, a large woman and a harsh beauty with wiry red hair is stalking and trying to find Ailis. She looks fierce and is wearing a suit of Gaelic armor from the Iron Age.]

Ailis:[Ailis chants] Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit.  
Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit.

Mother, I wish you were still here to give me guidance. In this hour, the strange place I was married into has brought me to the feet of mossy tree trunks within the depths of a misty valley. On this forest floor of crushed bluebells beneath my quaking knees, I am at the mercy of goddesses. I pray the witch was not right in her prophesy- that my life and the noble son I carry in my womb are not in danger.

For a year and one day this town has been my home. The trial marriage between the King and I was filled with passion and poetry. But outside the comforts of our growing love, I've found that the people of this town are twisted. In a land where the sun never rises high, I've no one to trust beyond my beloved. Although his love and power surrounds me, I cannot escape Catherine's boundless malice. She's bewitched by violence and greed. I worry fear has tainted me.

Mother, you would have loved the ceremony of the king and my official marriage earlier today: the dances, the food, drink and dress. It was a blissful night until the return of Catherine. She was leading an army excursion during the duration of our trial marriage. I had never met her until today. I hoped the legends of her brutality were just myth. I latched onto the idea that she would be as sweet as her two girls that I looked after.

I was taking in the beautiful melodeon with my eyes closed, plump and merry, until I felt a presence join me at the table.

[Catherine and Ailis look at one another with a chilling silence between them.]

Catherine: So it is true. [Catherine's gaze affixed on Ailis' round belly. She breaks away from Ailis and paces.]

Ailis:[Ailis whispers her chant underneath Catherine's monologue.] Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. [Repeat until chant ceases.]

Catherine: The prophesy of the old hag was right. The way Ailis carries the child- it is a boy that grows in her belly. But it will be a colder day in Ifreann if I should be kille at the hand of Ailis. Never the less, the birth of her son will diminish my daughters' birthright to the royal throne. I must preserve our lineage. She must die.

[Ailis' chant ceases.]

Loyalty to Ailis' family hangs heavier than this suit on my back. They protected me from a fateful death in the wake of my father's, the true king, horrific murder. But my loyalty will always lay in our bloodline.

In this dark forest all I see is red. The anger boils on the edge of my flesh. That stupid husband of mine, he was always weak for poetry and romance. He's not a sliver of the man my father was.

I should have killed Ailis at that blasphemous ceremony. The haughty wench- sitting there with her eyes closed, with that silly smile stretched across her fat cheeks- the way she cowered under me in that ridiculous dress- just like her flamboyant Mother, just as inane of a woman. In my absence she has turned my family against me. During our reunion, after a glorious battle where I expanded the boundaries of our land, all my girls had to speak of was Ailis and her charity. Their minds have become tainted.

No bother. I'll find her, put my mind at ease and slit the sheep's throat. I am Queen Catherine O Connor, the fiercest warrior in all of the four provinces. I've lead men into dens of savages, spilled the blood of Kings, and left fatherless children in my wake. Never will a little wench such as Ailis be my demise. I will secure the prosperity of my family. I will prove the witch wrong.

Ailis: Chilled by the presence of Catherine, I left the gathering as soon as I could. I walked down to the well and happened upon the witch, Brigid, shivering in the sunset. Her eyes were set deep into their sockets, the left one blackened. The skin of her face was gathered and pulled downward. I offered to bring her back food from the ceremony, for we had plenty and she looked thin enough to break. She stood slowly from her seat and met me in the eyes. She placed her crooked fingers on my face, and there I saw my body stiff as stone, surrounded by blood with Catherine panting above me. I recoiled from the nightmare.

Brigid: [Brigid's voice offstage. Ailis mouths the words of the witch's dialogue, as if possessed.] Take this blade and the magic contained in this goatskin. Find the hair of the one who'll betray you. And remember this spell- Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit.

Ailis: [Ailis chants the rest of the Gaelic spell while pulling red strands of hair from the brush.] Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. Mother, how I am ashamed to be reduced to hideous violence and allow fear to make a murderer of me. In the

end Catherine and I are two of the same. However, my life is at stake and the witch's word and magic is all I can depend upon.

[Catherine stalks Ailis]

Even now in the solitude of this forest floor I feel the jade eyes of Catherine watching me from the leaves above. My troubled mind has brought about a desperate sweat in the damp wind. It covers me with grief.

Ailis: Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit. Bás fort béolu. Narab marthain duit.

[Ailis continues to chant while holding the ceremonial knife to her wrists for a blood sacrifice, the last part of the spell. Catherine looms behind Ailis, panting and dying. With a blade Catherine slits Ailis throat. Ailis collapses and the blood pools within the circle. Catherine looks wild and crazed. She has a seizure and collapses next to Ailis.]

[End of play.]

