

Summer of Shakespeare

The story of Macbeth

Find out everything that happens in the play by reading our Macbeth story. You might like to read it with or to someone else!

Chapter 1 – The Witches' Predictions

It's a cold and dismal day. A thick, swirling mist shrouds the scorched, battle scarred ground. The clang of clashing metal mixes with muffled yells and shrieks. Distant thunder rumbles and flashes of lightning reveal sharp crags and the spines of bare, black trees.

Three huddled figures, clad entirely in black, gradually emerge from the gloom with bent backs and shadowy, creased faces. They cackle and moan as they creep into view. They are three evil witches, who have been meeting in secret.

Now their gruesome gathering has ended, and they are about to leave one another. The first one speaks in an inhuman whine.

"When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning or in rain?"

The second figure lifts her head with a strangled whisper, "When the hurlyburly's done.
When the battle's lost and won."

The third witch laughs. "That will be 'ere the set of sun."

"Where the place?"

"Upon the heath."

"There to meet with Macbeth."

It is nearly one thousand years ago, and King Duncan of Scotland is at war. He and his two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, are fighting Norwegian invaders and some Scottish rebels.

The king's best men are Macbeth and Banquo; fine soldiers and even finer friends. Macbeth is the Thane (or Lord) of the manor of Glamis, and lives in his great castle at Dunsinane with his wife. He and Banquo have been friends and comrades for longer than either can remember and have fought alongside each other in numerous celebrated battles. Their path of their friendship is paved with glory and bravery. As the sun sets on the day's magnificent and bloody battle, Macbeth and Banquo look wearily around them. Their faces are craggy with mud and gashed with wounds. They wear exhausted but gratified expressions. Bodies strew the blood-soaked ground. This has been a particularly hard fought fight against the lawless but resolute Norwegian invaders, and now the pair must return to camp to tell King Duncan of their success. As the thick mist swirls and the

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heavy rain pounds, they find themselves suddenly lost and disoriented: they do not recognise this part of the battleground. They look to one another for reassurance.

Banquo walks amongst the barbed, skeletal trees and calls to his friend in the Murkiness. "So foul and fair a day I have not seen!" he says, thinking both of the triumph of the battlefield and the bleakness of this bitter, misty landscape.

The two men may not hear it, but in the distance, a strangled voice screeches with shrill excitement, "A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come!"

And then, seemingly from nowhere, three strange skulking shapes emerge from the mist and solidify into the three weird sisters, entirely barring Macbeth and Banquo's path.

"What are these,
That look not like the inhabitants of the earth
And yet are on it?"
says Macbeth in horror as he looks at the three witch like figures. He wonders if they are human. Do they understand language? Do they even have voices?

All three witches turn slowly.

"All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
All hail Macbeth! That shall be king hereafter!"

As the creatures hideously wail and screech, Macbeth and Banquo exchange frightened and confused glances. What does this mean? Scotland already has a Thane of Cawdor. Scotland already has a king. How can Macbeth fill shoes that are already filled?

As Macbeth tries to make sense of this strange greeting, the witches turn their attention to Banquo with a sinister laugh.

"Lesser than Macbeth, and greater!
Not so happy, yet much happier!
Thou shalt GET kings, though thou be none.
So all hail Macbeth and Banquo!"

Amid choked laughter, the curling mist envelops the three sisters. When it clears, they have disappeared. Banquo and Macbeth are astonished. Where have they vanished? Were such things ever here or did they simply imagine it? What did the women's prophecies mean?

"Your children shall be kings..." mutters Macbeth

"You shall be king..." replies Banquo

Chapter 2 – Long Live Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor

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At the king's pavilion, Macbeth's arrival is hotly anticipated. News has reached the camp that he and Banquo are the great heroes of the battle. They have, single-handedly, killed many of the Norwegian invaders. Many believe that they are solely responsible for King Duncan's incredible victory. As the two brave warriors enter the camp, still discussing their strange encounter with the wizened old women, the nobleman Ross spots them and calls to Macbeth.

"The king hath bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor!" says Ross Heartily.

Macbeth and Banquo freeze in shock. Both have the same thought. The Thane of Cawdor is still alive. Why would Duncan give Macbeth a title that already belongs to another man? How could the strange women have known what Ross would say to them? Seeing the shock on their faces, Ross explains that Lord Cawdor has proved himself to be a traitor: he turned against King Duncan during the battle and chose to fight instead with the Scottish rebels. His treason has led to the removal of all his lands and the stripping of his title. He no longer bears the stamp of Thane of Cawdor. That title now belongs to the valiant Macbeth.

Macbeth staggers and stumbles slightly as he absorbs the shock of this revelation. His mind races. The witches called him by his current title, Glamis. They prophesied that he would soon be Thane of Cawdor. Now he is Cawdor too. According to the witches' prophecy, the greatest title of all is yet to come: those strange and eerie women said that Macbeth would soon be King of Scotland. Is their supernatural interference a good or bad sign? Macbeth is equal parts thrilled and terrified.

"If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me..." thinks Macbeth. Then aloud, he announces to Banquo and Ross, "Let us toward the king. Come friends..."

The witches predicted that Macbeth would become Thane of Cawdor. Now it has come true. Macbeth begins to think that he might become King after all. If the witches have one thing right, then isn't it likely that their other prophecy will be fulfilled too?

As these thoughts toss backwards and forwards in Macbeth's mind, King Duncan announces that his son Malcolm is to be appointed the Prince of Cumberland. Macbeth knows that this means that Malcolm will be crowned King after Duncan dies. That CAN'T be right. The witches said that he, Macbeth, would be king, not Malcolm. The riches and rewards of kingship should belong to him, not that young, inexperienced upstart. After all, Macbeth is the glorious war hero. Doesn't he deserve a beautiful crown, a glistening throne, an adoring court and loyal servants? Macbeth begins to think that something must be done if the witches' prophecy is to come true. But what exactly? Something horrible and indecent? Surely not. Macbeth's thoughts become blacker and bloodier as he thinks greedily of what it would be like to be King of Scotland. Brave Macbeth finds himself confused by ambition and greed. His better qualities wrestle with his lower instincts, and his mind grows confused and muddy.

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Chapter 3 - A plan is hatched

Back at Macbeth's castle, someone else is having black and bloody thoughts too. That person is Macbeth's wife. The two are very close. Macbeth even calls her his 'partner in greatness'. He has already written to her about the three weird sisters and their predictions and she is thrilled with the news.

Lady Macbeth is even more ruthless and determined than Macbeth and desperately wants her husband to be King of Scotland. She decides there and then that she will make it happen.

When Macbeth returns to Dunsinane castle, Lady Macbeth is already waiting for him.

"Great Glamis," she calls out, before adding, "Worthy Cawdor," with a cunning smile, acknowledging Macbeth's new and important position. Secretly, she thinks that, with her help, her husband will soon be much greater than both of these titles combined. If she can help to make the witches' prediction come true, he will swiftly become the King of all Scotland.

"My dearest love," says Macbeth, embracing his wife after their long separation, "King Duncan comes here tonight!"

"And when goes hence?" asks Lady Macbeth.

"Tomorrow, as he purposes."

"O, never shall sun that morrow see!" says Lady Macbeth.

It is clear that she does not want Duncan to survive the night at the castle. But what does she have in mind?

"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it!" urges Lady Macbeth, with cruelty in her gaze. Behind her cold, steely eyes, a wicked plan is hatching: a wicked plan that involves King Duncan's death.

Before long, Duncan and his men arrive at the castle. Duncan is impressed by Dunsinane's pleasant position and sweet smelling air. He is even more impressed by the hospitality offered by the wonderful Lady Macbeth. What a kind and gentle woman! Nothing seems too much to ask. Food and drink are supplied in abundance and their tender hostess is constantly on hand to top up glasses with wine and to involve Duncan and his men in charming conversation. Whilst Lady Macbeth entertains the King and his men, her husband slips away from the great dining room. His wife has told him that he should kill Duncan tonight to speed his own ascension to the throne, but Macbeth is feeling guilty. His mind swirls in confusion. He is having second thoughts.

"The king is here in double trust," he muses. "First, I am his kinsman. And next I am his host. I should shut the door against murderers, not bear the knife myself..."

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Just as Macbeth grapples with feelings of guilt and fear, his determined wife storms out of the dining hall and into the corridor to find him.

"King Duncan has almost supped? Why have you left the chamber?"

"We will proceed no further in this business!" insists Macbeth.

"Are you frightened?" Lady Macbeth sneers. Her cold eyes and wry smile suggest that she thinks she is more of a man than her feeble, weak willed husband.

"But if we should fail...?"

"We, fail?!" answers Lady Macbeth. "But screw your courage to the sticking place and we will not fail. When Duncan is asleep will I overpower his two guards. I will give them wine and their merriness and drunkenness will give you the chance to act!"

"I am settled," replies Macbeth at last.

He has decided that he will go through with the plan. But he is aware of his duplicity and wickedness, and as Lady Macbeth sneaks back to the dining hall with a malicious smile, Macbeth mutters distractedly under his breath, "False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

Chapter 4 – Is this a Dagger?

In the after-midnight darkness, no castle offers comfort. The slightest sound scares, the lightest footstep echoes. Shadows shift and solidify. And in this deathly gloom, Macbeth prowls his murky halls waiting for a signal from his wife: a signal that will tell him that Duncan's guards are drunk and incapable, and that it is time for him to murder a king...

As he paces back and forth, the weight of what he is about to do begins to play tricks with Macbeth's mind. He thinks back to his time as a brave warrior, fighting the invading Norwegians with his great friend Banquo. He thinks of the pride and honour he felt as he walked wearily away from the battlefield, broadsword hanging at his belt and Banquo standing by his side. He was an honourable and glorious hero then. Could it really have been just a few short weeks ago? Now, can he really be contemplating the murder of his dear King Duncan?

As these thoughts fly, Macbeth spots something glinting in the air before him. He blinks twice to check that he is not imagining things, but however hard he tries, he cannot shift the sight: a ghostly dagger floating and hovering, beckoning him, with its handle toward his hand. He reaches out to grab it but it dissolves into air, only to reappear just outside his grasp. He grabs again, but the dagger disintegrates and appears just a little further down the

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corridor. It pivots and turns. Surely it can't be? This floating dagger seems to be pointing him in a clear direction: towards Duncan's bedchamber.

"Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going...
And such an instrument I was to use!" cries Macbeth in horror.

A bell sounds. It is Lady Macbeth, giving her signal to say that the guards are now drunk. Macbeth prays that Duncan cannot hear the bell. He wishes he could not hear it himself.

"Hear it not Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell!"

Lady Macbeth strides purposefully into the Macbeth's bedchamber. In one hand, she carries the small bell that she used as a signal to her husband; in the other she carries an empty flagon, from which she has poured the wine which helped the guards first to drunkenness and then to a heavy, groggy sleep. The guards may be drunkenly sleeping, but she is bold and unafraid. An owl shrieks somewhere in the dark night sky. The shriek seems to mean something. She takes it as a signal that her husband is killing the king. She tightens her grip on the empty flagon as she imagines the cold blade of the knife repeatedly plunging into Duncan's body. She places the bell and the flagon calmly down on a table, closes her eyes and waits in stillness for the return of her husband: her husband who will soon be King of Scotland.

"I have done the deed!" Macbeth is back, "Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep!"

Lady Macbeth opens her eyes. Her husband stands before her, covered in blood and holding the two daggers, which he has used to murder his king. Lady Macbeth is astonished and horrified.

"Go, get some water
And wash this filthy witness from your hands!
Why did you bring the daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go!"

Macbeth is frozen to the spot. "I'll go no more. I am afraid to think what I have done!" he wails.

"Infirm of purpose... Give ME the daggers" screams Lady Macbeth. She knows exactly what she will do. If Duncan's body is covered in blood, she will smear the blood on the sleeping guards and leave the daggers with them. That way, everyone will think that the guards are guilty of the murder and blame will not fall on her and her husband. She snatches the blades from her trembling husband and slips, with a menacing look, into the castle's shadowy darkness.

Knock! Knock! Knock! There is a great banging noise at the door! Macbeth jumps fearfully.

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"What is that knocking?
How is it with me, when every noise appals me?
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

Lady Macbeth returns, her hands red with Duncan's blood. Macbeth looks at his own crimson hands, then at his wife's. He looks at her despairingly.

"My hands are of your colour.
But I shame to wear a heart so white!" she chides.

"Quick," she continues. "Retire we to our chamber. A little water clears us of this deed!"

Knock! Knock! Knock! Macbeth jumps again. If only, he thinks, the knocking would wake King Duncan from his sleep of death...

Chapter 5 – Murder in the Castle!

Knock! Knock! Knock!

At the great door to Dunsinane castle is Macduff, the Thane of Fife.

He has come to the castle with Lord Lennox and Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. They have come to visit the King, little knowing that he is now lying cold and dead in his bedchamber.

Macbeth's porter answers the door, and the lords ask for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Where can they find the King? Is he awake? He is needed urgently. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear. They yawn and stretch, pretending they have just woken from a night's sleep, and giving no clue of the horror they have unleashed this wicked night.

"The king is not yet stirring," says Macbeth. "But here is his bedroom door..." Macbeth signals to the chamber door, where he knows that Duncan's lifeless body lies. His heart pounds as Macduff knocks at the king's door, then slowly pushes it ajar.

An eternity seems to pass before Macduff re-emerges. His face is pallid and cold, as if all the blood has drained from it.

"Oh horror!" he wails. "Horror, horror, horror!"

"What is it my lord? What's the matter?" asks Lennox.

"Do not bid me speak," says Macduff. "See and then speak yourselves..." He signals towards the heavy chamber door. Macbeth and Lennox enter.

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Macduff turns to Lady Macbeth, suspecting nothing of her involvement in the Murder.

"Oh, gentle lady," he says, "Tis not for you to hear what I have to speak. But... our royal master is murdered!"

"Murdered? In our house?" whispers Lady Macbeth in mock-horror. She sinks to the ground, seemingly shocked and horrified by what she has heard. No-one must know that just one hour earlier she was smearing Duncan's blood over his guiltless guards. She must act like an innocent so that no-one will suspect.

Lennox and Macbeth reappear from the chamber.

"The guards of his chamber seem to have done the deed!" says Lennox. "Their hands and faces were smeared with Duncan's blood!"

"And in my fury, I have killed them both!" says Macbeth. He exchanges glances with his wife. A cunning idea, she thinks – to kill the guards before they can protest their innocence and throw suspicion at her and her husband. Perhaps, she thinks, Macbeth has shaken off his cowardice. Perhaps he will make a great king of Scotland after all...

Malcolm and Donalbain, meanwhile, are afraid. Is it possible that those who plotted their father's death may kill them too? In the morning's horror and confusion at Dunsinane, they reach a decision: they must flee Scotland to ensure they are not next to die...

Chapter 6 - Betrayal of a friend

The country needs a new king and Macbeth, the hero of the recent battle, is quickly chosen and crowned. What the witches had predicted for Macbeth has come true.

But the witches also said that Banquo's children would become kings. This weighs heavy on Macbeth's mind. Insidious voices whisper in his head, telling him that his greatest ally is now the greatest threat to his powerful reign. No-one must be allowed to come between Macbeth and his kingdom - not even his dearest friend in the world. So, from his great banqueting hall at Dunsinane castle, Macbeth calls for Banquo and his son Fleance.

"Banquo! Fleance!
Tonight we hold a solemn supper sir
And I'll request your presence!"

Banquo nods in agreement, instinctively and protectively pulling little Fleance closer to him. Since the appearance of the weird sisters and the death of Duncan, Banquo is no longer sure that he trusts anyone, least of all his old friend, King Macbeth.

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"Ride you this afternoon?" asks Macbeth. Banquo nods again. "And goes Fleance with you?" Another nod. "I wish your horses swift and sure of foot. Farewell."

Ushering his young son from the room, Banquo casts a backward glance at Macbeth, just as shadowy figures seem to emerge from dark corners. Have the weird sisters returned? Or is it just a trick of the light? Either way, Banquo is taking no chances. He shudders anxiously as he places a protective arm around Fleance, glad to be gone from the cavernous banqueting hall and away from his old friend Macbeth.

Banquo's eyes were not tricking him. Gloomy figures had indeed appeared from the shadows. Not three witches, but two desperate and wicked conspirators. Murderers!

Macbeth has called upon these men to listen to him and Banquo from the shadows. He now tells them that Banquo is a troublemaker and the source of much despair and sorrow in the land. Lies! Banquo and little Fleance must be killed for their troublemaking. He tells the wicked killers that this afternoon's ride is the perfect opportunity to murder Banquo and Fleance and to dispatch the bodies, without anybody ever discovering what has happened.

As the murderers slink away, Macbeth mutters quietly to himself, in a determined but sad voice. The old Macbeth has not completely disappeared, and he feels a tug of regret and fear as he realises that he has just ordered the death of the greatest friend he has ever known.

"It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight
If it find heaven, must find it out tonight."

Some way from the palace in the thick, dense woods of Burnham, Banquo and Fleance ride peacefully side by side. Banquo casts a loving glance at his son, who is swift becoming a talented horseman. Perhaps, thinks Banquo, Fleance is destined for greatness, just as the witches predicted. Could Fleance really be king one day?

Suddenly, from the forest floor's undergrowth, two black-clad figures appear, preventing Banquo and Fleance's further progress. The taller of the two wicked murderers reveals a long, silver blade, which glints jagged in the murky forest light. He smirks, and raises an eyebrow as he looks menacingly first at Banquo, and then at Fleance.

"O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!" yells Banquo.

As the murderers pounce, slitting Banquo's throat in one quick movement, Fleance kicks his panicked horse on the flank and gallops away. Tears streaming, he throws a look over his shoulder to see purple blood spurting from his father's neck. He continues to dig his heels into his horses' side until he is as far from Burnham wood and Dunsinane as he can possibly be.

Chapter 7 – Never shake your gory locks at me!

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Back at the castle, Macbeth has no idea that Fleance has escaped. He waits anxiously for news from his murderous thugs, as the banquet guests begin to arrive.

From the corner of his eye, Macbeth sees the first murderer slip into the great banquet hall. Surreptitiously, he moves towards the wicked ruffian, leaving Lady Macbeth in charge of his guests.

"There's blood upon thy face," he whispers

"It is Banquo's then," replies the murderer.

"Is he dispatched?"

"My lord, his throat is cut, but..." The killer pauses momentarily. Macbeth looks at him sternly. "But... Fleance is escaped."

Anger and panic flash briefly across Macbeth's face. He regains his composure but with a steely tone he orders the killer to leave, "Get thee gone!"

Macbeth returns to his guests. They are becoming restless. Why has their host disappeared into the shadows? Even Lady Macbeth looks anxious. She cannot explain Macbeth's absence for very much longer.

Lord Lennox and Lord Ross invite Macbeth to join them.

"May it please your highness, sit?" says one.

Macbeth is confused. "The table's full."

Lennox and Ross exchange a worried look and point at an empty chair at the head of the table. "But here is a place reserved, sir"

"Where?" Asks Macbeth.

Lennox gestures again, "Here my good lord. What is it that moves your Highness?"

There is a reason that Macbeth is so distracted and confused. There, sitting in the empty chair at the head of the table is a horrible and gory sight. It is the bloodspattered ghost of his dear friend Banquo, whiter than alabaster but with a scarlet streak gushing violently from his throat. He looks at Macbeth with dead, flinty eyes and shakes his head slowly back and forth.

Macbeth stumbles forward in horror. "Which of you has done this?" he wails.

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"Done what, my good lord?" ask Lennox, Ross and the others.

The ghost of Banquo continues to shake his head and now raises a hand to point an accusatory finger at his former friend.

"Thou can'st not say I did it: never shake your gory locks at me!" screams Macbeth in horror.

The assembled lords rise from their seats and exchange worried looks. Panic ruffles the usually calm features of the steely eyed Lady Macbeth. It takes her only a moment, however, to recover her composure and hatch a cunning plan.

"My lords, pray you keep seat. My husband is often thus, and has been from his youth: The fit is momentary; upon a thought. He will again be well."

She convinces the gathered lords that Macbeth is simply succumbing to an illness; one that he has suffered from since he was a child.

But just as the lords tentatively regain their seats, Macbeth howls in horror again. He hurls himself at the ghost of Banquo and screams. "Oh - why do you make such faces! Begone and quit my sight!"

The ghost grins now as crimson blood trickles down his open throat, eyes still glinting cold and hard. He seems to say, "You might have killed me, but my son is still alive and well..."

Macbeth screams one last time, "Hence, horrible shadow. Unreal mockery, Hence!"

Lady Macbeth knows that there is nothing she can do now. Things have gone too far, and the Lords will never believe her story about a lifelong illness. She ushers them from the room.

"At once good night. Please, go at once!"

As the men leave the banqueting hall, Lady Macbeth fixes Macbeth with a coldhearted stare: a stare that says, "Are you a man?"

Macbeth sinks to the ground, weeping and gesturing at the empty space where his dead friend had been seated. Lady Macbeth storms from the room.

As horror engulfs him, Macbeth reaches a decision: he must return to see the three witches. They will surely have answers for him.

Chapter 8 – The Return of the Witches

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The three witches gather in their dark lair. Hunched and crouched over a bubbling cauldron, each of them drops in some disgusting morsel: they are fashioning a charm of pure evil. They chant wickedly in unison,

"Double double, toil and trouble
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Round about the cauldron go:
In the poisoned entrails throw.
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adders fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing.
Double, double, toil and trouble:
Fire burn and cauldron bubble!"

The evil hags cackle and screech as they finish their incantation, and a whisper of green smoke begins to seep over the cauldron's rim. Then one of the crones puts a finger to her lips to quiet the others. She has heard something.

"By the pricking of my thumbs," she says, "Something wicked this way comes..." Macbeth steps into the witches' cave.

"How now, you secret, black and midnight hags! I conjure you by that which you profess – However you come to know it.... Answer me!"

"Speak!" says the first witch.

"Demand!" says the second witch.

"We'll answer!" says the third witch.

With that, the witches toss a final ingredient into the bubbling pot. A green vapour rises from the thick, gloopy stew and, as it clears, Macbeth is horrified to see a disembodied, severed head, dripping with blood and armoured with a helmet and visor. It floats towards him. Macbeth glimpses its eyes, burning like cold fires inside the helmet, and is startled as the apparition begins to speak in low, almost whispered tones.

It says, "Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff, Beware the thane of Fife!" Macduff? The Thane of Fife? Macbeth had thought that Banquo was the only threat to his safety. His mind races. Why must he fear Macduff? What threat can the Thane of Fife possibly pose to the great King of Scotland?

As Macbeth wrestles with this new intelligence, the armed head disappears in a puff of smoke, and a second apparition materialises from the cauldron's thick green mist. This time, the spirit is a naked infant child, covered in blood and goo, looking for all the world as if it had just been born. Seemingly innocent and helpless, the tiny baby cries and wails. Macbeth

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thinks fleetingly of Banquo's son Fleance, fatherless, alone and afraid in this dark and dismal world. With a strenuous effort, he shakes off this unwanted reminder and looks instead at the mewling infant before him. He nearly jumps out of his skin as the baby turns to him and, like the disembodied head before it, speaks with an inhuman, otherworldly voice.

"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!
Be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn
The power of man; for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth."

"Ha!" thinks Macbeth, "What need I fear Macduff if no-one of woman born can harm me?" Yet, Macbeth would rather be safe than sorry. He decides, on that instant, that he will murder Macduff and his family, just to be certain, and just as he did his great friend Banquo.

As Macbeth contemplates his latest wicked crime and the witches cackle around their cauldron, a third apparition silently appears from the viscous green smoke. This time, the figure is a child, about ten years of age, wearing a crown on his head and carrying the branch of a tree. What can this signify? Why is he crowned? What means the tree branch? But before Macbeth can think these matters over further, the spirit opens its mouth and speaks.

"Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him."

Macbeth cannot help but laugh. A marching wood? Whoever heard of anything so ridiculous? If he cannot be harmed by anyone born from a woman, or until a forest marches up the hill to the door of his castle, then his safety and kingship is guaranteed forever!

Now, finally, from the syrupy cauldron, comes a final vision. This time it is a procession of children, all robed as kings, with jewelled crowns upon their heads. And, at the rear, smiling with a horrible, fixed grin, and with blood still trickling from his open throat, is Macbeth's old friend Banquo, last seen at the terrible banquet. The dreadful, shadowy figure raises its hand and points one by one at the parade of boy-child kings, smiling and (it seems to Macbeth) acknowledging each young spirit as a greater and more rightful king than Macbeth himself.

The three witches are laughing hysterically now. Their supernatural show has filled them to the brim with a wicked and perverse pleasure. They are delighted to be audience to Macbeth's contradictory reactions to each member of their spirit promenade.

"Filthy hags!" screams Macbeth. "Why do you show me this horrible sight!"

Just as Macbeth turns to confront the wicked trio, he sees that they have disappeared into thin air, leaving him all alone in their cavernous and chilling lair.

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Chapter 9 – Death to the Hellhound!

Macbeth tears back through Birnam wood to Dunsinane, astride his horse. He is met by the nobleman Lennox, who brings terrible news: terrible news regarding the very last person Macbeth wants to hear about – Macduff. The Thane of Fife has fled to England. News has reached Scotland that Macduff intends to rouse a band of lawless resolute to fight Macbeth and to take away his crown. Now, Macbeth remembers that the three witches told him he could never be harmed by anyone of woman born. But they also told him that he should beware the Thane of Fife. And so, Macbeth now makes a horrible decision; the most despicable and evil decision he has made so far in his wicked reign. He doesn't know where Macduff is now. But he does know where Macduff's wife and children are. He will take his revenge on Macduff's traitorous behaviour by killing the Thane's whole family!

"The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife, give to the edge of the sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line.
This deed I'll do before this purpose cool."

Some days later, in England, Macduff has found King Duncan's son, Malcolm, and is trying to persuade him to join Macduff's band of rebels and to finally put an end to Macbeth's reign of terror. Then the dreadful news arrives that Macbeth has had Macduff's wife and babies murdered.

The nobleman Ross is the one who must give Macduff the terrible news.
"My lord, your castle is surprised. Your wife and babes are savagely slaughtered."

Macduff sinks to his knees. "Merciful heavens! My children too?"

Ross can barely bring himself to speak. "Wife, children, servants, all that could be found"

Macduff's great sadness is all consuming. But he is also filled with a fervent hate for the monstrous Macbeth. He knows that he must find the evil king of Scotland and kill him.

And the grisly murders of the poor innocent Macduff clan have persuaded Malcolm that he must march on Macbeth's castle too. Macduff and Malcolm will be joined with ten thousand English soldiers from King Edward, all determined to end the reign of Scotland's most evil tyrant.

Meanwhile, back in Dunsinane, Lady Macbeth's guilty conscience is causing her to act very strangely. Each night, for a whole week, she has been pacing up and down the length of Dunsinane's corridors, seemingly fast asleep but with eyes wide open and staring. One of her gentlewomen has become so worried that she has secretly called upon the court's doctor for help. In the castle's midnight gloom, they spy together as Lady Macbeth sleepwalks through the dark castle.

"You see," says Lady Macbeth's servant, "Her eyes are open!"

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"How long has she had that candle?" asks the doctor.

"She carries it with her everywhere she goes."

"Look!" exclaims the doctor. "She is rubbing her hands together now!"

Indeed, Lady Macbeth is rubbing her hands together. She rubs them so hard that it seems likely she will chafe away the skin from her palms and fingers. The two spies listen carefully as she whispers frantically,

"Out, damned spot! Out I say! – One, two. Why, then, 'tis time to do it. Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

The doctor and gentlewoman exchange glances. What is Lady Macbeth talking about? They move in closer to listen to her next words.

"What, will these hands never be clean?"

"This disease is beyond my practice," says the doctor, worriedly.

Lady Macbeth, meanwhile, continues to rave in her strange, quiet madness.

"Wash your hands. Put on your nightgown. Look not so pale. I tell you husband, Banquo is buried and cannot come out of his grave!"

She turns around and seems to look the doctor and gentlewoman directly in the eye, as she says, "There's a knocking at the gate. Come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!"

Things are not going well for the Macbeths. Lady Macbeth is acting out the murder of Duncan in her sleep, repeatedly. As if that wasn't bad enough, now Macbeth receives news that his thanes, sickened by the murder of Macduff, have deserted him, and joined the English troops. But Macbeth is still defiant and full of confidence. He believes himself entirely invincible, because the witches told him he would never be beaten unless a wood marched to his castle, led by someone who had never been born of woman. Simply impossible! He will never be defeated! Even when his servant tells him that there are ten thousand English troops advancing on Dunsinane, Macbeth simply snorts with laughter.

"I will not be afraid of death and bane,
Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane!" he screams, as the servant scurries away.

Now, the English army, led by Macduff and Prince Malcolm, are almost within range of Macbeth's archers, who stand atop Castle Dunsinane's battlements with bows and slings of arrows. Macduff and Malcolm think carefully about how their men can avoid the flights of swift flying darts that will soon be heading their way. They consult together and agree upon a solution. Tearing down a branch from a nearby tree, Malcolm shows the collected troops how they can cover themselves with leafy armour, protecting their heads

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and bodies from the onslaught of sharp arrows. Every man grabs a bough or branch and pulls it over his head. Soon, ten thousand men are marching towards the castle, covered in branches, twigs and leaves.

The terrified messenger barely dares enter Macbeth's chamber again, but he has news to tell and he knows that it's important.

"Sir, As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I looked toward Birnam, and...
I thought the wood began to move."

Macbeth can hardly believe the insolence of this disgusting excuse for a human being! "Liar and slavel" he screams at the hapless messenger, who once again scurries in fear from the room.

As Macbeth glances out from his castle window, he sees something that chills him to the bone. There, in the distance, moving and undulating upwards towards Dunsinane, is a tangled mass of trees and branches. Birnam wood is marching on the castle.

Macbeth is seized with panic. This was the witches' prophecy. He is surely doomed. Stay calm! he tells himself. A marching wood is only half the prophecy. He still cannot be defeated unless he meets a man who was not born of woman. And a man who was never born of woman is even more of an impossibility than an army of marching trees!

Who is this returning again? It is the poor servant, cowering in the corner, with more terrible news.

"My lord, the queen is.... dead." he whispers in terror.

The colour drains from Macbeth's face. His partner in greatness is lost to him forever. Guilt, shame and horror have destroyed her. Will they destroy him too?

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow..." he mutters, thinking of the many days and nights that stretch out before him; days and nights that he must live without his beloved queen. "Out, out, brief candle," he murmurs, close to tears.

Macbeth has barely enough strength to fight on. He chose this path of tyranny and evil; a path that has now brought him to the brink of madness and to the very depths of despair. He has murdered his best friend, slaughtered an entire innocent family and lost a great queen. As he sinks to his knees, he thinks he hears the three wicked witches whisper in his ear once again. He remembers that he cannot be defeated. Whatever fortune chooses to throw at him, he knows that he cannot be killed by anyone of woman born. He is Macbeth. He is invincible! He is the great King of Scotland. No one can stop him.

He picks himself up with a new strength of purpose. He will defeat the English onslaught. He will be King of Scotland forever!

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At last, Macduff's men have arrived at Dunsinane castle. He orders his exhausted army to throw down the leafy camouflage screens.

Atop his battlements, Macbeth stands tall, filled to the brim with sound and fury. He roars ferociously to the ten thousand English troops gathered below.

"Where is he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none!"

As he looks down at the army below him, Macbeth sees Macduff, standing strong and defiant in the shadow of Dunsinane's great towers. Macduff's eyes are full of hatred. He is looking at the monster who slaughtered his wife and babies.

Macbeth meets his gaze with a fiercely unapologetic challenge. With a firm and malicious resolve, he leaves the battlements and advances in great strides down the steep castle steps. He has one thought on his mind: he will fight this Macduff and kill him once and for all.

"Hellhound!" screams Macduff as Macbeth boldly appears at his castle door. "I have no words for you. My voice is in my sword!"

Macduff unsheathes his broadsword and raises it high above his head. Macbeth follows suit. They fly at each other and begin to fight. As they wrestle and clash, swords ringing and sparking as they strike, Macbeth laughs maniacally.

"You cannot defeat me Macduff. I live a charmed life, which must not yield to one of woman born."

But now it is Macduff's turn to laugh. He throws Macbeth to the ground with a triumphant yell.

"Despair thy charm you monster! I was ripped untimely from my mother's womb. She died before my birth Macbeth. I am not of woman born!"

Macbeth scrabbles about on the ground, realising now why the three wicked sisters told him to fear Macduff. As he looks deep into Macduff's eyes, he has just time enough to see the glint of Macduff's broadsword slice through the air and just time enough to hear its swift whoosh, before the blade meets Macbeth's neck and chops his head clean from his body. The hellhound of Scotland is finally dead. His reign of terror is over. He has been defeated by a marching forest and a man not born of woman.

Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland, and son of King Duncan is the new King of Scotland, just as Macbeth feared that one day he might be.

Gleefully, Duncan's people celebrate the coronation of a true and good man. They are happy to be free of Macbeth's reign of terror.

"Hail King of Scotland!" they cheer joyfully.

