



A Little Shakespeare: Macbeth Plot Summary

To know: this play takes place in Scotland. At this time, Scotland is divided into territories, each ruled by a Thane. Each Thane reports to the King; it is a little like how each state has a Governor.

In a mysterious place, three Witches gather. They plan to meet with Macbeth, for reasons unknown just yet.

Scotland is at war. A fierce battle is in progress. King Duncan and his eldest son Malcolm listen to the dying words of a Sergeant as he tells of Macbeth's bravery in battle. In the midst of the battle, they learn from Ross that Macbeth has defeated the treasonous Thane of Cawdor, so Duncan plans to reward Macbeth for his bravery by naming him the new Thane of Cawdor.

Macbeth and his friend Banquo come across the three Witches. They greet Macbeth, and call him Thane of Glamis, which he is. Then they call him Thane of Cawdor, and tell him he will soon be king. What does this mean??? The Witches then tell Banquo that he will not be king, but his sons will be kings. Macbeth demands more information, but the Witches vanish. Ross and Angus arrive, and inform Macbeth that he has been named the new Thane of Cawdor. Banquo and Macbeth are astonished – part of the prophecy has come true! Macbeth begins to wonder if the rest of the Witches' words will also prove true – will he really be king? And what will he have to do in order to make it happen?

At their castle, Lady Macbeth is reading a letter from her husband in which he tells her of the witches' prophecy. Lady Macbeth is ready for Macbeth to be king. She considers how she can convince her husband to plot against King Duncan. A servant arrives to tell her that Macbeth and Duncan will both be there that night. Macbeth arrives, and Lady Macbeth immediately proposes that tonight is the night to kill King Duncan.

The King and all of the generals arrive at Macbeth's castle to celebrate their latest victory. Macbeth is conflicted. Should he kill Duncan or not? He wants to be king himself, but Duncan has been good to him, and he fears what might happen to himself in this world and the next. What should he do? Lady Macbeth convinces him that their plan will not fail -- and that she will give the king's guards so much wine that they will fall asleep, easily framed for murder.

Late that night, Macbeth joins Banquo and his son Fleance, and they discuss the witches' prophecy, before Banquo and Fleance leave for bed. As Macbeth stands alone, he sees a dagger floating in the air in front of him. He is not sure if he's imagining it or if it is a vision of the future. He hears a bell, and goes off to murder King Duncan.

Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth waits. Macbeth enters, with bloody hands – the deed is done. He is distressed about the sounds and voices he thought he heard in the dark. Lady Macbeth realizes that Macbeth has brought the guards' knives back with him – he must go back and put the knives in the guards' hands! Macbeth is too upset to go back, so Lady Macbeth does it herself, smearing the guards' faces with blood while she's at it, to make sure they look guilty. There is a knock at the castle door, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth rush off to clean the blood from their hands and pretend they've been in bed.

Macduff and Lennox are knocking at the door. Macduff goes to fetch the king – and runs back in screaming: Duncan has been murdered! Banquo, Malcolm and Donalbain, Lady Macbeth, Angus, and Ross all enter to see what has happened. Macbeth rushes off to the king's room. When he returns, he blurts out that he stabbed the two sleeping guards because he was so angry that they had killed the king. Lady Macbeth faints, and the thanes leave to resolve the king's murder – except Malcolm and Donalbain. They are sure that if the king was murdered, they are next, since they are his sons. They make plans – Malcolm will hide in England and Donalbain will hide in Ireland.

A funeral procession for King Duncan begins. Ross and Macduff stay back to discuss the rumors about Duncan's murderers – was it really his bloody guards? And what of Macbeth, who will likely be crowned king now that Malcolm is

gone -- did he suspect Malcolm and Donalbain like he suspected the guards? Macduff avoids the coronation, heading to his castle in Fife, and perhaps farther south.

And just like that, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are crowned. Banquo is impressed that the witches' predictions have come true so far, but worries about what Macbeth has done to make them happen. Macbeth remembers the witches' prophecy – that Banquo's children, not his, will be kings – and he informs Lady Macbeth that his next logical step is to murder Banquo and Fleance.

As they attempt to flee the castle, Banquo and Fleance are attacked by three Murderers. Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

Back at their castle, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have a feast with Ross, Angus, and Lennox. One of the Murderers arrives to confirm to Macbeth that Banquo is dead, but Fleance lives. The feast continues, and Banquo's Ghost appears only to Macbeth, who completely panics. Lady Macbeth tells the guests that Macbeth is ill and sends them all away. . Macbeth decides to find the three Witches to hear their prophecies.

Macbeth discovers the three Witches and demands answers. The Witches conjure three apparitions. The First Apparition tells him to "beware Macduff." The Second Apparition tells him that "no man of woman born" can hurt him. This makes him happy, because isn't everyone born of a woman? The Third Apparition tells him that he will never be defeated until Birnam Forest climbs Dunsinane hill to his castle. This also makes Macbeth happy, because how can a forest climb a hill? Macbeth still wants to know about Banquo's family, though, and the spirits show Macbeth a long line of Banquo's descendants, all wearing crowns. Macbeth is horrified. The Witches and the spirits vanish. As Macbeth stands alone, Lennox comes to find him, to report that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth makes a plan to murder Macduff's family.

At Macduff's castle in Fife, Ross explains to Lady Macduff that her husband has now fled to England and that she must trust that he is doing the right thing. Lady Macduff is frustrated that Macduff is gone and tells her children that their father is a traitor. A Mysterious Woman enters and warns Lady Macduff that she and her children are in danger, but it is too late. Three Murderers arrive and brutally kill Lady Macduff and her children.

In England, Malcolm and Macduff discuss how they might save Scotland if Malcolm returns to fight for his father's crown and become king. Ross arrives and must inform Macduff that his wife and children have been murdered. In his deep despair, Macduff suspects that Macbeth is behind everything, and he and Malcolm plan revenge.

Back at Macbeth's castle, a Doctor and a Gentlewoman discuss Lady Macbeth, who has been sleepwalking for several nights. As they talk, Lady Macbeth appears, walking and talking in her sleep. She rubs at her hands, trying to clean them. She is haunted by the blood that she sees for the murders of Duncan, Lady Macduff, and Banquo. The Doctor and Gentlewoman are horrified.

Outside the castle, near Birnam Forest, Malcolm, Macduff, Lennox, Angus, and Ross plan their attack on Macbeth's castle. To disguise themselves, everyone cuts a branch from a tree and holds it in front of them as they climb Dunsinane hill towards the castle.

Back in his castle, Macbeth knows that Malcolm and Macduff are coming for him, but he is not afraid because he knows he can't be defeated until the forest climbs the hill. There is a scream – Lady Macbeth has killed herself. Macbeth is heartbroken. As he grieves for his wife, a servant comes to tell him that it looks as though the forest is climbing the hill to the castle!

The battle begins. Macbeth finds himself in combat with Macduff. Macbeth warns Macduff that he cannot be killed by anyone who was born of woman. Macduff laughs at Macbeth, because when Macduff was born, it was by an emergency operation – and so he wasn't 'born' in the typical way. As they battle, Macbeth is haunted by all of those that he has murdered in his bloody quest for power. All is lost.

Macduff kills Macbeth.

The play ends.