

Macbeth

Retold by Marcia Williams

Macbeth, a Scottish general, had just led his army to victory in the name of Macbeth's cousin, King Duncan. On his way back to report to the king with his friend Banquo, Macbeth met three witches who prophesied that he would become King of Scotland.

In the days that followed, Macbeth could think of nothing but the crown – the crown of Scotland that would sit on his head when he was the king! How soon would that be, he wondered. Should he be doing something to make sure it happened? No, he thought to himself. “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, without my stir.” But the seed of ambition had been sown by the three witches, and ambition is an evil master. Dark thoughts began to stir in Macbeth's mind – thoughts of ways he could hasten the day of his coronation.

When Banquo and Macbeth finally arrived at the palace, King Duncan could not have greeted them more warmly or with more gratitude for their great bravery. “O worthiest cousin! Welcome hither!” he cried. “I have begun to plant thee, and will labour to make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo, that hast no less deserved, let me infold thee and hold thee to my heart.”

Such a greeting from the king would have swelled the hearts of most men, but not Macbeth's. For shortly afterwards, King Duncan named his son, Malcolm, heir to the throne of Scotland. This was the honour that Macbeth had been hoping to receive.

“Stars, hide your fires!” Macbeth muttered to himself, “Let not light see my black and deep desires.”

King Duncan went on to say that he would visit Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Again, Macbeth should have been pleased by this honour. But now he was consumed by the desire to be king and all he could think about was that Malcolm now stood in his way. Maybe he could not rely on chance to make him king ... maybe he would have to give chance a helping hand!

Macbeth couldn't wait to tell his wife all that had happened, so he sent a letter ahead to her. Her excitement grew as she read it, for she was even greedier for power than Macbeth. She could already see the golden crown of Scotland on her husband's head. Macbeth was ambitious, but he had a sense of honour. Lady Macbeth was quite ruthless and only

honoured power and ambition. She was capable of destroying anyone who stood in her husband's way.

By the time Macbeth reached the castle, Lady Macbeth was already plotting King Duncan's death! When she greeted Macbeth she saw that his thoughts had also turned to murder, but she was worried by his lack of cunning. "Your face, my thane, is a book where men may read strange matters," she warned him. "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't."

Their talk was interrupted by the arrival of King Duncan and his two sons, Prince Malcolm and Prince Donalbain. The king was delighted by the sweet air around the castle, and by Lady Macbeth, who appeared so charming and welcoming. But Lady Macbeth was secretly urging her husband to kill him that night.



In preparation for the evil deed, Lady Macbeth drugged King Duncan's two guards, who lay beside the king as he slept.

Now that murder had become a reality, Macbeth was agonising over it. King Duncan was a good and gentle man, and a guest in Macbeth's house. It was his duty to protect the king, not murder him.

"We will proceed no further in this business," he told his wife. "If we should fail?"

"Screw your courage to the sticking-place and we'll not fail!" Lady Macbeth scorned.

So, swayed by his wife, Macbeth reluctantly agreed to murder the king as he lay in bed that night. Lady Macbeth's evil heart swelled with satisfaction and she retired to her chamber to await the time.

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Reluctantly, Macbeth picked up the daggers. Closing his eyes, he plunged them into King Duncan's heart. Then he ran from the room, his hands dark with the king's blood and the daggers still clenched in his fists.

"I have done the deed," he cried, overwhelmed with the horror of it.