

Act 1, Scene 1

Somewhere and nowhere. A terrifying storm. Lightning, with blinding white glimpses of a weird landscape. Each flash gives birth to an earth-shaking crack of thunder. Out of the darkness three voices wail.

Witch 1: 'When shall we three meet again,

In thunder, lightning or in rain?'

Witch 2: 'When the hurleyburley's done,

When the battle's lost and won.'

Witch 3: 'That will be ere the set of sun.'

Witch 1: 'Where the place?'

Witch 2: 'Upon the heath.'

Witch 3: 'There to meet with Macbeth.'

A cacophony of bloodcurdling yelps and inhuman screams, cutting through the noise of the storm.

Witch 1: 'I come, Graymalkin!'

Witch 2: 'Paddock calls.'

Lightning momentarily reveals three deformed shapes linking hands in a grotesque dance.

All: 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air.'

Act 1, Scene 2

Duncan, King of Scotland, was conferring with his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, at a fortress near Forres. Matters could not be worse.

Duncan: 'Didn't that dismay our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?'

The sergeant attempted a laugh.

Captain: 'Yes, as much as sparrows dismay eagles or hares lions. If I'm completely honest I'd say they were like overworked guns, their barrels exploding, as they lay into the enemy.' *He slipped to the ground.* 'I'm weak, I need help.'

Duncan: 'You've done well. *He turned to an attendant.* 'Go, get him to a doctor.'

As the sentries carried the sergeant out another newcomer, even fresher from the battlefield, arrived.

Scene 3:

It was beginning to grow dark. Thunder rumbled and the heath was covered with mud. Three deformed shapes crept out of the slime.

Witch 1: 'Where hast thou been, sister?'

Witch 2: 'Killing swine.'

Witch 3: 'Sister, where thou?'

Witch 1: 'A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,

And munched, and munched, and munched:

'Give me,' quoth I:

'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries.

Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger: But in a sieve I'll thither sail,

And, like a rat without a tail, I'll do, I'll do and I'll do!

Witch 2: 'I'll give thee a wind.'

Witch 1: 'Thou'rt kind.'

Witch 3: 'And I another.'

Witch 1: ': 'I myself have all the other; And the very ports they blow, All the quarters that they know In the shipman's card.'

'I'll drain him dry as hay:

Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his pent-house lid;

He shall live a man forbid.

Weary se'nights, nine times nine

Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:

Though his bark cannot be lost,

Yet it shall be tempest-tost.

Look what I have.'

Witch 2: 'Show me, show me!'

Witch 1: 'Here I have a pilot's thumb,

Wracked as homeward he did come.'

A drumbeat, marking the progress of an army on the march, could be heard approaching.

Witch 3: 'A drum! a drum! Macbeth doth come.'

The three joined hands and began moving slowly in a circle.

All: 'The weird sisters, hand in hand,

Posters of the sea and land,

Thus do go about, about:

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,

And thrice again, to make up nine.

Peace! The charm's wound up.'

Macbeth and Banquo walked ahead of their troops.

Macbeth: 'What a day. Victory and filthy weather. I've never seen so fair and foul a day.'

Banquo: 'How far is it to Forres?' *He stopped short as three human shapes rose in front of them. 'What are these? So withered and strangely dressed that they don't look like anything that lives on the earth.' He shut his eyes tight then opened them again. 'But they are definitely on it.' He took a step towards them. 'Are you living creatures? Or something that we should fear?'*

The three women cackled hysterically then hopped about, placing their bony fingers on their skinny lips.

'You seem to be women, but your beards cast doubt even on that.

Macbeth: 'Speak if you can. What are you?'

Witch 1: 'All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!' *Macbeth and Banquo glanced at each other.*

Witch 2: 'All hail, Macbeth. Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!'

Macbeth laughed nervously. Banquo stared at the women.

Witch 3: 'All hail Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter!'

Banquo: 'Good Sir, why do you start and seem to be afraid of things that sound so favourable?' *He turned back to the three creatures. 'Are you real or what? Who are you? You greet my partner showing knowledge of who he is and promise him great things, including the hope of royalty – which makes him speechless. You don't say anything to me. If you can look into the future and tell who will prosper and who won't, speak to me then.'* *They looked up slowly, their eyes boring into him.*

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The second witch shook her head slowly. Her voice was low and snake-like.

Witch 2: 'Not so happy, yet much happier.'

The third witch pointed at him.

Witch 3: 'Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none. So, all hail, Macbeth and Banquo.'

Witch 1: 'Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!' *They glided backwards and began merging with the gloom.*

They had gone.

Banquo: 'These are bubbles of the earth. Where have they gone?'

Macbeth: 'Vanished into the air. And what seemed solid melted like breath in the wind. I wish they had stayed.'

Banquo: 'Were we seeing things? Have we gone mad?'

Macbeth gazed at his friend for a moment then he laughed.

Macbeth: 'Your children will be kings.'

He doubled over and roared. Banquo began laughing too.

Banquo: 'And you'll be king,' *he slapped Macbeth on the back.*

Macbeth: 'That's not all. Thane of Cawdor too. Isn't that how the song it went?'

Banquo: 'That very tune, and the words too.' *They heard someone coming and two shapes – men on horseback – emerged from the darkness. 'Who's that?'*

Banquo: 'If you follow that to its logical conclusion it might yet bring you the crown in addition to Thane of Cawdor, but this is very strange: sometimes, to bring us to destruction, the forces of darkness tell us truths – convince us with simple facts, to betray us in more serious matters.'

Ross and Angus were talking quietly a few yards away. Banquo looked towards them.

Banquo: 'Cousins, a word.' *He patted Macbeth's arm then left him.*

Macbeth was immersed in confusion. What did it mean? He tried to apply reason to it. The weird women had told him two truths as innocent prologues to the imperial theme. This couldn't be bad. Nor could it be good. If it was bad why did it promise such success for him, beginning with an indisputable fact? He was Thane of Cawdor after all. But if it was good, why did it make him think about doing something so unnatural that it made his hair stand up on end and his heart pound furiously – knocking against his ribs? His worst moments of fear in battle were nothing to the horrors of his imagination now. The thought that kept coming to him was so outrageous, so unsettling, that he was losing all sense of reality.

Banquo whistled. Macbeth glanced up: they were watching him and laughing.

Banquo: 'Look at him, wrapt in thought.'

Macbeth smiled at them. But his mind was still full. If it was his fate to be king then Fate would make him king without his having to lift a finger.

Banquo: 'He's having difficulty with his new honours, which are like new clothes that don't really fit till we've worn them for a while.'

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Duncan: Has Cawdor been executed yet? Haven't those I sent to do it returned?'

Malcolm: 'My Liege, they haven't, but I've spoken to someone who witnessed it. He said the traitor confessed his treasons very frankly: he implored your Highness' pardon. He was deeply repentant. Nothing he ever did in his life was as much a credit to him as the way he faced his execution.'

The King's eyes showed his sorrow. He shook his head sadly.

Duncan: 'There's no way of reading a man's true intentions in his face. He was a gentleman on whom I had built an absolute trust.'

Duncan: 'Welcome. *He turned to Banquo.* 'Noble Banquo, you've deserved no less and no-one should think you have. Come, let me embrace you and hold you to my heart.'

Banquo: 'And if I grow there, the harvest is all yours.'

The King invited everyone to be seated. He walked slowly to his chair of state. His face was grave, now.

Duncan: 'My undoubted good fortune and happiness must be tempered for a moment with some serious business,' *He beckoned to Malcolm, who rose and went to the chair beside his father's.* Sons, kinsmen, thanes, and all those close to me: you should know that we are making our eldest, Malcolm, our heir, and from now on he will be known as the Prince of Cumberland. It is an honour that carries profound responsibilities.' *The assembled men clapped then they all got up and congratulated the young prince. Duncan called Macbeth to him.* 'We'll go from here to Inverness and honour you with a visit,'

Act 1, Scene 5

Lady Macbeth held the letter which the messenger had just brought her. She paced her room, reading it aloud.

Lady Macbeth: They met me in the day of success. They have supernatural knowledge. When I tried to question them further they vanished into the air. While I was still standing there, wrapped in wonder, some messengers came from the King, calling me Thane of Cawdor: the title which the weird sisters had only just saluted me with! And they had also referred me to the future with 'Hail, king that shalt be!' I had to tell you this my dearest partner of greatness so that you wouldn't miss the joy of knowing what has been promised you. Think about it and farewell.

Lady Macbeth clutched the letter to her heart. He was Glamis already and also Cawdor now! And she knew he would be... what he had been promised! And yet... She didn't think he could pull it off. He was too full of the milk of human kindness to do... what was necessary. He wanted greatness, he wasn't without ambition, but he had no ruthlessness in him. Whatever he wanted to achieve always had to be done honourably. No, he would never betray anyone. And yet he still wanted something he shouldn't have: what he wanted screamed out: 'If you want me you must do such and such!' But he feared to act on it. She couldn't wait for him to get home so that she could pour her influence into his ear, persuade him away from all the excuses that kept him from wearing the... the round golden shiny headpiece that fate and the supernatural seem to have crowned him with already.

There was a knock at the door. She thrust the letter behind her back guiltily.

'Even the raven – the bird of death – that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements is hoarse,' *She closed her eyes and raised her arms to the sky.* 'Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts. Take all my femininity away and fill me from the crown to the toe top full of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood, stop me from feeling pity so that no natural feelings can get in the way.'

She put her hands on her chest. 'Come to me, you spirits of evil, and make me less like a woman and more like a man. Come thick night and shroud me in the dunkest smoke of hell, so that my sharp knife won't see the wound it makes, nor that the light of heaven peep through the blanket of the dark to cry, 'stop! stop!''

She became aware of a noise below. She opened her eyes. It was Macbeth, surrounded by adoring members of the household. She turned and ran.

'Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!' *she rushed into his arms. He lifted her, held her close and kissed her.*

'Greater than both, according to the all-hail hereafter. Your letters have transported me beyond the immediate present: I feel the future in this moment.'

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Duncan and Banquo rode side by side as they approached Inverness.

Duncan: 'This castle is pleasantly situated. The air appeals to my senses.'

Banquo: 'Look. Swifts have built their nests here – proof of the delicacy and freshness of the air. See, there's no jut, frieze, buttress or corner that these birds haven't used. I've noticed that wherever they breed the air is delicate.'

Lady Macbeth ran out to meet them.

Duncan: 'See, see, our honoured hostess!'

A dozen grooms came to help them. The courtyard was swept so clean that one could see the great grey stones that paved it. Duncan smiled.

'People take so much trouble over my entertainment. It can be a problem, but I do appreciate it.'

Lady Macbeth: 'Anything I could do, doubled and then doubled again, would be nothing compared with the honours your Majesty piles on our house. For everything you've done in the past and now these new honours, we are deeply in your debt.'

Duncan: *looking around.* 'Where's the Thane of Cawdor? We tried to catch him but he rides fast. He's got something special to come home to, which helps his speed.' *Duncan looked admiringly at Lady Macbeth.* Beautiful and gracious hostess, we are your guest tonight.'

Lady Macbeth: 'We are your servants. Everything in our home is yours.'

Duncan: Give me your hand. Conduct me to my host. We love him greatly and will continue our favours to him. Lead the way, if you please, hostess.'

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Macbeth: 'We won't go any further with this business. He's honoured me lately.' *His voice was almost pleading.* 'And I've earned golden opinions from all sorts of people. I want to enjoy them like new clothes – not cast them aside so soon.'

Lady Macbeth: 'Were you drunk when you dreamt of wearing a king's robes? And has that dream slept since then, waking now, sick and trembling at what you wanted to do?' *She snapped her fingers.* 'From now on, that's how much I value your love.'

When he didn't say anything, she took his arm and shook it.

'Are you afraid to be the same in your actions as you are in your desire? Do you want to spend the rest of your life longing for a crown, knowing that you're nothing more than a coward, letting 'I don't dare' answer 'I want'? Do you want to eat fish without getting your feet wet like the poor cat in the saying?'

Macbeth: 'Stop. Please don't. I would dare to do anything a man should do. There are some things no human being should even think of doing.'

Lady Macbeth: 'What animal were you then when you thought about it, only to break your promise to me? When you dared to do it, then you were a man. And the more you dared the more of a man you were in my eyes. There were no excuses then and now you're all excuses: they're just pouring out – making themselves! And unmaking you!'

He turned away and she went around him and faced him squarely.

'Look here. I know what a tender thing it is to love a baby. I would rather dash its brains out than break a promise I've made to you!'

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