

Macbeth

by William Shakespeare
Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One Victory, and Prophecy

Startled by a lightning-strike close by atop the rocky hill, a black charger recoils and shudders, halting in the dirt road. Wild-eyed, the lathered beast rears and neighs fearfully, thrusting out front hooves as if to fend off the enveloping thunder.

The rider, a cloaked soldier nearly flung from the saddle, curses, digs in his spurs, and lashes the steed forward, resuming an urgent mission. The dead oak's shattered trunk smolders and smokes as man and horse career downhill at a gallop, disappearing into the gloomy mist in a frenzied rush to join in the clamor of war in the woods below.

On the knoll, amid the skeletal tree's splintered trunk and barren, blackened branches, strange, luminous vapors gather to rise, shimmering in the dim twilight; specters coalesce—inchoate, but with crones' hard voices.

“When shall we three meet again, in thunder, lightning, or in rain?”

“When the hurlyburly's done; when the battle's lost and won.”

“That will be ere the set of sun!” notes the third.

“Where the place?” asks the first.

“Upon the heath.”

“There to meet with Macbeth!” adds the third.

“I come, Graymalkin,” the first assures the distant feline that serves her.

The second hears her own far-away familiar. “Paddock calls.”

“Anon!” the third cries to hers, as they fade and float aloft.

Fair is foul, and foul is fair! thinks the leader, drifting away. *Hover through fog and filthy air!*

“What bloody man is that?” asks old Duncan, King of Scotland, at the edge of the battle. “*He can report, as seemeth by his plight, of the revolt the newest state.*”

Standing near royal palace at Forres with his two grown sons and several thanes, the barons who rule clans of Scots, their sovereign of a thousand years ago wants intelligence on his troops' fight to quell an insurrection.

“This is the sergeant who like a good and hardy soldier fought 'gainst my captivity!” says Malcolm, the king's elder son. “*Hail, brave friend! Say to the king thy knowledge of the broil as thou didst leave it!*”

The soldier bows, a hand clasped against his bleeding side. “*Doubtful* it stood, as with two spent swimmers that do cling together and choke their art!” says the wounded warrior. “The merciless Macdonwald—worthy to be a rebel, for that the multiplying villainies of nature do swarm upon him!—from the Western Isles of *kerns* and *gallowglasses*—Irish mercenaries: foot soldiers and riders wielding battleaxes—“is supplied! And Fortune, on his damnèd quarrel *smiling*, showed like a rebel's *whore!*”

“But all's too *weak!* For *brave Macbeth*—well he deserves that name!—disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, which smoldered with bloody execution, like Valour's minion carved out his passage till he faced the slave—and ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell to him till he *unseamed* him from the nave to the chops, and fixed his head upon our battlements!”

“Oh, *valiant* cousin! Worthy *gentleman!*” cries the king.

“As when the sun 'gins his reflection, shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break, so from that spring whence comfort *seemed* to come, *discomfort* swells,” says the sergeant. “Mark, King of Scotland, *mark!*—no sooner had justice, with valour armed, compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels than the *Norwegian* lord, surveying advantage, with furbished arms and new supplies of men began a *fresh* assault!”

Duncan's people had not foreseen the Vikings' invasion. "Dismayed not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?"

"Yes—as sparrows *eagles*, or the hare the *lion!*" says the soldier. "If I say sooth, I must report they were as *cannons* overcharged with *double* cracks, so doubly they redoubled strokes upon the foe!" He recalls the fierce fighting: "Except that they meant to *bathe* in reeking wounds, or consecrate another *Golgotha*, I cannot tell!"

The pale soldier staggers. "But I am faint; my gashes cry for help...."

Duncan gives him a reassuring clap on the shoulder. "So well thy *words* become thee as thy wounds!—they smack of honour both! Go, get him surgeons," he tells his attendants. As the injured sergeant is helped away, the king sees one of the lords of his realm approaching on horseback. "Who comes here?"

"The worthy Thane of Rosse," Malcolm tells him.

"What a haste looks through his eyes!" observes the silver-haired Thane of Lennox, standing with the royals. "So should he look who seems to speak things strange...."

Still holding the reins, young Rosse strides to Duncan. "God save the king!"

"Whence camest thou, worthy thane?"

"From Fife, great king, where the Norwegian banners flout the sky and fan our people cold! Norway himself, with terrible numbers, assisted by that most disloyal traitor, the Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict—until Bellona's bridegroom,"—Macbeth, allied with the Roman goddess of war, "lapped in proof,"—bloodied, "*confronted* him with self-comparisons: point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm, *curbing* his lavish spirit!

"And, to conclude: the *victory* fell to *us!*"

Duncan is amazed and delighted. "Great *happiness!*" The Vikings' ships had sailed into the firth and landed near the very heart of Scotland, expecting to rout easily the royal forces then battling the northern rebels.

"Thus now Sweno, Norway's king, craves *composition!*"—settlement. "Nor would we deign him burial of his men till he disbursed at Saint Colme's Inch"—an island in the firth—"ten *thousand guilders* to our general use!"

The king nods, highly pleased. But his thoughts soon turn grave. "No more shall *that* Thane of Cawdor deceive our bosom interest!" he growls. "Go pronounce his present *death*, and with his former title greet *Macbeth!*"

Rosse bows. "I'll see it done."

"What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath *won!*" Duncan decrees.

Rumbling thunder rolls out across the Scottish heath near Forres, as three spectres meet again, this time assuming shapes familiar to men.

"Where hast thou been, Sister?"

"Killing swine."

"Sister, where thou?" asks the newest.

The eldest has a tale to tell. "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."

The specter, affronted at being denied and ordered away, intends to retaliate. "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!*"

"I'll give thee a wind!"

"Thou'rt kind."

"And I another!"

"I myself *have* all the others, and the very ports they blow, all the quarters"—wind directions—"that they know i' 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’nnights, 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. . . .”

“Show me, show me!”

“Here I have a pilot’s thumb!—*wrecked* as homeward he did come.”

“A drum, a drum!” cries the youngest; they can hear sound of military men on the march.

“*Macbeth* doth come!”

As the three circle, invoking primordial powers, the most ancient figure intones, “The weird sisters, hand in hand, riders 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.” The agents of Fate stand still and wait, as two soldiers ride along the rutted road below.

The generals, having led their victorious troops nearly home, have now veered away eastward on horseback, headed for the king’s palace. Macbeth, still exulting in success, eyes the threatening clouds. “So foul and fair a day I have not seen!”

“How far is’t called to Forres?” asks Banquo. As they come up a rise in the wind-blown desolation, he is surprised to find three cloaked and hooded figures standing by the road. “What are these, so withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like the inhabitants o’ the earth, and yet are on’t?”

The commanders ride closer and stop, not dismounting. Banquo speaks first—annoying the three. “*Live* you?—or are you aught that *man* may question?”

“You seem to understand me, I see, each at once her chappy finger laying upon her skinny lips. You should be *women*—and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so!”

“Speak, if you can,” demands Macbeth. “What *are* you?”

The three raise gnarled hands.

“All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!” says the youngest.

“All hail Macbeth. Hail to thee, Thane of *Cawdor*!”

“All hail *Macbeth*! Thou shalt be *king* hereafter!” says the oldest.

Macbeth stares, taken aback.

Banquo watches him; two of the crones have prophesied great advancement. “Good sir, why do you start, and seem to *fear* things that do sound so fair?” He turns to the three. “I’ the name of truth, are ye fantastical, or that indeed which outwardly ye show? My noble partner you greet with present grace, and great prediction of noble having, and of such *royal* hope that he seems rapt withal!

“To *me* you speak not. If you can look into the seeds of time and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate.”

“Hail!”

“Hail.”

“Hail.”

“Lesser than Macbeth, and *greater*!” says the new one.

“Not so happy, yet much *happier*”—more fortunate, adds the second.

“Thou shalt beget *kings*, though thou be none,” pronounces the eldest gravely. “So all hail Macbeth and Banquo.”

The youngest lifts her hands. “*Banquo* and Macbeth, *all hail*!” Her eyes sparkle with wry amusement.

“Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more!” demands Macbeth. “By Sinel’s death I know I am Thane of Glamis; but how of *Cawdor*? The Thane of Cawdor *lives*, a prosperous gentleman—and to be *king* stands not within the prospect of belief, no more than to be Cawdor!

“Say from whence you owe this strange intelligence, and why upon this wind-blasted heath you stop our way with such prophetic greeting! *Speak*, I charge you!”

But the specters are done, for now. The two men's horses whinny, hitching and shuffling uneasily, as the three images waver and warp, swirl and fade—and then disappear.

"The earth hath *bubbles* as the water has, and these are of *them!*" cries Banquo, astonished. Whither are they vanished?"

"Into the air! And what *seemed* corporal melted as breath into the wind!" says Macbeth. "Would they had stayed...."

Banquo looks around them, seeing, above and ahead, only dark gray sky and barren land. "Were such things here as we do speak about? Or have we eaten on the insane-root that takes the reason prisoner?"

Macbeth regards him carefully. "Your children shall be kings."

"*You shall be king!*"

"And Thane of Cawdor, too—went it not so?"

"To the selfsame tune and words." Banquo sees horses approaching from the east. "Who's here?"

Two other thanes of King Duncan's court, Lords Rosse and Angus, ride up the hillock toward them. The noblemen all greet each other warmly, and they dismount to talk.

"The king hath happily received, Macbeth, the news of thy success," Rosse tells him, "and when he reads thy *personal* venture in the rebels' fight, his wonders and his praises do contend which should be thine or his!

"Silenced with that, in viewing o'er the rest o' the same day, he finds thee in the stout *Norwegian* ranks, nothing afeard of what thyself didst *make*: strange images of *death!*"

"As thick as hail came post with post!—and every one did bear thy praises in his kingdom's great defence, and poured them down before him!"

Angus smiles. "We are sent to give thee from our royal master *thanks*—only to herald thee into his sight, not *pay* thee!"

"And, as an earnest of a greater honour, he bade me, from him, call thee *Thane of Cawdor!*" says Rosse. "In which addition: *Hail*, most worthy thane! For it is thine!"

Banquo remembers the grotesque prophets. *What!—can the devil speak true?* he wonders.

Macbeth frowns. "The Thane of Cawdor lives; why do you dress me in borrowed robes?"

"Who *was* the thane lives yet," says Angus, "but under heavy *judgment* bears that life which he deserves to lose! Whether he was combinèd with those of Norway, or did line the rebel with hidden help and vantage, or with *both* he laboured in his country's wreck, I know not; but treasons, capital, confessed and proved, have overthrown him."

Macbeth is privately delighted. *Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor! The greatest is beyond!*—the crown awaits. "Thanks for your pains," he tells Rosse and Angus, pulling Banquo aside. He speaks in a hush: "Do you not hope your children shall be *kings*, when those that gave the thane of Cawdor to me promised no less to them?"

Banquo shrugs. "That, trusted home, might yet enkindle *you* unto the *crown*, besides the thane of Cawdor. But 'tis *strange*—and oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to *betray* us in deepest consequence."

Macbeth is silent, thoughtful.

Banquo sees the others men's puzzled looks. "Cousins, a word, I pray you." He tells the thanes about the crones; but, wary of augury—and of oracles' questionable candor—he reveals only that the three spoke an enigma about kings.

As they talk, Macbeth rejoices at the news. *Two truths are told, as happy prologues to the swelling act of the imperial theme!* He nods to the thanes. "I thank you, gentlemen!"

Feverishly, he ponders the prophecy. *Cannot be ill—cannot be good! If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success, commencing in a truth?—I am Thane of Cawdor! If good, why do I yield to that suggestion whose horrid image doth unfix my hair, and make my seated heart knock at my ribs, against the use of nature?*

Present fears are less than horrible imaginings! My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, so shakes my simpler state of mind that function is smothered in surmise, and nothing is but what is not!

“Look, how our partner’s rapt,” says Banquo; the three thanes believe the new title weighs heavily on Macbeth.

Thinks Macbeth, *If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir!* The crime he has already contemplated may be needless.

Banquo understands change, added challenges, unknown threats. “New honors come upon him strange: like our garments, cleave not to their mould but with the aid of use,” he tells Rosse and Angus.

Macbeth is now eager. *Come what comes, may time and the hour run through the roughest day!*

Banquo calls to him. “Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.”

Leading his horse, Macbeth rejoins the others. “Give me your favour—my dull brain was wrought with things forgotten.

“Kind gentlemen, your pains are registered where every day I turn the leaf to read them!

“Let us toward the king; think upon what hath chanced; and, after more time, in the interim having weighed it, let us speak our free hearts each to other.”

“Very gladly,” says Banquo.

“Till then, enough. Come, friends.”

The four lords ride east together to meet with their sovereign.

Chapter Two Flower and Serpent

In the throne room of his palace at Forres, the monarch is attended by his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, with Lord Lennox and other thanes and courtiers.

“Is execution done on Cawdor?” asks King Duncan. “Are not those in commission yet returned?”

“My liege, they are not yet come back,” says Malcolm. “But I have spoke with one that saw him die—who did report that very frankly he confessed his treasons, implored Your Highness’ pardon, and set forth a deep repentance.”

Duncan scorns the traitor’s bravado: “Nothing in *his* life became him like the *leaving* it! He died as one that had been *studied* in his death, throwing away the dearest thing he owned as ’twere a careless trifle.

“There’s no art for finding the mind’s construction in the face,” the king reflects sadly. “He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust.”

A sennet of cornets signals the return of Rosse and Angus, bringing the generals.

“O worthiest cousin!” cries Duncan, embracing Macbeth. “The sin of my *ingratitude* even now was heavy on me! Thou art so far *before* that swiftest wing of recompense is slow to overtake thee! Would thou hadst *less* deserved, so the proportion of both thanks and payment might have been *mine*! Only I have left to say: More is thy due than more than all can pay!”

“The service and the loyalty I owe, in doing it pays itself,” Macbeth replies humbly. “Your Highness’ part is to receive our duties; and our duties are to your throne and state, children and servants—who do but what they should, by doing everything safe toward your love and honour.”

“Welcome hither!” says Duncan warmly. “I have begun to *plant* thee, and will labour to make thee full of *growing*!

“Noble *Banquo*, that hast no less deserved, and must be *known* no less to have done!—so let me enfold *thee*, and hold thee to my heart!”

“There if I grow, the harvest is your own,” pledges Banquo.

The king, mindful of the tumultuous times, intends to consolidate his realm, and to provide for a stable succession. He has a major announcement.

There are tears in his eyes. “My plenteous joys, wanton in fulness, seek to hide themselves in drops of sorrow!

“Sons, kinsmen, thanes, and you whose places are the nearest, know that we will establish our estate upon our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter the *Prince of Cumberland!*

“Which honour must not, unaccompanied, invest him only, but signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine on *all* deservers!”

Malcolm, a quiet and honorable man in his thirties, is highly regarded, and his elevation to govern Cumberland—he is thus designated as heir to the throne—is well received. And the other thanes expect to be rewarded generously for their help in preserving the kingdom.

Duncan turns to beam once more at Macbeth. “From hence to Inverness, and bind us further to you!” The king and his retinue will visit the newly elevated nobleman at his castle.

“The rest is labour, which is not used for *you*,” Macbeth tells him. “I’ll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful the hearing of my wife with your approach!

“So, humbly, I take my leave,” he says, with a bow.

“My worthy Cawdor!” says Duncan fondly as he goes.

But Macbeth, walking away, is much perturbed. *The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step on which I must fall down!—or else o’erleap, for in my way it lies!*

Stars, hide your fires: let not light see my black and deep desires, the eye not see the hand; yet let that be which the eye fears, when it is done to see!

In the visitors’ quarters he calls for a messenger—a fast rider—then sits down and begins to write.

The king hears further generous praise of Macbeth.

Duncan nods. “*True*, worthy Banquo! He is full so valiant that when in *his* commendations I am fed it is a *banquet* to me!”

He motions to his attendants, unwilling to wait any longer. “Let’s *after* him, whose care is gone before to bid us welcome!

“He is a peerless kinsman!” he tells Lennox, smiling.

The king and his party begin immediate preparations for their day-long journey.

In the castle at Inverness, Lady Macbeth reads a letter just brought by post from her husband. He writes of a strange prophecy.

“They met me in the day of success—and I have learned, by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge!

“When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves *air*, into which they vanished! Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it came missives from the king, who all-hailed me *Thane of Cawdor!*—by which title before these weird sisters had saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with, “Hail, *king* that shalt be!”

“This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner in greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee! Lay it to thy heart, and farewell!”

She grips the letter tightly. *Glamis thou art, and Cawdor!—and shalt be what thou art promised!*

She paces. *Yet do I fear thy nature: it is too full o’ the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great, art not without ambition—but without the ill will that should attend it! What thou wouldst highly, that wouldst thou holily—wouldst not play false, and yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou’ldst rather have, great Glamis, that which cries, ‘Thus thou must do if thou’ld have it!’ than that which thou dost fear to do, then wishest should be undone!*

Hie thee hither, that I may pour my spirits in thine ear, and chastise with the valour of my tongue all that impedes thee from the golden round which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem to have thee crowned withal!

An excited messenger rushes toward her. “What is your tidings?”

He bows. “The *king* comes here tonight!”

“Thou’rt mad to say it!” Lady Macbeth is startled by news so suitable to her intent. “Is not thy master with him?—who, were’t so, would have informed us for preparation!”

“So please you, it is *true!* Our thane *is* coming!—one of my fellows had the speed of him, who, almost dead for *breath*, had scarcely more than would make up his message!”

“Give him tending; he brings great news!” The man bows and hurries away; there is much to do—and quickly—for a royal visit.

The lady is grimly pleased. *The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements!*

Come, you spirits that attend on mortal thoughts! Unsex me here, and fill me, from the crown to the toe, full of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood; stop up the access and passage to remorse, so that no compunctious visitings of Nature shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between the effect and it! Come to my woman’s breasts and make my milk into gall, you murdering ministers, wherever in your sightless substances you wait on nature’s mischief!

Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark to cry, ‘Hold, hold!’

Just as she finishes the fierce invocation, Macbeth comes to her.

She embraces him. “Great Glamis! Worthy *Cawdor!*—greater than *both*, by the all-hail hereafter! Thy letters have transported me beyond this ignorant present, and I feel now the *future* in the instant!”

Macbeth kisses her, but after a moment he must break away. “My dearest love, *Duncan* comes here tonight!”

“And when goes hence?”

“Tomorrow, as he purposes.”

“Oh, never shall sun *that* morrow see!”

They have long shared nefarious notions, if not the resolve to accomplish them.

Lady Macbeth leans back, looking up at him. “Your face, my thane, is as a *book* where men may read strange matters! To *beguile* the time, *look* like the time: bear *welcome* in your eye, your hand, your tongue—look like the innocent flower, but *be* the serpent under’t!

“He that’s coming must be provided for. And you shall put this night’s great business into *my* dispatch—which shall to all our nights and days *to come* give solely sovereign sway and masterdom!”

Macbeth nods—and frowns, thinking of the Prince of Cumberland. But the king is expected to arrive at any moment. “We will speak further...”

“Only look up *clear*; to *alter* favour is to be feared!” she warns. “Leave all the rest to me!”

Torches light the way as King Duncan and his train approach Macbeth’s dark-stone fastness. A lute plays softly as the noblemen enter the dim, two-storied main hall: Malcolm and Donalbain, Banquo, and the Thanes of Macduff, Lennox, Rosse and Angus, all followed by attendants.

“This castle hath a pleasant seat,” Duncan observes. “The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses.”

Banquo concurs, pointing to the birds nesting among rafters near the high loft. “This guest of summer, the temple-haunting martlet, does approve, by his lovèd mansionry, that the heavens’ breath smells woingly here! No jutty, frieze, buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle. Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed, the air is delicate.”

Lady Macbeth hurries forth to greet the royal contingent. She curtsies, slowly and deeply. “See, see, our honoured hostess!” cries Duncan, taking her hands. He glances back as his party continues to file into the massive hall. “The love that follows us sometime is our trouble, which still we thank as love.” He is aware of imposing on her hospitality—and of her sudden increase in prosperity. “Herein I teach you how you shall bid ‘God shield us!’ for your pains—and thank us for your trouble!”

Lady Macbeth is skillfully obsequious: “All our service in every point *twice* done, and then done *double*, were poor and single business to contend against those honours, deep and broad, wherewith Your Majesty loads our house! For those of old, and the late dignities heaped up to them, we rest your hermits!”

Duncan looks around. “Where’s the Thane of Cawdor? We cursed him at the heels, and had a purpose to be his purveyor; but he rides well, and his great love, sharp as his spur, hath hold him to his home before us.

“Fair and noble hostess, we are your guest tonight.”

Lady Macbeth smiles graciously. “Your servants ever have theirs, themselves and what is theirs in compt to make their audit at Your Highness’ pleasure, ever to return your *own!*”

“Give me your hand,” says Duncan kindly. “Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly, and shall continue our graces towards him!

“By your leave, hostess.” The white-haired monarch kisses her hand.

Loud laughter resounds over conversation in the torch-lighted dining hall. Spoons and knives clatter against wooden trenchers as kitchen servants, harried by the steward, rush back and forth with dishes, pots, platters and mugs, roasted meats, crusty bread and potent wine for the royal guest and his party of revelers.

But Macbeth, standing alone in a dim side room, is contending with concern.

If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well it were done quickly! If the assassination could trammel-up the consequence, and catch with its surcease success, so that only this blow might be the be-all and the end-all—here but here upon this bench in the school of Time we’d jump the life to come!

But in these cases we still have judgment: that herein we but teach bloody instructions which, being taught, return to plague the inventor! This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips!

Even through the door he can recognize the muffled laugh of King Duncan.

He’s here in double trust: first, as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed, and his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself!

Besides this, Duncan hath borne his faculties so meetly, hath been so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against the deep damnation of his taking-off! And pity, like a naked, new-born babe straining to howl, or heaven’s cherubim, horsed upon the sightless couriers of the air, shall blast the horrid deed into every eye so that tears shall drown the wind!

I have no spur to prick the side of my intent but only vaulting ambition which o’erleaps itself and falls on the other!

Lady Macbeth finds him fretting. “How now,” he asks. “What news?”

She is quite annoyed: “He has almost supped! Why have you left the chamber?”

“Hath he asked for me?”

She frowns at the foolish question: “Know you not he *has?*”

Macbeth has decided. “We will proceed no further in this business! He hath *honoured* me of late; and I have bought golden opinions from all sorts of people, which would be *worn* now in their newest gloss, not cast aside so soon.”

Her irascible impatience is immediate: “Was the hope *drunk* wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it *slept* since!—and wakes it now, to look so green and pale at what it did so freely? From this time, such I account thy *love!*”

“Art thou afraid to be the same in thine own *act* and *valour* as thou art in *desire*? Wouldst thou have that which thou esteem’st the ornament of life,”—the crown, “but live a *coward* in thine *own* esteem, letting ‘*I dare not*’ wait upon ‘*I would,*’ like the poor cat i’ the adage?”—*The cat wanted fish, but would not wet her feet.*

“Prithee, *peace,*” says Macbeth, nettled. “*I dare* do all that may become a *man!*—who dares do more is none!”

Lady Macbeth challenges him: “What *beast* was’t, then, that made you propose this enterprise to me? When you *durst* do it, *then* you were a *man!*—and being *more* than what you were, you would be so much *more* the man! Neither time nor place did *then* adhere, and yet you would have *made* both!

“They have made *themselves!*—but their fitness now does *unmake* you!” she tells him, disgusted. “I have given suckle, and know how tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me; I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from the boneless gums, and dashed his brains out, had I so *sworn* as you have done to do *this!*”

Macbeth regards her dourly. “If we should fail?”

“We fail!—but tighten your courage to the sticking-place and we’ll *not* fail!

“When Duncan is asleep—whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey soundly invite him—his two chamberlains will I with wine and wassail so overwhelm that reason, the warder of the brain, shall be a *fume*, and the receipt of memory only a *wisp!*”

“When in swinish sleep their drenched natures lie as in a death, what cannot you and I perform upon the unguarded Duncan?—what not put upon his spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt of our great quell?”

Macbeth is once again swayed by her stern will. “Bring forth men-children only; for thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but *males!*” And the scheme—or, rather, its outcome—still tempts him. He rejoins the plot. “Will it be received—when we have marked with blood those sleepy two of his own chamber, and used their very daggers—that *they* have done’t?”

“Who dares receive it *other?*—as we shall make our *griefs* in clamour *roar* upon his death!”

Macbeth nods agreement. “I am settled, and bend up each corporal agent to this terrible feat!

“Away, and *mock* the time with *fairest* show!

“False face must hide what the false heart doth know!”

From the dining hall, now empty but for two servants, Lord Banquo enters the dark central area of Macbeth’s castle. The sumptuous supper is long since finished; hearty had drinking further dulled the senses of those who had lingered until they verged on slumber even at the table.

Members of the king’s household are bedded in the loft; the others have been lodged in buildings just beyond the castle keep.

Banquo and his son Fleance, who had gone outside to check on the horses, are the last guests to retire. The youth carries a small torch.

“How goes the night, boy?”

“The *moon* is down; I have not heard the clock.”

“And she goes down at twelve....”

“I take’t ’tis later, sir.”

“Hold; take my sword. There’s husbandry in heaven: their candles are all out.” They head for the stone steps leading up to the guests’ quarters in the loft.

Banquo removes the leather sheath holding his dagger. “Take thee that, too.” He yawns. “A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, and yet I would not sleep.” He has been troubled by

nightmares. “Merciful powers, restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature gives way to in repose!”

Through the stone arch at the far end of the dark room, two men enter, one with a candle.

“Give me my sword,” Banquo tells his son. “Who’s there?” he asks warily.

“A friend,” Macbeth replies.

Banquo hands the weapon back to Fleance. “What, sir, not yet at rest? The king’s a-bed. He hath been in unusual pleasure, and sent forth great largess for your offices!” He reaches into a pocket. “This *diamond* he greets your wife withal, by the name of ‘most kind hostess!’—and shuts himself up in measureless content!”

Macbeth, taking the precious stone, is modest about his estate’s welcome: “Being unprepared, our will became the servant to *defect*, which else should freely have wrought.”

“All’s well,” Banquo assures him. He pauses in the flickering light, glancing down at the castle’s stone floor, strewn with straw. “I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters. To you they have showed some truth....”

“I think not of them,” Macbeth claims. “Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve, we would spend it in some words upon that business, if you would grant the time.”

Banquo smiles. “At your kind’st leisure.”

Macbeth makes a political overture: “If you shall cleave to my intent, when ’tis, it shall make *honour* for you.”

“So I lose none in seeking to augment it, but still keep my bosom franchised and allegiance clear, I shall be counselled.” Banquo will listen.

“Good repose the while!”

“Thanks, sir; the like to you!” With the torch, Fleance precedes Banquo up the steep steps along the high wall to the royal party’s sleeping chambers.

Macbeth tells the servant, “Go; bid thy mistress that, when my drink is ready, she strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed!” He declines to take the candle, and the man goes to deliver the message.

Macbeth waits, silent in the darkness.

He stands against the far wall and broods.

Then, suddenly, he stares, wide-eyed. *Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?*

Come, let me clutch thee! But his hand closes on empty air. *I have thee not, and yet I see thee still! Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible to feeling as to sight? Or art thou but a dagger of the mind, a false creation proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?*

I see thee yet, in form as palpable as this which now I draw! Thou marshal’st me the way that I was going—and such an instrument I was to use!

Mine eyes are made the fools o’ the other senses—or else worth all the rest!

Gripping his own dagger’s haft, he rubs his eyes with the other hand; yet the phantom knife remains. *I see thee still—and on thy blade are dudgeon goutts of blood, which was not so before!* He tries to resist imaginings: *There’s no such thing!—it is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes!*

Now o’er one-half the world Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse the curtained sleep; witchcraft celebrates pale Hecate’s offerings—and withered Murder, alarumed by his sentinel the wolf, whose howl’s his watch, thus with his stealthy pace, with Tarquin’s ravishing strides, towards his design moves like a ghost!

Thou sure and firm-set earth, hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear thy very stones prate of my whereabouts, and take the present horror from the time which now suits with it!

He stands at the foot of the flight of stairs. *Whiles I threat, he lives. Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives!*

Finally he hears his wife’s signal, and he begins to climb the steps.

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.

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

Lady Macbeth carries a candlestick from the dining hall, where she has seen that all of the guests, attendants and servants are gone.

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold! What hath quenched them hath given me fire! Moving slowly, she enters the dark, cavernous room.

A sound startles her. *Hark!* She holds the candle higher. *Peace! It was the owl that shrieked—the fatal bellman, which gives the stern 'st good-night!*

She looks up to the loft. *He is about it! The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms do mock their charge with snores. I have so drugged their possets that Death and Nature do contend about them whether they live or die!*

From above, she hears a distant mumble: “Who’s there? *What, ho!*”

Lady Macbeth moves back from the steps, trying to see up into the front of the loft. *Alack, I am afraid they have awaked, and 'tis not done! The attempt and not the deed confounds us!*

Hark! She listens, but hears nothing. *I laid their daggers ready; he could not miss 'em!*

She remembers King Duncan, lying asleep. *Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't!*

She watches Macbeth come down the stairs, and speaks, almost breathless: “My husband!”

“I have done the deed,” he tells her. “Didst thou not hear a noise?”

“I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry. Did not you speak?”

“When?”

“Now.”

“As I descended?”

“Aye.”

He raises a hand for quiet, and peers toward the loft. “Hark.” No sound. “Who lies i’ the second chamber?”

“Donalbain.”

Macbeth has glimpsed his bloody hands in the candlelight. “This is a sorry sight!”

“A foolish *thought*, to say a *sorry* sight!” chides Lady Macbeth, pleased with progress.

He thinks of Duncan’s chamberlains. “There’s one did laugh in’s sleep, and one cried ‘Murder!’ such that they did wake each other. I stood and heard them; but they did say their prayers, and addressed them again to sleep.”

“*There* are two lodged together,” says the lady, with cold contempt.

“One cried, ‘God bless us,’ and ‘Amen!’ the other—as if they had *seen* me with these hangman’s hands! Listening to their fear, I could not say ‘Amen’ when they did say ‘God bless us’ . . .”

“Consider it not so deeply.”

“But wherefore could not I pronounce ‘Amen’? I had most *need* of blessing, and ‘Amen’ stuck in my throat!”

“These deeds must not be thought after in these ways,” she warns. “*So*, it will make us mad!”

“Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more!—Macbeth does *murder* sleep!’”

“The innocent sleep,” he murmurs, drifting into a dark reverie of loss, “sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care; the death of each day’s life.” Already he senses a growing sorrow, a deep aching far beyond remedy; he would welcome sleep. “Sore labour’s bath, balm of hurt minds, great Nature’s second course.” He whispers: “Chief nourisher in life’s feast—”

Lady Macbeth is peeved by his maudlin musing: “What do you *mean*?”

He shivers. “Still it cried, ‘*Sleep no more!*’ to all the house! ‘Glamis hath *murdered* sleep, and therefore *Cawdor* shall sleep no more!—*Macbeth shall sleep no more!*’”

“*Who* was it that thus cried?” she demands. “Why, worthy thane, you do unbend your noble strength, to think so brainsickly of things!” She moves closer. “Go get some water, and wash this filthy witness from your hand,” she orders harshly. The candlelight reveals more. “Why did you

bring these daggers from the place? They must lie *there!* Go, carry them!—and smear the sleepy grooms with blood!”

Macbeth stares. “I’ll go no more! I am afraid to *think* what I have done!—*look* on’t again I dare not!”

“Infirm of purpose! Give *me* the daggers! The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures; ’tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil! If he do bleed, I’ll *gild* the faces of the grooms withal, for it must seem their *guilt*.” Her husband does not respond to the play on words. She hands him the candlestick, takes the stained weapons, and hastily climbs the stairs.

Feverish, he leans against the cold, rough stone of the wall.

A sudden, sharp rap startles him; he springs forward, listening. *Whence is that knocking? How is’t with me, when every noise appalls me?*

His shaking threatens to put out the candle; he steadies it—and again sees the crimson stains. *What hands are here? Oh, they pluck out mine eyes! Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No!—this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red!*

Lady Macbeth comes down the steps. “My hands are of your colour; but I shame to wear a *heart* so white!” Sharp raps sound again. “I hear a knocking at the south entry. Retire we to our chamber; a little water clears us of this deed. How easy is it, then!”

She looks scornfully at the rattled man. “Your constancy hath left you unattended.

“*Hark!* More knocking! Get on your night robe, lest occasion call us, and show us to be watchers.

“Be not lost so poorly in your thoughts!” she warns, moving quickly toward their chambers.

“To know my deed, ’twere best not know *myself*,” mutters Macbeth, following.

The noise at the door is louder. “Wake *Duncan* with thy knocking,” whispers Macbeth. “I would thou *couldst!*”

Chapter Three Horror and Treachery

Pounding at the entrance awakens the elderly night porter, who at last struggles up from his bench in a daze produced by much spiced ale.

“Here’s a knocking *indeed*,” he grumbles, leaving his chamber. “If a man were porter of *Hell*-gate, *he* should have much gold for turning the key!” Further raps echo in the hall, still dim as the glow of sunrise brightens the high, open windows. He shuffles toward the door.

“Knock, knock, *knock!* Who’s there, i’ the name of B’elzebub?”

“Here’s a *farmer*, that hanged himself on the *expectation* of plenty. *You* come in time! Have kerchiefs enow about you: *here* you’ll *sweat* for’t!”

“Knock, *knock!* Who’s *there*, in the other devil’s name?”

“Faith, here’s an *equivocator*, who could swear in *both* the scales against *either* scale; who committed treason enough, for God’s sake—yet could not equivocate to *Heaven!* Oh, come *in*, equivocator!” He pauses to chuckle. But the knocking grows louder.

“*Knock, knock, knock!* Who’s *there?*” The limping gait is bringing him and his candle to the heavy oak door.

“Faith, here’s an English *tailor* come hither, for stealing out of a French hose,” he cackles, enjoying his own ribald whimsy. “Come *in*, tailor!—*here* you may roast your goose!” He continues ambling. The rapping is more insistent.

“Knock, *knock*; never at quiet! What *are* you?”

“But this place is too cold for *Hell*,” he grumbles. I’ll devil-porter it no further; I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.

“Anon, *anon!*” he cries. He unlocks the door and swings it open. “I pray you, remember the porter,” he says with a bow, suggesting a gratuity.

Macduff and Lennox arose well before dawn, and they have come to join the king.

By the light of the ancient porter’s guttering flame, Macduff teases him: “Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed, that you do lie so late?”

“Faith sir, we *were* carousing till the second cock!—and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things....”

Macduff grins. “What three things does drink especially provoke?”

“Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine.”

He begins with the first. “Lechery, sir, it provokes—and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him *stand to*, and *not stand to*—” He shrugs and wrinkles his nose, slyly suggesting an alternative.

“In conclusion, *equivocates* him in a sleep. And, giving him the lie, leaves him”—as his bladder empties.

Macduff laughs. “I believe *Drink gave thee* the lie”—challenged you—“last night!”

“That he did, sir, i’ the very *throat* of me! But I requited him for his lie; and, I think, being too strong for him—though he took up my legs sometime” says the wry old grappler, “yet I made a shift to *cast* him!”—to toss down drink.

“Is thy master stirring?” asks Macduff, just as Macbeth, still pulling a robe about his night clothes, approaches. “Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes.” He gives the porter a coin, and the man returns to his rest.

Lennox nods to his host. “Good morrow, noble sir!”

“Good morrow, both,” says Macbeth, straightening his robe.

“Is the king stirring, worthy thane?” asks Macduff.

“Not yet.”

“He did command me to call timely on him; I have almost slipped the hour.”

“I’ll bring you to him.”

As they climb the steps, Macduff acknowledges the accommodations. “I know this is a *joyful* trouble to you; yet ’tis but one!”

Macbeth is gracious: “The labour we *delight* in *physics* pain.” They have reached the entrance to Duncan’s bedchamber. “This is the door.”

“I’ll make so bold to call, for ’tis my legitimate service,” says Macduff, opening the door and walking in.

“Goes the king hence today?” asks Lennox.

“He does; he did appoint so.”

“The night has been *unruly!*” complains the visiting thane. “Where we lay, our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say, *lamentings* heard i’ the air!—strange screams of death, and prophesying with accents terrible of dire combustion and confused events, new-hatched to the woeful time! The obscure bird clamoured the livelong night; some say, the *earth* was feverous and did shake!”

“’Twas a rough night.”

“My young remembrance cannot parallel a fellow to it!”

The door is flung open and Macduff rushes out. “Oh, horror, *horror, horror!*—tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor *name* thee!”

“What’s the matter?” asks Macbeth.

“*Chaos* now hath made its *masterpiece!* Most sacrilegious *murder* hath broke ope the lord’s anointed temple, and stole thence the life o’ the building!”

“What is’t you say? The *life*....”

“Mean you his majesty?” demands Lennox.

Macduff's face is ashen. "Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight with a new *Gorgon!* Do not bid me speak—*see*, and then speak yourselves!"

Macbeth and Lennox hurry into the king's chamber.

"Awake, *awake!* Ring the alarum-bell," cries Macduff out into the hall. "*Murder and treason!*

"Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! *Awake!* Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit, and look on death itself! Up, *up*, and see the great *doom's* image! *Malcolm! Banquo!* As from your graves rise up, and walk like spirits to countenance this *horror!* Ring the *bell!*"

After peals from the tower and alarums among the soldiers outside are sounded, Lady Macbeth comes into the hall, a robe covering her nightgown. "What's the business, that such a hideous trumpet calls to parley the sleepers of the house?" she demands, climbing the steps. "Speak, *speaking!*"

"Oh, gentle lady, 'tis not for you to hear what I can speak," moans Macduff. "The repetition, in a woman's ear, would murder as it fell!" Banquo emerges, partly dressed, from his room. "Oh, Banquo, *Banquo*, our royal master's murdered!"

The lady is stunned: "*Woe, alas! What?—in our house?*"

"Too cruel *anywhere!*" cries Banquo. "Dear 'Duff, I prithee, contradict thyself, and say it is not so!"

Macbeth and Lennox now emerge from the fatal chamber.

"Had I but died an hour before this chance, I had lived a blessed time," says Macbeth, sorrowfully, "for from this instant there's nothing serious in mortality: all is but *toys—renown* and *grace* are dead! The *wine* of life is drawn, and the mere lees is left this vault to brag of!"

Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's sons, have come from their rooms. "What is amiss?" asks Donalbain.

Macbeth shakes his head sadly. "*You are, and do not know't!* The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood is stopped—the very *source* of it is *stopped!*"

"Your royal father's murdered!" says Macduff.

"*Oh!*" cries Malcolm, staggered. "*By whom!*"

"Those of his chamber, as it seemed, had done't," Lennox tells him. "Their hands and faces were all badged with blood; so were their daggers, which unwiped we found upon their pillows. They stared and were distracted; no man's life was to be trusted with them!"

"Ah, yet I do repent me of my fury, that I did kill them," says Macbeth.

"Wherefore *did* you so?" asks Macduff—sharply.

Macbeth spreads his hands. "Who can be wise, *amazed*—temperate and furious, loyal and neutral, in a *moment?* No man!—the expedition of my violent *love* outran the pauser, *reason!*

"Here lay Duncan, his silver skin laced with his golden blood!—and his gashed stabs looked like a breach in Nature, for *Ruin's* wasteful entrance!—*there*, the murderers, steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers unmannerly streaked with *gore!* Who could refrain, that had a *heart* to *love?*—and in that heart, *courage* to make 's love known!"

"Help me hence!" pleads Lady Macbeth, apparently near collapse. "*Oh!*" She falls.

"Look to the lady!" cries Macduff, as Macbeth kneels to rub her hands, and helps her to rise; several attendants come to her aid.

- As they watch, Malcolm speaks privately to his brother. "Why do *we* hold our tongues, that most may claim this argument for ours?"

- "What *should* be spoken here, where our fate, hid in an auger-hole, may rush and *seize* us?" whispers Donalbain, fearfully watching Macbeth. "Let's *away!*—*our* tears are not yet brewed!"

- "Nor our strong *sorrow*, just on the foot of motion!"

"Look to the lady," Banquo urges two servants; the women support Lady Macbeth, and help her away. "And when we have our naked frailties hid, that suffer in exposure," he says, "let us meet, and question this most bloody piece of work, to know it further.

"Fears and concerns shake us! In the great hand of God I stand; and thence I fight against the undivulged offering of *treasonous malice!*" he cries.

“And so do I!” declares Macduff.

The other noblemen of the royal party concur.

“Let us briefly put on manly readiness,” says Macbeth, “and meet i’ the hall together.”

The others agree, and they go to dress.

In Malcolm’s chamber, a prince speaks urgently to his brother. “What will you do? Let’s not consort with them; to show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easily! I’ll to England!”

“To *Ireland*, I,” says Donalbain. “Our *separated* fortunes shall keep us both the safer. Where we are, there’s *daggers* in men’s *smiles*! The nearer in blood, the nearer *bloody*!”

Malcolm nods. “This murderous shaft that’s shot hath not yet alighted, and our safest way is to avoid the aim! Therefore to *horse*—and let us not be dainty of leave-taking, but shift away!

“There’s warrant in that theft which steals *itself*, when there’s no *mercy* left!”

Very soon they have fled from Macbeth’s hospitality; they will leave Scotland far behind.

Threescore and ten I can remember well,” the wizened old servant tells the Thane of Rosse, just outside the castle at Inverness, “within the volume of which time I have seen hours dreadful, and things strange. But *this* sore night hath trifled former knowings!”

The northern nobleman looks up at the roiling gray clouds. “Ah, good father, thou seest the *heavens*, as if troubled with Man’s act, threaten his bloody stage; by the clock ’tis day, and yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp!

“Is’t night’s predominance, or the day’s *shame* that darkness does the face of earth entomb, when living light should kiss it?”

The old man shakes his head in dismay. “’Tis *unnatural*, even like the *deed* that’s done! On Tuesday last, a falcon, towering in its pride of place, was by a mousing *owl* hawked at and killed!”

Rosse nods. “And—a thing most strange and certain!—Duncan’s horses, beauteous and swift, the nobles of their race, turned *wild* in nature, broke their stalls, flung out, contending ’gainst obedience, as if they would make *war* with mankind!”

“’Tis said they bit *each other*!” Never before had the stallions snapped in such a frenzy.

“They did so,” says Rosse, “to the amazement of mine eyes that looked upon’t!

“Here comes the good Macduff. How goes the world, sir, now?” he asks, as the other thane joins them.

“Why, see you not?” Macduff, too, has been watching the imminent storm; the king’s party must all travel today.

“Is’t known who did this more-than-bloody deed?”

“Those that Macbeth hath slain.”

“*Alas* the day!” says Rosse. “What *good* could *they* hope for?”

“They were *suborned*! Malcolm and Donalbain, the king’s two sons, are stol’n away and fled!—which puts upon *them* suspicion of the deed.”

“’Gainst *nature* still!—thriftless *ambition*, that wilt ravin up thine own life’s means!”

Glancing again at the darkening clouds, Rosse considers. “Then ’tis most like the sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.”

“He is already named, and gone to Scone to be invested.”

“Where is Duncan’s body?”

“Carried to Colmekill, the sacred storehouse of his predecessors, and guardian of their bones.”

“Will you to *Scone*?” asks Rosse.

“No, cousin, I’ll to Fife”—Macduff’s own dominion.

“Well, I will thither.” Rosse wants to take part in the new king’s coronation ceremonies.

“Well.” The Thane of Fife has private reservations about Macbeth. He turns to go. “May you see things well done there!—lest our *old* robes sit easier than our new! Adieu!”

“Farewell, father,” Rosse tells the ancient.

The old man watches as the lords head for their horses. “God’s benison go with you—and with those that would make good of bad, and friends of foes!”

Chapter Four ‘Dear friend’

Many noblemen have been called to the royal castle at Forres. King Macbeth has vigorously increased his powers, and he is building a new, grander palace—a stronghold at Dunsinane, about thirty leagues to the south.

Banquo, arriving late, is one of the lords who have traveled here to attend the monarch in council. Waiting in a large room outside the dining hall, where the others are finishing the day’s midday meal, he ruminates.

Thou hast it now, Glamis: Cawdor, king—all, as the weird women promised. And, I fear, thou play’dst most foully for’t!

At heart a loyal soldier, the general is disturbed by growing suspicions. He paces. *Yet it was said it should not stand in thy posterity, but that myself should be the root and father of many kings. If there come truth from them—as upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—why, by the verities on thee made good, may they not be my oracles as well, and set me up in hope?*

The doors swing open. *But hush! No more....*

Cornets sound a sennet as Macbeth and the queen enter. Following are Lennox and Rosse, with other lords, ladies and their attendants. To his wife, Macbeth comments privately about the evening’s state event: “Here’s our chief guest.”

She nods. “If *he* had been forgotten, it had been as a gap in our great feast—in all things unbecoming.”

The nobles observe that King Macbeth immediately strides to Lord Banquo, smiling broadly. “Tonight we hold a solemn supper sir, and I’ll request your presence!”

Banquo bows. “Let Your Highness’ *command* be upon me—to the which my duties are with a most indissoluble tie forever knit.”

“Ride you this afternoon?” asks Macbeth. As general commander, Banquo is responsible for military operations; as of old, Vikings control areas of the north; as for Scotland, emerging as a nation, stability is tenuous, requiring constant vigilance—and judicious application of the force of arms.

“Aye, my good lord.”

“We should have else desired your good advice, which ever hath been both grave and prosperous, in this day’s council; but we’ll take tomorrow. Is’t far you ride?”

“As far, my lord, as will fill up the time ’twixt this and supper; go not my horse the better, I must become a borrower of the night for a dark hour or twain.”

Macbeth smiles again, very cordially. “Fail not our feast!”

“My lord, I will not.”

“We hear,” Macbeth says gravely, “that our bloody cousins are bestowed in England and in Ireland—not *confessing* their cruel parricide; filling their hearers with strange *invention!*” He brightens. “But of that tomorrow, when therewithal we shall have causes of state craving us jointly.

“Hie you to horse. Adieu, till you return at night! Goes Fleance with you?”

“Aye, my good lord; our time does call upon’s.”

“I wish your horses swift and sure of foot,” says Macbeth, “and so I do commend you to their backs. Farewell!” Banquo bows, makes his way through the chatting courtiers, and leaves the hall.

The king raises his hand for attention. “Let every man be master of his time till seven at night,” he commands. “To make society the sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself till supper-time alone. The while then, God be with you!”

As the room empties, Macbeth pulls a servant aside. “Sirrah, a word with you: attend those men our pleasure?”

“They are, my lord, without the palace gate.”

“Bring them before us.” The boy goes to fetch two commoners.

Shafts of afternoon sunlight slant to the stone floor. Alone, the new king thinks.

To be thus is nothing, unless to be safely thus!

Our fears in Banquo stick deep, and in his royalty of nature reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares; and with that dauntless temper of his mind he hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act in safety.

There is none but he whose being I do fear—and, under him, my genius is rebuked, as, it is said, Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the sisters when first they put the name of king upon me, and bade them speak to him. Then, prophet-like, they hailed him father to a line of kings! Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, and put a barren sceptre in my grip—from thence to be wrenched by an unlineal hand, no son of mine succeeding!

If 't be so, for Banquo's issue have I defiled my mind!—for them the gracious Duncan have I murdered!—put rancours in the vessel of my peace only for them; and mine eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man to make them kings!—the seeds of Banquo kings!

Rather than so, come, Fate, into the list! I'll champion me to the uttermost!

He looks up. “Who's there?”

The servant has returned with two rough-looking men. “Now go to the door,” Macbeth tells him, “and stay there till we call.” The boy bows and goes.

“Was it not yesterday we spoke together?”

“It was, so please Your Highness.”

“Well then, now you have considered of my speeches, know that it was *he* in the times past who held you so under fortune—who you thought had been our innocent self! This I made good to you in our last conference: passed in probation with you how you were borne in hand,”—deceived, “how *crossed*, the instruments, who wrought *with* them, and all things else that might to *half* a soul, even to a notion dazed, say, ‘Thus did *Banquo!*’”

“You made it known to us.”

“I did so—and went *further*, which is now our point of second meeting. Do you find *patience* so predominant in your nature that you can *let this go*? Are you so gospell'd as to pray for this ‘good man,’ and for his *issue*, whose heavy hand hath bowed *you* to the grave and *beggared yours forever*?”

“We are *men*, my liege!”

Macbeth scowls. “Aye, in the *catalogue* ye go for men!—as hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs, shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves are clept all by the *name* of dogs. The valuing file distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle, the housekeeper, the hunter, every one according to the gift which bounteous Nature hath in him closed—whereby he does receive particular addition from the bill that writes them all alike.

“And so of *men*.

“Now, if you have a station in the file not i' the *worst* rank of manhood, *say* 't!—and I will put that business in your bosoms whose execution takes your *enemy* off, grapples you to the heart and love of *us*, who wear our health but sickly during his life—who in his death were perfected!”

“I am one, my liege, whom the vile blows and buffets of the world have so incensed that I am reckless what I do to spite the world!” Scars on the burly man’s sunburned face bear him witness.

The other man’s reply is dismal. “And I another so weary with disasters, tugged with fortune, that I would set my life on any chance to mend it, or be rid of’t.” His dark frown supports the claim.

“Both of you know Banquo was your enemy.”

“True, my lord.”

“So is he *mine*—and in such bloody instance that every minute of his being thrusts against my near’st of life! And though I could with barefaced power sweep him from my sight and bid my *will* avouch it, yet I must not; for certain friends are both his and mine, whose loves I may not drop—but instead must bewail his fall who I myself struck down.

“And thence it is that I to your assistance do make love, masking the business from the common eye for sundry weighty reasons.”

“We shall, my lord, perform what you command us.”

“Though our lives—” the stout man begins.

“Your spirits shine through you,” says Macbeth dryly. “Within this hour at most I will advise you where to plant yourselves. Acquaint you with the perfect spy o’ the time, the *moment* of’t!—for’t must be done *tonight*; and somewhat *from* the palace, always in thought that I require a *clearness*”—must not be associated with it.

“And *with* him—to leave no rubs nor botches in the work—Fleance, his son, that keeps him company, whose absence is no less material to me than is his father’s, must embrace the fate of that dark hour!

“Resolve yourselves apart. I’ll come to you anon.”

The men nod. “We *are* resolved, my lord,” says the taller.

“I’ll call upon you straight; abide within.” They go to wait in a smaller chamber.

It is concluded, thinks Macbeth. *Banquo, thy soul’s flight, if it find heaven, must find it out tonight!*

In her regal chambers at the palace, wearing an elegant gown befitting her station, the queen paces, distraught. “Is *Banquo* gone from court?” she asks one of her serving-women.

“Aye, madam, but returns again tonight.”

“Say to the king I would attend his leisure for a few words.”

“Madam, I will.” She curtseys and goes to find Macbeth.

Nought’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content! ’Tis safer to be that which we destroy, than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy!

When the king comes to her, attired for the formal evening, she is wringing her hands. “How now, my lord! Why do you keep *alone*?—of sorriest *fancies* your companions making—using those thoughts which should indeed have died with them they think on! Things without all remedy should be without *regard*: what’s done is *done!*”

Macbeth’s brooding has led to an angry determination. “We have *scotched* the snake, not killed it: she’ll close and be herself,”—rejoin severed halves, “whilst our poor matter remains in danger of her former tooth!

“But let the *frame* of things disjoint, *both* the *worlds*”—heaven and earth—“suffer, ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep in the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly!

“Better be with the dead—whom we, to gain our peace, have *sent* to peace!—than on the torture of the mind to lie in restless delirium! Duncan is in his grave; after life’s fitful fever *he* sleeps well. Treason has done its worst: nor steel, nor poison, malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing can touch *him* further.”

“Come on, gentle my lord, sleek o’er your rugged looks,” urges the queen, touching his face. “Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight!”

Macbeth nods. "So shall I, love—and so, I pray, be *you*. Let your remembrance apply to Banquo: present him in *eminence*, both with eye and tongue." He frets: "*Unsafe* is the while that we must lave our honours in these flattering streams, and make our faces vizards"—masks—"to our hearts, disguising what they are!"

Increasingly, the queen has been affected by his chronic melancholy. "You must leave this!"

"Oh, full of *scorpions* is my mind, dear wife!—thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance *live!*"

"But in them nature's copy's not *eterne*...."

"There's comfort, yet! They *are* assailable." He takes her hand. "Then be thou *jocund*. Ere the bat hath flown his cloistered flight, ere to vile Hecate's summons the shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done a deed of dreadful note!"

"*What's* to be done?"

"Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the *deed*."

From a high window, he stares at the shadows lengthening on the grounds below.

"Come, seeling night, scarf up the tender eye of pitying day; and with thy bloody and invisible hand cancel and tear to pieces that great bond which keeps me pale!

"Light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood. Good things of day begin to droop and drowse, while night's dire agents to their prey do rouse."

He turns to his wife. "Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still; things bad begun make strong themselves by ill!

"So, prithee, go with me."

They walk, arm in arm, down to the dining hall, to entertain their noble guests with an elaborate state supper.

Night is falling. Waiting in wooded grounds near a side gate to the palace, three dark figures lurk in the deep shadows; they are watching the path leading down to the stable. The tall man frowns. "But who did bid thee join with us?"

"Macbeth."

The questioner's heavy companion is not concerned. "He needs not our mistrust, since he delivers our offices and what we have to do, to the direction just."

"Then stand with us," says the big one glumly. "The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day; now spurs the belated traveller apace to gain the timely inn; and near approaches the subject of our watch."

The squat man turns. "*Hark!* I hear horses!"

From a distance in the dusk they can make out a voice; Banquo is calling toward the barn: "Give us a light there, *ho!*"

"Then 'tis he," the odd newcomer tells them. "The rest that are within the note of expectation already are i' the court."

"His horses go about." Two boys are leading them into the stable.

"Almost a mile," says the knowing one, as Banquo and his son move forward. "But he does usually, as all *men* do, from hence to the palace gate make it their walk."

"A light, a light!" whispers the shorter man, as Banquo and Fleance approach with a lantern. The three move back out of sight.

"'Tis he," the new watcher confirms quietly.

"Stand to't!" whispers the tall man.

Banquo is eager to be inside. "It will be rain tonight," he tells his son as they walk.

"Let it come *down!*" cries the tall assassin. He and the stout man set upon Banquo, slashing him with their swords.

"Oh, *treachery!*" cries the injured nobleman. "*Fly*, good Fleance, *fly, fly, fly!* Thou mayst *revenge!*" He falls, gravely wounded. "Oh, *slaves!*" he groans angrily, as brutal blades flail. Banquo soon lies dead on the blood-soaked turf.

“Who did strike out the *light*?” demands the tall murderer, gasping from his effort.

The new one shrugs. “Was’t not the way?”

“There’s but one down,” grunts the short killer, “the son is fled.”

“We have lost best half of our affair!” growls the big man. He and his partner drag the corpse to the edge of the dark woods. “Well, let’s away, and say how much *is* done.”

When they return to the path, the other has vanished.

Entering the festive, torch-lighted dining hall with the queen, Macbeth beams at all of their smiling guests. “You know your own degrees; sit down!” He waves toward the waiting tables, set with napkins and bright silver bowls of scented water, floating flowers. “At first and last, a hearty *welcome!*”

Standing at the front, on either side of Macbeth’s center table, are his chief deputies, Lennox and Rosse, along with other lords, ladies, and their attendants. The nobles bow and curtsy, and express their thanks to the ebullient king as they seat themselves for the evening’s feast.

“Ourself will mingle with society, and play the humble host,” Macbeth announces. “Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time we will require *her* welcome!”

“Pronounce it *for* me, sir, to all our friends,” says the queen genially, “for my *heart* speaks they are welcome!”

Almost unnoticed as the distinguished company take their seats, and servants from the kitchen dodge each other among the tables, distributing bread and wine, Macbeth’s taller henchman comes in to stand beside a door at the dim back of the hall.

The monarch proclaims to his wife, “See, they encounter thee with *their* hearts’ thanks!” He surveys the front table. “Both sides are even; here I’ll sit, i’ the midst.

“Be large in mirth!” he calls. “Anon we’ll drink a measure the table round!” The announcement generates happy approval among the chattering guests, who are already buttering their bread.

Macbeth goes to the rear alcove. Under the hanging garlands he says, quietly, “There’s blood on thy face.”

The killer steps back within the recess and mutters, “’Tis Banquo’s then.”

“’Tis better thee without than he *within!* Is he dispatched?”

“My lord, his throat is cut; that *I* did for him.”

“Thou art the *best* o’ the cut-throats!” says Macbeth, delighted. “Yet he’s as good that did the like for *Fleance*; if *thou* didst it, thou art the *nonpareil!*”

The man turns the dark hat in his hands. “Most royal sir, Fleance is ’scaped.”

Macbeth is taken aback. “Then comes my fit again!” He stares down, fuming. “I had else been perfect, whole as the marble, founded as the rock, as broad and general as the casing air! But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, *bound in* to saucy doubts and fears!”

He looks at the killer. “But Banquo’s safe?”

“Aye, my good lord—safe in a *ditch* he bides, with twenty trenchèd gashes on his head—the *least* a death!”

“Thanks for that. There the *grown* serpent lies; the worm that’s fled hath a nature that in *time* will venom breed—no teeth for the present. Get thee gone. Tomorrow we’ll hear ourselves again.” The man bows, and goes out into the dark. Macbeth closes the door, and turns to find the queen approaching.

“My royal lord, you do not give the cheer!” she chides, drawing him into the room. “The feast is *sold* that is not often *vouched* while ’tis a-making—’tis to be given with welcome! To feed were best at home—from thence, the sauce to meat is *ceremony*; meeting were bare without it!”

They move forward. “Sweet remembrancer!” he cries, buoyantly, and kisses her. He calls out, to all: “Now good digestion wait on appetite, and *health* on *both!*”

Lennox rises, turns to Macbeth, and motions, with a courtly gesture, toward the seat at the center. “May’t please Your Highness sit?”

“Here had we now our country’s *honour* roofed,” Macbeth says, walking toward him, “were the graced person of our *Banquo* present—whom I would rather challenge for unkindness than pity for mischance!”

“His absence, sir, lays blame upon his promise,” says Rosse. “Please’t Your Highness to grace us with your royal company!”

Macbeth glances. “The table’s full.”

“Here is a place reserved, sir,” says Lennox.

“Where?”

“*Here*, my good lord,” says Lennox, puzzled.

Looking toward the seat intended for the king, Macbeth is horrified to see the pale shape of Banquo—his bloody wounds glistening, eyes fixed in a piercing glare.

“What is’t that moves Your Highness?” asks Lennox, alarmed by Macbeth’s stunned gaping. The king seems to be amazed by an empty chair.

Macbeth gasps. “Which of you have done this?”

“What, my good lord?” asks a nobleman.

Macbeth backs away in terror, hands held forward as if to ward off the ghastly stare. “Thou canst not say *I* did it!” he cries to the space, “Never shake thy gory locks at *me!*”

Rosse stands. “Gentlemen, rise! His highness is not well...”

But the queen speaks with pleasant calm. “*Sit*, worthy friends! My lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat; the fit is *momentary!*—upon a thought he will again be well! If much you note him, you shall offend him and extend his passion.”

She smiles, waving toward the plentiful food. “Feed, and regard him not,” she says soothingly.

She turns to Macbeth and grips his arm, pulling him aside. “Are you a *man?*” she hisses to him alone, at the back of the hall.

“Aye—and a *bold* one!—that dare look on that which might *appall the devil!*”

The flustered guests pick up their spoons, but conversation is now quiet and reserved.

Her expression is composed, but as she moves to block the supper party’s view of the king’s pallid face, the queen’s voice trembles with anger. “Oh, proper *stuff!*”

“This is the very *painting* of your fear!—this is the *air*-drawn dagger which you said led you to Duncan! Oh, these flaws and starts, impostors to *true* fear, would well become a *woman’s* story at a winter’s fire, authored by her *grandam!*”

“*Shame* itself! Why do you make such faces? When all’s done, you look but on a *stool!*”

Macbeth peers past her. “Prithee, see *there!* Behold! *Look! Lo!*”

“How *say* you?” he whispers, wide-eyed, facing the ghost—which stands, spreads its arms, and tips its head forward—showing the awful wounds. “Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, *speak*, too!”

Macbeth has backed against the wall. “If charnel-houses and graves must send those that we bury back, our *monuments* shall be the *maws of kites!*”—mouths of carrion birds.

And then, as he watches, the dreadful figure of Banquo fades and disappears. Macbeth steps forward, peering around the room.

“What,” says the distressed queen, “quite *unmanned* in folly?”

“If I *stand* here, I *saw* him!”

“Fie, for *shame!*”

Macbeth is confounded. “Blood hath been shed ere *now*—i’ the olden time, ere human statute purged the gentle weal—aye, and *since* too, murders have been performed too terrible for the ear! The times have been that, when the *brains* were out, the man would *die*, and there an *end*; but now they *rise* again, with twenty mortal murders on their crowns, and push us from our stools!

“*This* is more strange than such a *murder* is!”

The queen turns to smile back toward their guests, who have cautiously resumed dining. “My worthy lord, your noble friends do lack you. . . .”

Macbeth straightens, forces a smile. “I do forget.”

He moves forward with his wife. “Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends,” he says apologetically. “I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing to those that know me.

“Come, love and health to all!” he says, striding boldly to the head table. “Then I’ll sit down.” He seizes a goblet. “Give me some wine—fill full!” A servant pours from a flagon.

“I drink to the general joy o’ the whole table, and to our dear friend *Banquo*, whom we miss; would *he* were here! To all, and him: we *thirst*, and all to *all!*” Macbeth raises the cup and drains it.

The noblemen, relieved, drink as well: “To our duties, and the pledge!”

But the salute has served as a summons: the bloody figure reappears, standing directly in front of Macbeth—but seen by him alone.

“*Avaunt* and quit my *sight!*” cries the king, trembling in horror, spilling red wine over the white tablecloth before him. “Let the earth *hide* thee! Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold; thou hast no speculation in those eyes which thou dost glare with!”

The queen hastily addresses the startled guests: “Think of this, good peers, but as a thing of custom: ’tis no other; only it spoils the pleasure of the *moment*,” she assures them.

Macbeth has dropped his cup, and he backs from the table—away from the gory, slashed face of Banquo. “What *man* dare, *I* dare!” he loudly avers. “Approach thou like the rugged Russian *bear*, the armèd *rhinoceros*, or the Hyrcan *tiger!* Take any shape but *that*, and my firm nerves shall never tremble! Or be *alive* again, and dare me to the field with thy sword! If trembling I exhibit then, protest me the *baby* of a *girl!*”

“Hence, horrible *shadow!* Unreal *mockery*, *hence!*”

The baleful vision fades away.

“Why, so,” breathes Macbeth, grasping the back of the heavy chair. “*His* being gone, I am a *man* again. . . .”

He looks back and forth at the stunned guests, who are beginning to rise in alarm. “Pray you, sit still.”

The queen stares at him, shaking her head. “You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting, with most marvelous *disorder!*”

Macbeth is aware that all eyes are watching; but he thinks that they, too, saw the horrid ghost. “Can such things *be*, and overcome us like a summer’s cloud, without our *special wonder?* You make me strange even to the disposition that I own, when now I think you can *behold such sights* and keep the natural ruby of your cheeks, when *mine* is blanched with fear!”

Rosse asks, “*What* sights, my lord?”

“I pray you, speak not!” pleads the queen. “He grows worse and worse; question enrages him!”

“At once, *good night!*” she says, gracious but commanding. “Stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once!”

Lennox rises. “Good night; and better health attend his majesty!” He bows and goes to the door; the other guests silently follow his example.

“A kind good night to all!” she calls, as the hall clears.

King and queen sit alone amid the remains of the ruined feast. The servants are afraid to return. Macbeth stares at the rush-strewn floor, remembering the ghost. “It will have blood. They say blood *will* have blood.

“Stones have been known to *move*, and trees to *speak!*—auguries and understood relations have by magot-pies and choughs and *rooks* brought forth the *secret ’st* man of blood!”—exposed the most careful killer.

“What is the night?” he asks, drained.

“Almost at odds with morning which is which.”

Macbeth rubs his face with both hands, trying to collect himself and return to the realm of the ordinary. “How say’st thou that Macduff denies his person at our great bidding?”

“Did you send to him, sir?”

Macbeth nods. Macduff had not replied directly. “I hear it by the way; but I will send. There’s not a one of them”—the Scottish lords—“but in his house I keep a servant fee’d”—a spy. “I will tomorrow.

“And betimes I will to the weird sisters! *More* shall they speak,” he vows, “for now I am bent to know, by the worst means, the *worst!*”

“For *mine* own good, all causes shall give way! I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as going o’er.

“Strange things I have in *head* that will to *hand*—which must be *acted* ere they may be scanned!”

His wife sees that he verges on collapse. “You lack the season of all natures, *sleep!*”

Despite the bleak prospect for resting undisturbed by foul dreams, he will try again. He rises. “Come, we’ll to sleep.

“My strange and self abuse is the *initiate* fear, that lacks hard *use*,” he says dourly. “We are yet but *young* in deed!”

Chapter Five Toil and Trouble

Billows of steam and smoke rise in the dark cavern toward the rocky crags slanting above, where hundreds of bats hang, fluttering uneasily. Below, at the center of the huge, gloomy chamber’s bone-littered floor, a fire sputters and hisses, sending up glowing sparks.

Flames climb the scorched sides of an iron cauldron; its sickly, virid contents simmer and glow. As a black-clad specter stirs slowly with a pole of bleached wood, strange bubbles arise; on each a fleeting image of human conflict shimmers like a wine-glass reflection—until they pop, spattering into blood-red droplets that fall, sparkling, into the fire.

“Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed,” mutters the eldest.

“Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined,” says her younger sister.

“Harpier cries, ‘’Tis time, ’tis *time!*’” announces the youngest.

They begin a conjuring ritual, each adding to the boiling brew.

The oldest one—older than memory—chants:

“Round about the cauldron go;
In the poisoned entrails throw:
Toad—that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Sweltered *venom*, sleeping not—
Boil thou first i’ the charmèd pot!”

All three utter an incantation:

“*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!*”

The younger—older than fear—chants:

“Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder’s fork and blind-worm’s sting,
Lizard’s leg and owlet’s wing—

For a charm of pow'rful trouble,
 Like a hell-broth boil and bubble!"

All three sisters intone:
 "Double, double toil and trouble;
 Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!"

The youngest—older than regret—now chants:
 "Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
 Witch's mummy, maw and gulf
 Of the ravin'd salt-sea *shark!*
 Root of hemlock digg'd i' the dark,
 Liver of blasphemmer, too,
 Gall of goat, and slips of yew
 Slivered in the moon's eclipse,
 Beak of griffin, martyr's lips,
 Finger of birth-strangled babe
 Ditch-delivered by a drab,
 Make the gruel thick and slab!
 Add thereto a *tiger's* chaudron,
 For the ingredients of our cauldron!"

Eyes closed, the three repeat:
 "Double, double toil and trouble;
 Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!"

The younger concludes the occult ceremony:
 "Cool it with a baboon's blood;
 Then the charm is firm and good."

She faces the others: "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."

Three loud bangs echo from the low, secret door, concealed outside by dusty bramble, gorse and brush. "Open, locks, whoever knocks!" cries the eldest sister. The ironbound door swings open.

Macbeth's spies have learned where, fearful peasants believe, witches meet. Despite the threat of storm and rain this morning, he has ridden here—with soldiers—to question the three. He thinks he has surprised them.

He sheaths his dagger; its haft had battered the door. "How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!" he cries boldly. He looks at the cauldron. "What is't you do?"

"A deed without a name!" murmurs the youngest.

Macbeth draws his sword and holds it aloft. "I *conjure* you," he cries, "by that which you profess! Howe'er you come to know it, *answer me!*"

"Though you untie the winds and let them fight against the *churches*; though the testy waves confound and swallow *navigation* up; though bladed grain be dislodged and trees *blown down*; though *castles* topple on their warders' heads; though *palaces* and *pyramids* do slope their heads to their foundations; though the treasure of nature's germens tumble *all together*, even till *destruction* sicken!—*answer me to what I ask you!*"

The three, watching him, reply: "Speak." "Demand." "We'll answer!"

He believes his dire imprecations have overpowered the oracles—even as their chief stirs the mixture they have concocted for him alone. It is nearly done.

"Say if thou'dst rather hear it from *our* mouths, or from our masters'," says the most ancient hag.

Macbeth sheathes his sword, plants his feet apart, and folds his arms. "Call 'em; let me see 'em."

She nods, and tells the others:

“Pour in *sow*’s blood—she hath eaten
Her nine farrow! Grease that’s sweaten
From murderers’ gibbet throw into the flame!”

The fire flares higher, and the figures cry together: “Come, high or low; *thysself* and office
deftly *show!*”

From outside, thunder rumbles down into the dark hollow in the rock.

An apparition, ephemeral at first, then resolving into a clear form, takes shape, wavering
within the fire’s heat and the cauldron’s steam. Appearing to float above the sisters is a man’s
bodiless head, in a helmet of armor—the visor down, the eyes unseen behind a slit in the steel.

Macbeth steps forward to address it: “Tell me, thou unknown power—”

The oldest sister cuts him off: “He knows thy thought; hear his speech, but say thou nought.”

An eerie, anguished voice emerges from the head. “Macbeth! Macbeth! *Macbeth!* Beware
Macduff!—*beware* the Thane of *Fife!*”

“Dismiss me! *Enough!*” With that, the image begins to sink and fade.

“Whate’er thou art, for thy good caution, thanks,” says Macbeth. “Thou hast harped my fear
aright. But one word more—”

“He will not be commanded,” the specter tells the king. “Here’s another, more potent than the
first.”

Thunder above heralds the second figure; within the swirls of steam is the semblance of a
newborn boy, slippery with blood, and just taking breath, then crying aloud for the first time.

A shrill voice calls, over the infant’s wailing, “*Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!*”

“Had I need of *ears* I’d hear *thee!*” scowls Macbeth, shielding his.

The midwife’s harsh voice persists: “Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn the power
of *man*, for none of woman born shall harm *Macbeth!*” The wriggling spirit fades as it descends.

Macbeth is exuberant. “Then *live*, Macduff!—what need I fear of *thee?*”

“But yet I’ll make assurance *double* sure, and take a bond of Fate: thou shalt *not* live, so that I
may tell pale-hearted *fear* it *lies!*—and sleep in spite of *thunder!*”

Again the cavern trembles under the tumultuous weather outside, and a third apparition
emerges from the vapors: a child with a golden crown, holding up a tree-shaped scepter.

Macbeth stares. “What is this that rises like the issue of a king, and wears upon his baby-brow
the round and top of sovereignty?”

“Listen, but speak not to’t,” commands the lead figure.

From beyond the mystic vision comes a deep, prophetic voice: “Be *lion*-mettled, *proud!*—
and take no care who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are!—Macbeth shall never
vanquished be until great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him!”

As the luminous child fades away in the dark, Macbeth is highly pleased. “That will never be!
Who can conscript the forest, bid the tree unfix his earth-bound root?”

“Sweet bodements! *Good!* Rebellion’s head rise never till the wood of Birnam rise!—and our
high-placed Macbeth shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath to time and mortal custom!

“Yet my heart throbs to know one thing. Tell me, if your art can tell so much: shall Banquo’s
issue ever reign in this kingdom?”

The oldest shakes her head. “Seek to know no more.”

“*I will be satisfied!*” insists Macbeth. “Deny me this, and an eternal *curse* fall on you! Let me
know!”

As he watches, astonished, the scene before him changes. “Why sinks that cauldron? And
what noise is this?” From out of the empty air comes the steady cadence of a drum.

The ancient augur steps away, motioning to the space before the king. “Show.”

“Show,” nods her sister.

“*Show!*” cries the youngest.

Together they chant: “Show his *eyes*, and grieve his *heart*. Come like shadows; so *depart.*”

And then begins a slow and stately parade of premonitions: ethereal kings, the rulers of generations yet unborn.

The very first disturbs Macbeth: “Thou art too like the spirit of *Banquo!* *Down!* Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs!” The next two please him no more: “And thy hair, thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first. A third is like the former!

“Filthy hags! Why do you show me *this?*”

The procession of future sovereigns continues. “A fourth! *Start, eyes! What?*—will the line stretch out to the *crack of doom?* Another yet! A *seventh!* I’ll see no more; and yet the eighth appears, who bears a mirror which shows me many more!—and some I see that two-fold balls and treble scepters carry!”—emblems of kings to rule Scotland—and England and Ireland. “*Horrible sight!*”

As the row of monarchs fades, a ghost comes forward—a noble who wears no crown.

Macbeth stares. “Now I see ’tis *true!*—for the blood-boltered Banquo *smiles* upon me, and points at them for *his!*”

The apparitions vanish, and the drum is silent—all in an instant.

Macbeth blinks, gaping at empty space. “What, is this so?” he breathes.

“Aye, sir, all this is so,” says the old one, “but why stands Macbeth thus amazedly?”

“Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites, and show the best of our delights! I’ll charm the air to give a sound, while you perform your antic round, that this great king may kindly say”—she glares at him—“our duties did his *welcome* pay!”

The three laugh heartily, waving their arms and skipping merrily around him, to wild, discordant music—and then they suddenly disappear.

“Where are they?” cries Macbeth, whirling to survey the silent, empty cavern. “*Gone?* Let this pernicious hour stand aye accursèd in the calendar!”

At the door he calls: “*Come in,* without there!”

The Thane of Lennox enters the cave, his hat and cape dripping with rain. He has been waiting outside with a contingent of other now-sodden riders, shivering beside their horses. “What’s Your Grace’s will?”

“Saw you the weird sisters?”

“No, my lord.”

“Came they not *by* you?”

“No, indeed, my lord.”

Macbeth is furious. “*Infected* be the air whereon they ride,” he shouts up, disturbing some bats, “and *damnèd* all those that trust them!”

He turns to Lennox. “I did hear the galloping of horse; who was’t came by?”

“’Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word: Macduff is fled to England.”

“Fled to *England!*”

“Aye, my good lord.”

Macbeth turns away, thinking.

Time, thou anticipatest my dread exploits! The flighty purpose never is o’ertook unless the deed go with it! From this moment the very firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand!

And even now, to crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done!—the castle of Macduff I will surprise, seize upon Fife—give to the edge o’ the sword his wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls that trace him in his line!

No boasting like a fool! he vows. *This deed I’ll do before this purpose cool!*

But no more sights!

“Where are these gentlemen? Come, bring me where they are.”

He stalks out into the driving rain.

The clans' powerful lords, fiercely loyal to Scotland, have learned, painfully, that its ruler can be a brutal master. Following the murder of Lord Banquo, Macbeth has used the militias ruthlessly, and harsh experience has altered their private views of the king's ascension to the throne.

Outside the old palace at Forres this morning, the aging Thane of Lennox talks with one of the younger Scottish nobleman—one who, he suspects, is active among a growing group of the alienated. He again refers to their countrymen's suffering; but this time the nobleman's guarded comments to his silent companion are laden with irony.

"My former speeches have but hit your thoughts, which can interpret *further*; I say only that things have been *strangely* borne.

"The gracious Duncan was *pitied* by Macbeth; marry, *he* was *dead*.

"And the right-valiant Banquo walked too late—whom, you may say, if't please you, *Fleance* killed; for *Fleance fled*." He says, dryly, "Men must not walk too late.

"Who can avoid the thought how *monstrous* it was for Malcolm and for Donalbain to kill their gracious father?—*damned* act!

"How it did *grieve* Macbeth! Did he not straight in *pious rage* the two delinquents tear?—who were the slaves of *drink* and thralls of *sleep*! Was not that *nobly* done?—aye, and *wisely* too; for 'twould have angered any heart alive to hear the men *deny't*." He spits on the ground in disgust. "So that, I say, he has borne all things *well*!"

But Lord Lennox is irked; while his carefully chosen phrasing could be defended, the infused sarcasm feels cowardly and impotent. "And *I* do think that, had he Duncan's sons under his key—as, an't please heaven, he shall *not*!—they should find what 'twere to *kill a father*! So should *Fleance*!"

"But, peace. For, from broad words,"—frank speech, "and because he failed his presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear *Macduff* lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell where he bestows himself?"

The younger lord nods; he has just received news of Prince Malcolm from far south. "The son of Duncan, from whom this tyrant withholds the due of birth, lives in the *English* court, and is received by the most pious King Edward with such grace that the malevolence of Fortune nothing takes from his high respect.

"Thither *Macduff* is gone, to pray the holy king upon his aid to wake *Northumberland*, and warlike *Siward*,"—the English lands of Lord Siward, the Earl of Northumberland, border on southern Scotland, "so that, by the help of these, with Him above to ratify the work, we may again give meat to our tables, sleep to our nights—free from our feasts' and banquets' *bloody* knives!—do *faithful* homage and receive *honours*—all of which we pine for now!

"And this report hath so exasperated our king that he prepares for some attempt of *war*!"

"Sent he to *Macduff*?" asks Lennox.

"He did. And after an absolute, 'Sir, not *!*' To the frowning messenger he turns his back and *hmpfs*—as if to say 'You'll rue the time that clogs me with *this* answer!'" The thane hopes *Macduff* understands his danger. "And that well might advise him to a caution, to hold what distance his wisdom can provide!"

If King Edward supplies *Macduff* with an invading force, Lord Lennox will be among those ready to help overthrow *Macbeth*. He looks up at the castle and murmurs, hopefully, "Some holy angel fly to the court of England, and unfold that message ere he come, so a swift blessing may soon return to this, our country suffering under a hand accursed!"

The younger lord understands; he nods. "I'll send *my* prayers with him."

The clandestine emissary, the Thane of Rosse himself, will soon make his way to London.

On his hurried journey south, Rosse has stopped, briefly, at *Macduff's* castle, overlooking the inlet at Fife.

"What had he *done*, to make him fly the land?" demands Lady *Macduff*.

"You must have patience, madam—"

“He had none!” Her young son is beside her, but the lady is frightened—and angry. “His flight was *madness!* When our actions do not, our *fears* do make us traitors!”

Rosse has watched the danger grow as allegiances shifted. “You know not whether it was his fear or his wisdom.”

“*Wisdom!* To leave his *wife*, to leave his babes, his mansion and his titles in a place from whence *himself* does fly? *He loves us not!*—he lacks the natural touch of the poor *wren*: the most diminutive of birds will fight, her young ones in her nest, against the *owl!*”

“All is the *fear*, little is the *wisdom*, and *nothing* is the love, where the flight so runs against all reason!” she adds bitterly.

“My dearest coz, I pray you, school yourself!” Rosse tries to reassure her. “As for your husband, he is noble, wise—judicious, and best knows the fits o’ the season. I dare not speak much further; but cruel are the times when *we* are traitors, and do not know *ourselves*—when we hold from Rumour what we fear, yet know not *what* we fear, but float upon a wild and violent sea, each way and more!

“I take my leave of you; it shall not be long but I’ll be here again! Things at the *worst* will cease, all else climb upward to what they were before! My pretty cousin, blessing upon you!”

Lady Macduff touches her son’s hair sadly. “Father’d he is, and yet he’s fatherless.”

Rosse is nearly moved nearly to tears. “I am so much a fool, should I stay longer; it would be my disgrace and your discomfort.” He bows, well aware that he may already be pursued. “I take my leave at once.”

The thane leaves the castle; his riders await him outside, and they immediately head inland at a gallop.

The distraught lady looks thoughtfully at the boy. “Sirrah, your father’s *dead*; and what will you do now? How will you live?”

“As *birds* do, Mother!”

“What, with worms and flies?”

“With what I *get*, I mean, as do they.”

“Poor bird! Thou’ldst never fear the net nor lime, the pitfall nor the engine!”—traps.

“Why should I, mother? *Poor* birds, they are not set for!” But he looks up at her. “My father is not dead, for all your saying.”

“Yes, he is dead; how wilt thou do for a father?”

“Nay, how will *you* do for a husband?”

The lady smiles. “Why, I can buy me *twenty* at any market!”

“Then you’ll buy ’em to *sell* again!”

She laughs. “Thou speak’st with all thy wit; and yet, i’ faith, with wit enough for *me!*”

“Was my father a traitor, Mother?”

“Aye, that he was,” she says angrily.

He frowns. “What *is* a traitor?”

She looks down at his innocent face. “Why, one that swears and lies.”

“And be *all* traitors who do so?”

“Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.”

“And must they all be *hanged* that swear and lie?”

“Every one.”

“Who must hang them?”

“Why, the *honest* men.”

“Then the liars and swearers are *fools*,” says the lad of eight, “for there are liars and swearers enow to *beat* the honest men, and hang up *them!*”

Lady Macduff laughs. “Now, God help thee, poor monkey! But how wilt thou do for a father?”

“If he were dead, you’d *weep* for him; if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a *new* father!”

“Poor prattler, how thou *talk’st!*”

Unannounced, a landed gentleman enters the room, hat in his hand; he has ridden here, hastily and alone, from a few leagues north. He bows courteously—but his fear is apparent. “Bless you, fair dame! I am not to you known, though of your state of honour I am aware.

“I believe some danger does approach you nearly! If you will take a homely man’s advice, be not found here; hence, with your little ones!”

Seeing her clasp her son, as if to shield him, he apologizes: “To fright you thus, methinks, I am too savage; but doing worse to you were the fell cruelty which is *too nigh your person!*”

“Heaven preserve you!” he says, peering past the door behind him. “I dare abide no longer!” He bows and hurries away.

Lady Macduff watches him go. “Whither should I fly?”

“I have done no harm! But I remember now I am in this earthly world—where to do harm is often laudable, to do *good* sometime accounted dangerous folly! Why then, alas, do I put up that womanly defence, to say I have done no harm?”

She sees two strangers, dark kerchiefs covering their features, at the door. “What are these faces?”

“Where is your husband?” demands the taller.

“I hope in no place so unsanctified where such as *thou* mayst find him!” she says defiantly.

“He’s a traitor.”

“Thou liest, thou shag-eared *villain!*” cries the boy.

The man seizes his thin arm and draws a dagger. “What, you *egg!*” He stabs the child, twisting the blade under the frail ribs. “Young fry of treachery!”

The boy gasps. “He has *killed* me, Mother!” he groans. “*Run away*, I pray you!”

The murderer lets the pale body fall from his bloody knife. He turns to Lady Macduff.

Despite the shock she turns to run, hoping to warn her other children.

“*Murder!*” she screams desperately, pursued by both killers.

Chapter Six Exiles Lament

London languishes in a sultry summer, as Macduff and Malcolm walk outside the grand castle of the King of England, Edward the Confessor. The prince points across the tended green to benches by a stand of trees within the grounds. “Let us seek out some desolate shade,” he tells the visiting lord, “and there weep our sad bosoms empty!”

But Macduff has not come here to commiserate. “Let us rather hold fast the mortal *sword*, and like good *men* bestride our down-fallen *birthdom!*” he says urgently. “Each new morn, new widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows *strike heaven on the face!*—such that *it* resounds as if it felt with Scotland, and yelled out same syllables of dolour!”

In his exile, Malcolm has met with other Scottish lords who urged him to return home; but, always fearing betrayal, he is cautious—and protected: even now, two alert and well-armed men walk discretely behind the prince as he ambles toward the front of the English palace.

“What I *believe* I’ll bewail, what *know*, believe,” Malcolm tells the thane. “And what I can *redress*, as I shall find the time befriends, I will.

“What you have spoke, it may be so, perchance.” He stops and regards Macduff. “This *tyrant*, whose sole *name* blisters our tongues, was once thought *honest*. You have loved him well; he hath not touched *you* yet.

“I am young—but wisdom warns that you might deserve something from him through *me*, offering up a weak, poor innocent lamb to appease an angry god....”

Macduff frowns. “I am not *treacherous!*”

“But Macbeth *is!* Even a good and *virtuous* nature may *recoil* under an imperial charge....”

“But I shall crave your pardon,” he says soothingly. “That which you *are* my *thoughts* cannot transpose. Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell; though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, yet grace must ever look so.”

Macduff sees that the prince is unwilling to venture back to Scotland. “I have lost my *hopes!*”

“Perchance even *there*, where *I* did find my doubts.” Malcolm remains suspicious. He stops and asks, challenging: “Why in that rawness left you *wife* and *child*, those precious motives, those strong knots of love, without leave-taking?” He notes the older nobleman’s indignation. “I pray you, let not my concerns imply *your* dishonours, but mine own *safeties!* You may be rightly just, whatever *I* shall think.”

Macduff is anguished: “Bleed, *bleed*, poor country! Great Tyranny, lay thou thy basis assurèd, for goodness dare not check thee! *Wear* thou thy wrongs; the title is affirmed!

“Fare thee well, lord,” he says—with grave dignity. “I would not be the villain that thou think’st for the whole space that’s in the tyrant’s grasp, and the rich East to boot!”

“Be not offended!” says Malcolm. “I speak not as in absolute doubt of *you*.” He has other concerns as well. “I think our country *sinks* beneath the yoke!” he says. “It weeps, it *bleeds*; and each new day a gash is added to her wounds!

“I think withal there *would* be hands uplifted in my right; and here from gracious England have I offer of goodly thousands. But, for all this, when *I* shall tread upon the tyrant’s head, or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country shall have *more* vices than it had before!—more *suffer*, in more sundry ways than ever, by him that shall succeed!”

Macduff is perplexed. “What should *he* be?”

“It is *myself* I mean!—in whom I know all the particulars of *vice* so grafted that, when they shall be opened, foul Macbeth will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state esteem him as a lamb, being compared with *my* confineless harms!”

Macduff scoffs. “Not from the legions of horrid *Hell* can come a devil more damned in evils to top *Macbeth!*”

Malcolm shrugs. “I grant him bloody, luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, sudden, malicious—smacking of every sin that has a name! But there’s no bottom, *none*, in *my lust*: your wives, your daughters, your matrons and your maids could not fill up the cistern of my *voluptuousness!* And my desire all continent impediments would o’erbear that did oppose my will! Better *Macbeth* than such an one to reign.”

Macduff considers. “Boundless intemperance in nature *is* a tyranny; it hath been the untimely emptying of a happy throne, and fall of many kings.”

Still, he sees the exiled nobleman as the one whom his father, King Duncan, chose as the proper heir to Scotland’s throne. “But fear not yet to take upon you what is *yours!* You may convey your pleasures in a spacious plenty, and yet *seem* cold! The time you may so hoodwink; we have *willing* dames enough; there cannot be that *vulture* in you to devour so many as will to greatness dedicate themselves, finding it so inclined.”

Malcolm has more. “*With* this, there grows in my most ill-composèd affection such a stanchless *avarice* that, were I king, I should cut off the nobles from their lands—desire *his* jewels, and this *other*’s house. And my more *having* would be as a sauce to make me *hunger* more, such that I should forge quarrels unjust against the good and loyal, destroying them for wealth!”

“This *avarice* sticks deeper, grows with more pernicious root than summer-seeming lust; and it hath been the sword of our slain kings,” Macduff admits. “Yet do not fear; Scotland hath foisons to *fill up* your will with your mere *own*.”

The cited flaws are not deadly, he argues. “All these are supportable, with other *graces* weighed.”

“But I *have* none!” protests Malcolm. “The king-becoming *graces*—as justice, verity, temperance, stableness, bounty, perseverance, mercy, humility, devotion, patience, courage,

fortitude—I have no relish of them, but abound in the division of each several *crime*, acting it many ways!

“Nay, had *I* power, I should pour the sweet milk of *concord* into Hell, uproar the universal *peace*, confound all *unity* on earth!”

“O Scotland, *Scotland!*” moans Macduff.

“If such a one be fit to govern, speak,” says Malcolm, sadly. “I am as I have spoken.”

“Fit to *govern*? No, not to *live!*” cries Macduff angrily. Malcolm’s guards move closer, hands on the hilts of their swords.

“*O nation miserable*, with an untitled tyrant *bloody-sceptered!*” groans Macduff. “When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again, since that the truest issue of thy throne by his own interdiction stands accused, and does blaspheme his breed?”

He turns to Malcolm. “Thy royal father was a most *sainted* king; the queen that bore thee, oftener upon her knees in prayer than on her feet, died every day she lived!”—was renewed in faith. “Fare thee well!” he says, bowing. “These evils thou repeat’st upon thyself have *banished* me from Scotland! O my breast, thy hope ends *here!*”

He is turning to go when the prince’s hand grasps his arm firmly. “Macduff, this noble passion, child of *integrity*, hath from my soul wiped the black questions, reconciled my thoughts to thy good truth and honour!

“Devilish Macbeth by many of these trains”—similar arguments—“hath sought to win me into his power, and modest wisdom plucks me from over-credulous haste.

“But may God above deal between *thee* and me!—for even now I put myself to thy direction, and *unspeak* mine own detraction!—here abjure the taints and blames I laid upon myself, as strangers to my nature!

“I am yet unknown to *woman*, never was *forsworn*, scarcely have coveted what was *mine own*, at no time broke my faith, would not *betray* the Devil to his fellow, and delight no less in truth than *life!*” he says earnestly. My first *false-speaking* was this upon myself.”

A blush reveals his youthful discomfiture in confessing such deep innocence. “What I am, *truly*, is thine and my poor *country’s* to command!—whither, indeed before thy here approach, old Siward, with ten thousand warlike men, already at point, was setting *forth!*”

The powerful earl of Northumberland, England’s Lord Siward, is Prince Malcolm’s uncle.

“Now we’ll *together!*—and may the chance of goodness like our warranted quarrel!”

He sees that Macduff’s thoughts are far away. “Why are you silent?”

The thane will gladly fight for justice, but he’ll not rejoice in civil war—or an invasion by Englishmen. “Such welcome and unwelcome things at once!—’tis hard to reconcile.”

Malcolm nods. “Well; more anon.”

He is convinced that he has judged Macduff rightly—as a true and potent ally.

From a door near the main entrance to the English palace, an elderly doctor of physic emerges; he walks down the stone steps, headed for a guarded gate in the fence at the front.

Malcolm asks him, “Comes the king forth, I pray you?”

“Aye, sir; there are a crew of wretched souls that stay his cure.” He motions toward a dozen pale commoners waiting patiently outside the tall iron bars. “Their malady convinces the great assay of art,”—defeats the practice of medicine, “but at *his* touch—such sanctity hath Heaven given his hand!—they presently amend!”

“I thank you, doctor,” says Malcolm, as the physician goes to have the gate opened, ready for the king’s arrival and his ceremonies of healing.

“What’s the disease he means?” asks Macduff.

“’Tis called ‘the evil.’ A most miraculous work in this good king, which often, since my here-remain in England, I have seen him do! How he solicits heaven, himself best knows. But

strangely-visited people—all swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye, the sheer despair of surgery—he *cures*, by hanging a golden stamp about their necks, put on with holy prayers!

“And, ’tis spoken, to the succeeding royalty he leaves the healing benediction.

“*With* this strange virtue, he hath a heavenly gift of *prophecy*, and sundry blessings hang about his throne that speak him full of grace!”

“See who comes here,” says Macduff, as another Scotsman arrives at the gate.

The Thane of Rosse has come to England on a critical mission: to encourage Prince Malcolm to invade their native land and take back the crown. And he has just received some news.

The prince peers as Rosse approaches. “My countryman; but yet I know him not.”

Macduff greets the thane: “My ever-gentle cousin, welcome hither!”

“I know him now,” says Malcolm, smiling. “Good God, betimes remove the means that makes us strangers!”

“Sir, amen!” says Rosse, bowing.

“Stands Scotland where it did?” asks Macduff.

Rosse nods mournfully. “Alas, poor country, almost afraid to know itself!

“It cannot be called our mother, but our *grave*—where no-one but who knows *nothing* is once seen to smile; where sighs and groans, and shrieks that *rend the air* are made but not *marked*; where violent *sorrow* seems the modern rapture. The dead man’s knell is there scarce asked for *whom*; and *good* men’s lives expire before the flowers in their caps, *dying* or ere they *sicken*.”

“Oh, relation too precise, and yet too *true*!” says Macduff.

“What’s the newest grief?” asks Malcolm.

“That of an *hour*’s age doth hiss the speaker: each *minute* teems a new one.”

Macduff asks, “How does my wife?”

Rosse blanches. He equivocates: “Why, well.” All in heaven are well.

“And all my children?”

“Well too.”

“The tyrant has not battered at their peace?”

“No.” The family is now beyond the reach of Macbeth. Rosse adds, truthfully but sadly, “They were well at peace when I did leave ’em.”

Macduff knows the kind-hearted Rosse well. “Be not a niggard of your speech. How goes ’t?”

Rosse will tell what he has learned since reaching England; but first Prince Malcolm must be told the pressing news of state. “When I came hither to transport the tidings, which I have heavily borne, there ran a *rumour* of many worthy fellows that were *out*,”—in open rebellion, “which was to my belief witnessed the rather because I saw the *tyrant*’s power a-foot!

“Now is the time for help!” he tells the prince. “*Your* eye in Scotland would *create* soldiers—make our *women* fight, to doff their dire distresses!”

“Be’t their comfort, we *are* coming thither!” says Malcolm. “Gracious England hath lent us good *Siward* and *ten thousand men*! An older and a better soldier is none that Christendom gives out!”

Rosse’s heart swells to learn of that help.

But now he faces Macduff, tears in his eyes. “Would I could echo that comfort with the like! But I have words that would be howl’d out in the desert air, where hearing should not latch them!”

“What concern they?” asks Macduff. “The general cause?—or is it a fee, grief due to some single breast?”

“No mind that’s *honest* but in it *shares* some woe, though the main part pertains to you alone.”

“If it be mine, keep it not from me; quickly let me have it!”

“Let not your ears forever despise my tongue, which shall possess them with the heaviest sound that ever yet they heard!”

Macduff stares. “I guess at it.”

“Your castle is surprisèd; your wife and babes murdered.” He shakes his head at the horror of what was found. “To relate the *manner* were to the tally of these savagely slaughtered deer to add the death of *you*.”

“Merciful heaven!” cries Malcolm. He sees that Macduff is pale, but silent. “*What*, man? Ne’er pull your hat down over your brows!—give sorrow *words*! The grief that does not speak whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it *break*!”

“My *children*, too?”

“Wife, children, servants, all that could be found.”

Macduff, stunned, stands in a daze. “And *I* must be from thence.... My wife killed, too?”

Rosse nods, wiping his eyes. “I have said.”

Malcolm grips Macduff’s shoulder. “Be comforted; let’s make us *medicines* of our great *revenge*, to cure this deadly grief!”

Macduff thinks grimly of Macbeth. “*He* has no children.” And then it strikes him fully. “All my pretty ones? Did you say *all*?” His voice breaks. “O *hell-hawk*! *All*?” he wails. “What, all my pretty chickens and their dam at one fell swoop?”

Prince Malcolm has long lamented his father’s death; now is the time for retribution. “*Dispute* it like a *man*!”

“I shall do so; but I must also *feel* it as a man!” sobs Macduff. “I cannot but remember that such things *were*, that were most *precious* to me! Did heaven *look on*, and would not *take their part*?”

“Sinful Macduff, they were all struck for *thee*!” He weeps, choking with emotion. “*Nought* that *I* am, not for their own demerits but for *mine* fell slaughter on their souls! Heaven rest them now!”

Malcolm stands before him. “Be this the whetstone of your *sword*!—let grief convert to *anger*!—*blunt* not the heart—*enrage* it!”

“Oh, I could play the woman with mine eyes, and braggart with my tongue!” declares Macduff fiercely. “But, gentle heavens, cut short all intermission! Front to front bring thou this *fiend* of Scotland and *myself*!—within my *sword*’s length set him; if he ’scape *it*, heaven forgive *him*, too!”

Malcolm approves. “This turn goes manly!”

“Come, go we to the king! Our power is ready; our lack is nothing but our leave!”

“Macbeth is ripe for shaking, and the powers *above* put on their instruments!”

“Receive what cheer you may; the night is long that never finds the day!”

Chapter Seven At Dunsinane

In the massive new fortress Macbeth has built—north of the Great Birnam Wood, along the thousand-foot-high cliff at the top of Dunsinane Hill—a doctor and one of the queen’s waiting-gentlewomen stay up very late tonight.

They sit, restlessly, waiting in a dim side room of her majesty’s quarters, near the royal bedchamber.

The doctor is tired and annoyed. “I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report! When was it she last walked?”

“Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon’t, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed—yet all this while in a most fast *sleep*!”

“A great perturbation in nature,” says the doctor, “to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching! In this slumbry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?”

The gentlewoman demurs. "That, sir, which I will not report after her."

"You may to *me*—and 'tis most meet you should."

"Neither to you nor anyone, having no witness to confirm my speech!" She knows of grievous consequences visited on those who have crossed Macbeth or his wife.

At the sound of footsteps, they rise—and see the queen, carrying a lighted candle, slowly enter the room.

"*Lo*, you, here she comes!" whispers the gentlewoman. "This is her very guise; and, upon my life, *fast asleep!* Observe her; stand close."

"How came she by that light?"

"Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually; 'tis her command."

The doctor points: "You see her eyes are open."

"Aye, but their *sense* is shut!"

"What is it she does now?" he asks, watching. "Look how she rubs her hands...."

"It is an accustomed action with her to seem thus, washing her hands. I have known her to continue in this a quarter of an hour!"

In her trance, the distraught queen says softly. "*Yet here's a spot!*"

"*Hark!*—she speaks," murmurs the doctor. "I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly." He pulls a notebook and pencil from his coat pocket.

The queen moans. "*Out*, damned spot! *Out*, I say!" In feverish sleep she relives a waking nightmare. She listens. "One... *two*... Why, then, 'tis time to do't!—

"Hell is *murky*...."

"*Fie*, my lord, *fie!*—a *soldier*, and *afear'd*? What need *we* fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?"

Now she seems to stare down. "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

The doctor is startled. "Do you mark that?" he whispers.

Lady Macbeth groans. "The Thane of Fife *had* a wife!—where is *she* now? —*What*, will these hands ne'er be *clean*? —No more o' *that*, my lord, no *more* o' *that!*—you mar all with this *starting!*"

The doctor notes the revelations. "Go to, go *to!*—you have known what you should not!"

The gentlewoman nods. "She has *spoke* what she should not, I am sure of that! Heaven knows what she has *known!*"

"Here's the *smell* of the blood *still!*" whines the queen. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!" She again rubs her palms together, moaning: "*Oh, oh, oh*...."

"What a *sigh* is *there*," says the doctor quietly. "The heart is sorely charged!"

"I would not have such a heart in *my* bosom for the dignity of the whole body!" says the woman.

The man ponders. "Well, well, well...."

"Pray God it *be*, sir!" says the gentlewoman.

He shakes his head. "*This* disease is beyond my practise; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds."

The queen's dreadful dreaming continues. "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale!— I tell you yet again: Banquo's *buried!*—he cannot come out of's *grave!*"

"Even so?" mumbles the doctor, writing.

"—To bed, to *bed!* There's knocking at the *gate!* —Come, come, come, *come*, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone!—to bed, to bed, to *bed!*"

And then the queen turns, slowly, and returns, still unseeing, to her chamber.

"Will she go now to bed?"

"Directly," says the gentlewoman.

The doctor is disturbed. “Foul whisperings are abroad; unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles! Infected minds to their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.” He looks at his notes. “More needs she the *divine* than the physician!”

Suddenly they hear the queen’s shriek of terror—long and piercing.

“God, God forgive us all!” says the doctor, shaken. “Look after her; remove from her the means of all annoyance,” he warns, “and keep eyes upon her!”

He slips the notebook into his coat, picks up his bag—the medicines for bodily ills are useless here—and prepares to return to the visitors’ quarters. “So, good night. My mind she has perplexed, and amazed my sight! I think, but dare not speak!”

“Good night, good doctor.”

She goes to look after the troubled queen; in the morning she will seek other women’s help with the nightly vigil.

The open country in central Scotland just west of Dunsinane swarms with troops: officers on horseback, and foot-soldiers marching to the military cadence of drums beneath the flying colors of their rebellious lords.

“The English power is near, led on by Malcolm, his uncle Siward, and the good Macduff,” says Lord Menteth. “Revenge *burn* in them, for *their* dear causes would to a bleeding and a grim alarm excite the *mortified* man!”

Lord Angus nods to the south. “Near Birnam Wood shall we well meet them; that way are they coming.”

“Who knows if Donalbain be with his brother?” asks Lord Cathness.

Lennox leads the noblemen. “For certain, sir, he is not. I have a file of all the gentry: there is Siward’s *son!*—and many other youths that even now protest their first of manhood.”

“What does the tyrant?” asks Menteth.

Cathness answers: “Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies. Some say he’s mad; others who lesser hate him do call it valiant fury. But, for certain, he cannot buckle *his* distempered cause within the belt of rule!”

“Now does he feel his secret murders sticking on his hands,” says Angus. “Now, by the minute, *revolts* upbraid his faith-breach; those he commands move *only* in command, nothing in love. Now does he feel his title hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish *thief!*”

Menteth concurs. “Who then shall blame his pestered senses for recoiling and starting, when all that is within him does *condemn* itself for being there?”

“Well, march we on, to give obedience where ’tis *truly* owed,” says Cathness. “Meet we the *medicine* of the sickly weal, and with him”—Prince Malcolm—“pour we into our country’s purge each *drop* of us!”

Lord Lennox has urged restraint in fighting Macbeth’s fearful, beleaguered troops. “Or so much as it needs, to bedew the sovereign *flower* and drown the *weeds!*”

He signals to the captains, starting their move forward. “Make we our march towards Birnam!”

Within the castle keep at high Dunsinane, Macbeth paces, irked by word of rampant defection. “Bring me no more reports!—*let* them fly, *all!*” *Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane, I cannot taint with fear*, he assures himself.

What’s the boy Malcolm?—was he not born of woman? The spirits that know all mortal consequence have pronounced me thus: ‘Fear not, Macbeth; no man that’s born of woman shall e’er have power upon thee.’ Then fly, false thanes, and mingle with the English epicures! The mind I sway by and the heart I bear shall never sag with doubt, nor shake with fear!

A timorous young servant approaches the king with news; Macbeth glares at him. “The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon! Where got’st thou that goose look?”

“There is ten thousand—”

“Geese, villain!”

“—soldiers, sir!”

“Go *prick* thy face and over-*red* thy fear, thou lily-livered boy! What *soldiers*, patch? Death on thy *soul!*—those linen cheeks of thine are *counsellors* to *fear!* What *soldiers*, whey-face?”

“The *English* force, so please you!”

“Take thy face *hence!*” Macbeth calls for his armor-bearer—“*Seyton!*”—as the servant flees. *I am sick at heart, when I behold. “Seyton, I say!” This push will cheer me ever, or dis-seat me now!*

I have lived long enough; my way of life is fall’n into the sere, the yellow leaf. And that which should accompany old age, as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have—but, in their stead, curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour breath, which the poor heart would fain deny, but dare not.

“*Seyton!*” The servants glance at each other; it sounds as if he’s summoning Satan.

The armorer arrives and bows. “What is Your Grace’s pleasure?”

“What news more?”

“All is *confirmed*, my lord, which was reported.”

Macbeth is undaunted. “I’ll *fight* till from my bones my *flesh* be hacked! Give me my armour.”

“’Tis not needed yet. . . .”

“I’ll put it on!” cries the king angrily. Seyton fetches the breastplate and the heavy shirt of metal links.

Macbeth calls to attendants: “Send out more horses!—skirr the country round!—*hang* those that talk of fear!” He goes to Seyton: “Give me mine armour!”

As he buckles on the protection, Macbeth turns to the waiting physician. “How does your patient, doctor?”

“Not so *sick*, my lord, as she is *troubled*, with thick-coming fantasies that keep her from her rest.”

“*Cure* her of that! Canst thou not minister to a *mind* diseased?—*pluck* from the memory a rooted sorrow, *raze out* the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidote *cleanse* the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart!”

The doctor speaks carefully. “Therein the patient must minister to himself.”

“Throw physic to the *dogs!*—I’ll none of it!” cries the king, eagerly preparing for battle.

“Come, put mine armour on; give me my staff, Seyton!”

“Send out!”

The armorer hurries to him with thick gauntlets and more plate-laden mail.

“Doctor, the thanes fly from me. —Come, sir, *dispatch!*— If thou couldst, doctor, cast the water”—test the urine—“of my *land*, find its disease, and purge it to a sound and pristine health, I would *applaud* thee to the very *echo* that should applaud *again!* —Pull’t off, I say!— What rhubarb, cyme, or what purgative drug, would scour these *English* hence? Hear’st thou of them?”

“Aye, my good lord. Your royal preparation *makes* us hear something,” adds the doctor hastily; knowledge of the rebellion is very dangerous. *Were I from Dunsinane away and clear, profit again should hardly draw me here!* he thinks.

“Bring it after me,” Macbeth tells Seyton, who is carrying his sword. He strides away, headed for the battlements. “I will not be afraid of death and bane till *Birnam forest* come to Dunsinane!”

With the legions of English troops commanded by Lord Siward, Prince Malcolm and Macduff and their men have made their way north, meeting little opposition, to join the rebellious Scottish lords led by Lennox: Rosse, Menteth, Cathness, and Angus—all leading their own mustered forces.

“Cousins,” Malcolm tells the Scotsmen with him at their rendezvous, “I hope the days are near at hand that chambers will be *safe!*”

Menteth nods. "We doubt it nothing!"

"What wood is this before us?" asks Siward.

"The Wood of Birnam," Menteth tells him.

"Let every soldier hew him down a bough and bear't before him," Malcolm commands.

"Thereby shall we shadow the numbers of our force, and make discovery err in report of us."

A captain bows. "It shall be done." He goes to pass along the order.

Siward has brought many troops, and has found few who oppose their advance. "We learn that no other but the confident tyrant still keeps in Dunsinane, and he will *endure* our setting down before 't." The English lord does not relish the idea of long besieging a fortress on foreign soil.

"'Tis his main hope," notes Malcolm. "For where there is advantage to have gone, both more and less have given him the *revolt*, and none serve with him but *constrained* things, whose hearts are absent too."

Macduff is restless. "Let our just censures"—judgment in history—"attend the true *event*; and put we on industrious soldiership!"

Siward nods. "The time approaches that will with due decision make us know what we shall *say* we have, and what we *own*! Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate—but *certain* issue *strokes* must arbitrate!"

He gives the order: "Towards which, *advance the war!*"

Hang out our *banners* on the outward walls," Macbeth commands. "The cry is still 'They come!'" He is not worried. "Our castle's strength will laugh a siege to *scorn*! Here let them lie till *famine* and the *ague* eat them up!

"Were they not augmented with those that should be *ours*, we might have *met* them, daring, beard-to-beard, and beat them backward home!"

He hears a disturbance in a nearby room. "What is that noise?"

Seyton goes to find out. "It is the cry of *women*, my good lord!" he calls back, on the way.

Macbeth broods. *I have almost forgot the taste of fears; the time has been, my senses would have cooled to hear a night-shriek, and my falling hair would, at a dismal treatise, rouse and stir as if life were in 't. I have supped full with horrors; direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, cannot once start me.* He sees Seyton return, pale and gaping. "Wherefore was that cry?"

"The queen, my lord, is dead!"

For a moment, Macbeth stands silent—alone and forlorn. "She should have died hereafter. There would have been a time for such a word."

He sits down heavily onto a cold stone bench and stares down. *Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time; and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.*

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot—full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

A sentry approaches the king fearfully. "Thou comest to use thy tongue," says Macbeth sourly, rising. "Thy story, quickly."

"Gracious my lord, I should report that which I see—I *saw*!—but know not how to do it!"

"Well, *say*, sir!"

"As I did stand my watch upon the hill, I looked toward Birnam—and anon, methought, *the wood began to move!*"

"*Liar and slave!*" shouts the king, enraged and livid.

"Let me endure your wrath, *if't be not so!*" pleads the sentry. "Within this three mile may you see it coming, I say!—*a moving grove!*"

Macbeth stares. “If thou speak’st *false*, upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive till *famine* claim thee!”

But then he turns away. “If thy speech be *sooth*, I care not if thou dost for *me* as much.”

He looks around the chamber, at the waiting officers and soldiers, with their silent drums; the king’s colors hanging limp from their slanting staffs.

I shrink in resolution, and begin to hear the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth: ‘Fear not, till Birnam wood do come to Dunsinane’—and now a wood comes toward Dunsinane!

“Arm, arm, and out!”

If this which he avouches does appear, there is nor flying hence nor tarrying here. I begin to be aweary of the sun, and wish the estate o’ the world were now undone!

“Ring the alarum-bell!”

Blow, wind! Come, wrack! At least we’ll die with harness on our back!

Now near enough,” says Prince Malcolm, riding beside Lord Siward and Macduff. He stands in the stirrups and calls to the armies’ captains: “Your leafy screens throw down, and show like those you are!”

The combined forces are poised to launch an attack on the fortress at Dunsinane.

“You, worthy uncle, shall go with my cousin,” Malcolm confirms to Siward, “and your right-noble son *lead* our first battle!

“Worthy Macduff and we shall take upon ’s what else remains to do, according to our order.”

“Fare you well!” cries Siward, hoping to engage rather than besiege. “Do we but *find* the tyrant’s power tonight, *let* us be beaten if we cannot *fight!*”

“Make all our trumpets speak!” shouts Macduff as they ride forth, “Give them all breath, those clamorous harbingers of *blood* and *death!*”

Chapter Eight Hailing the King

Past the huge castle’s thick walls of gray stone, Macbeth steps forth boldly into the fray, as his soldiers struggle to hold back the invaders. The Scottish rebels and their English allies have fought past the outer palisade of heavy, upright logs set into the earth.

On the battlements above King Macbeth, trumpets blare out shrill alarums, calls to battle. But no one new comes to defend him.

He stands in the midst of man-to-man mayhem. All around him are cruel sights, brutal sounds: the clash and pounding of steel swords against iron-bound shields of wood and leather; oaths and grunts as arrows fly to throats, spears and blades thrust forth and strike home, cutting through muscle and bone. And then the final, despairing cries of the men whose dreams of martial glory have been cut short—and of those whose simple prayers for survival have failed.

Clad in gleaming armor, Macbeth simply observes. *They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, but, bear-like, I must fight the course.* He feels shielded, oddly indifferent. *What’s he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none!*

Then another nobleman in armor—bright new English metal—comes before him, bloody sword at the ready. “What is thy name?” asks Siward, the earl’s brave son, nearly twenty-two.

“Thou’lt be afraid to hear it.”

“No, though thou call’st thyself a hotter name than any is in hell!”

“My name’s Macbeth.”

“*The devil himself* could not pronounce a title more *hateful* to mine ear!”

“No—nor more *fearful!*”

“Thou *liest*, abhorred *tyrant!*” cries the youth. “With my *sword* I’ll prove the lie thou speak’st!” He rushes forward, slashing with his weapon.

Macbeth, larger and heavier, with many a fight behind him, easily wards off the blow, dodges agilely—and strikes, deftly and deep. Young Siward gasps, stunned; he sags, already dying, his blood spilling onto the paving stone.

Macbeth tugs his blade free as the body drops. “Thou wast born of woman; but swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, brandished by man that’s of a woman born!”

The besieged king moves on to view the continuing carnage.

...

Macduff treads among the warring men, always peering around him. *That way the noise is....* “Tyrant, *show thy face!*” he calls out, incensed. *If thou be’st slain, and with no stroke of mine, my wife and children’s ghosts will haunt me ever!*

He watches the castle’s defenders, many of them in tattered garments, poor and aging mercenaries, unskilled and disordered. *I cannot strike at wretched kerns, whose arms are hired to bear their staves.* “Either *thou*, Macbeth, or else my sword with an unbattered edge I sheathe again, undeeded!”

He hears loud cries ahead. *Here thou shouldst be; by this great clatter, one of greatest note seems bruited! Let me find him, Fortune, and more I beg not!*

Gripping his heavy broadsword even more firmly, Macduff rushes to the center of conflict.

...

“This way, my lord,” Siward tells Malcolm, on the wide stone steps of the fortress. “The castle’s *gently* rendered; the tyrant’s people on both sides do fight.

“The noble thanes do bravely in the war!” the English lord declares. “The day almost itself professes yours, and little is to do!”

Malcolm concurs. “We have met with foes that strike *beside* us.” Much of the defense at Dunsinane has been no more than half-hearted; many of Macbeth’s men have surrendered as soon as confronted.

At the huge, open doors, Lord Siward nods courteously, waiting for Prince Malcolm to go before him. “Enter, sir, the castle!”

As the fighting wanes, the few remaining combatants are the most angry—injured and bent on revenge, or too furiously engaged with an immediate foe to offer or ask for quarter.

Macbeth can see that the battle is lost; the king is invincible, but his forces are not.

Why should I play the Roman fool, and die on mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes do better upon them!

He especially detests the invading English; he looks for Northumbrians to slaughter.

And then Macduff finds him. “*Turn, hell-hound, turn!*” cries the thane, exuberant.

Macbeth faces him. “Of all men else I have avoided *thee*. But get thee back; my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already!”

“I have no words.” Macduff raises his blade and leaps forward. “My voice is in my *sword*, thou bloodier *villain* than terms can give thee out!”

They fight—and furiously. Macbeth is evenly matched, in both strength and skill with sword, dagger and shield. Fiery rage strikes relentlessly against cold implacability.

They circle, for a moment breathing hard, each searching for an opening in the other’s guard.

Macbeth laughs. “Thou lovest labour!—as easily mayst thou the intrenchant *air* with thy keen sword impress as make *me* bleed! Let fall thy blade on *vulnerable* crests!—*I bear a charmèd life*, which must not yield to one of woman born!”

Now Macduff laughs—grimly. “*Despair* that charm, and let the angel whom thou still hast served”—the fallen angel, Satan—“tell thee: Macduff was from his mother’s womb *untimely ripped!*”—a Caesarean delivery.

Macbeth pales. *Accursèd be that tongue that tells me so, for it hath cowed my better part of man! And be these juggling fiends no more believed, who palter with us in a double sense!—who keep the word of promise to our ear, and break it to our hope!*

He turns away. "I'll not fight with thee."

"Then *yield* thee, coward!" growls Macduff. "And live to be the show and gaze o' the time! We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are, painted on a pole, and underwrit, 'Here may you see the *tyrant!*'" He starts toward the defeated king.

Macbeth turns back. "I will *not* yield, to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, and to be baited with the *rabble's* curse! Though Birnam Wood *be* come to Dunsinane, and thou opposed being of no woman *born*, yet I will try the last!

"Before my body I throw my warlike shield! *Lay on*, Macduff!—and *damned* be him that first cries, '*Hold, enough!*'"

While Macduff might now avenge his family—and he dare not fail—Macbeth can evade ignominy no more than briefly.

Macduff plunges forward, striking with his sword to the right, then left, battering Macbeth's well-scarred shield with bone-jarring blows. A thrust slices past the leather edge and cuts deep into the king's arm; then a vicious slash quickly disables his other.

Macbeth falls backward, painfully, futilely, straining to lift either sword or shield. He hears his own hot, gasping breath inside the metal helmet, and, as its visor is slid back, looks up into the angry red eyes of Macduff—and watches the terrible downward slice of the thane's knife.

Outside the entrance to the castle, trumpets sound a flourish as Malcolm's ceremonial guard emerges, drums beating, colors flying. Following with the prince are Lord Siward, Lord Lennox and Lord Rosse, and other noble thanes. Many of their officers and soldiers are gathered before them.

"I would the friends we miss were safe arrived," says Malcolm.

"Some must go off," says Siward, stoically. "And yet, by these I see, so great a day as this is cheaply bought!"

"Macduff is missing," says Malcolm. He turns solemnly to Siward. "And your noble son."

"Your son, my lord, has paid a *soldier's* debt," Rosse tells the English lord. "He only lived but till he was a *man*—the which no sooner had his prowess *confirmed*, in the unshrinking station where he fought, but like a man he died."

Siward is numb. "Then he is dead?"

"Aye, and brought off the field," says Rosse. "Your cause of sorrow must not be measured by his *worth*, for then it hath no end."

"Had he his hurts before?" asks Siward.

"Aye—on the front."

Siward nods, tearfully. "Why then, *God's* soldier be he! Had I as many sons as I have hairs, I would not wish them to a fairer death! And so his knell is knolled."

Malcolm clasps Siward's shoulder. "He's worthy *more* sorrow, and that I'll *spend* for him!"

"He's 'worth' no longer: they say he parted well, and *paid* his score," says the father. "And so, God be with him!" Wiping his eyes, he sees Macduff approaching. "Here comes newer comfort."

The thane carries a tall, bloody pike; impaled atop it is the severed head of Macbeth.

"*Hail, king!*—for so *thou* art," Macduff cries to Malcolm. "Behold, where stands the usurper's cursed head!

"The time is *free!*" he cries, triumphant.

Macduff surveys the Scottish noblemen around Malcom. "I see thee compassed with thy kingdom's thanes, who speak my salutation in their minds!—whose voices"—affirmation—"I desire *aloud* with mine: *Hail, King of Scotland!*"

The others agree, with a resounding, “*Hail, King of Scotland!*” The trumpeters add a royal flourish.

King Malcolm smiles, pleased with the acclamation. “We shall not spend a large expense of time before we reckon with your several loves, and make us even with you!

“My thanes and kinsmen, henceforth be *earls!*—the first that ever Scotland in such an honour named!

“What’s more to do, which would be planted newly with the time—as calling home our exilèd friends abroad who fled the snares of watchful tyranny; producing forth the cruel ministers of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen, who, as ’tis thought, by self and violent hands, took off her life—this, and what needful else that calls upon us by the grace of Grace, we will perform in measure, time and place.

“So, thanks to all at once and to each one, whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone!”