

from

HOLINSHED'S CHRONICLES



Preparing to Read

Build Background

One of Shakespeare's favorite sources for his plays was the *Chronicles* (1577), a collection of histories and descriptions of the British Isles written by Raphael Holinshed and others. The following passage reveals Macbeth's involvement in Duncan's murder.



It fortun'd, as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed toward Forres, where the King then lay, they went sporting by the way together without other company save only themselves, passing through the woods and fields, when suddenly, in the midst of a laund,¹ there met them three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of elder² world; whom when they attentively beheld, wondering much at the sight, the first of them spoke and said, "All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis!" (for he had lately entered into that dignity and office by the death of his father Sinel). The second of them said, "Hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor!" But the third said, "All hail, Macbeth, that hereafter shalt be King of Scotland!"

Then Banquo. "What manner of women," saith he, "are you, that seem so little favorable unto me, whereas to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign also the kingdom, appointing forth nothing for me at all?" "Yes," saith the first of them, "we promise greater benefits unto thee than unto him, for he shall reign indeed, but with an unlucky end; neither shall he leave any issue behind him to succeed in his place, where contrarily thou indeed shalt not reign at all, but of thee those shall be born which shall govern the Scottish kingdom by long order of continual descent." Herewith the foresaid women vanished immediately out of their sight. . . . Shortly after, the Thane of Cawdor being condemned at Forres of treason against the King committed, his lands, livings, and offices were given of the King's liberality to Macbeth. . . .

Shortly after it chanced that King Duncan, having two sons by his wife (which was the daughter of Siward Earl of Northumberland), he made the elder of them (called Malcolm) Prince of Cumberland, as it were thereby to appoint him his successor in the kingdom immediately after his decease. Macbeth, sore troubled herewith, for that he saw by this means his hope sore hindered . . . he began to take counsel how he might usurp the kingdom by force, having a just quarrel³ so to do (as he took the matter), for that Duncan did what in him lay to defraud him of all manner of title and claim which he might, in time to come, pretend⁴ unto the crown.

The words of the three Weir Sisters also (of whom before ye have heard) greatly encouraged him hereunto; but specially his wife lay sore upon him⁵ to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen. At length, therefore, communicating his purposed intent with his trusty friends, amongst whom Banquo was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid he slew the King at Inverness or (as some say) at Bothgowanan, in the sixth year of his reign.

1. laund: glade.

2. elder: ancient.

3. quarrel: cause.

4. pretend: claim.

5. lay sore upon him: pressed him hard.

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What mental picture from this act lingers most in your mind? Jot down words and phrases to describe it.

Comprehension Check

- Whom do Macbeth and his wife plan to take the blame for Duncan's murder?
- What prompts people to think that Malcolm and Donalbain may be guilty of killing their father?
- In the absence of Malcolm and Donalbain, who will become king?

Think Critically

2. How does the nocturnal setting of Act Two, Scene 1, contribute to the scene's overall **mood**, or atmosphere?

THINK ABOUT

- the time of night at which the events take place
- Banquo's observations about the night
- Macbeth's remarks about the night

3. Why do you think Macbeth imagines that he sees a dagger at the end of Act Two, Scene 1?

4. **ACTIVE READING** **READING DRAMA** Review any questions about or reactions to stage directions in your

READER'S NOTEBOOK. What effect do you think each of the following **sound effects** might have on the audience?

- the bell at the end of Scene 1
- the owl referred to in Scene 2
- the knocking that ends Scene 2 and continues in Scene 3
- the "alarum bell" in Scene 3

5. Consider the porter's humorous comments on the types of people who wind up at the gates of hell. How is Macbeth like or unlike the sinners that the porter describes?

6. How does Lady Macbeth compare with her husband at this point in the play? Cite evidence to support your opinion.

7. Do you think the Macbeths are finished with their killing? If so, why? If not, whom do you think they might kill next?

Extend Interpretations

8. **What If?** Do you think Macbeth would have killed Duncan if his wife had not urged him to do so? Cite evidence from the first two acts to support your opinion.

Literary Analysis

BLANK VERSE One of the most popular verse forms in English, **blank verse** consists of unrhymed iambic pentameter, in which the normal line contains five stressed syllables, each preceded by an unstressed syllable:

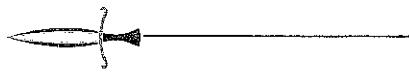
*Will all great Neptune's ocean
wash this blood*

Paired Activity Working with a partner, copy a representative passage from *Macbeth*, marking the unstressed (˘) and stressed (ˈ) syllables. Then discuss the following questions:

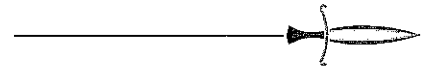
- Shakespeare sometimes introduces rhyming pairs of lines for emphasis or as signals to the actors, indicating entrances or changes of scene. What are some examples in Act Two?
- Shakespeare sometimes has characters speak in prose. Why do you think he uses prose for the porter's opening remarks in Act Two, Scene 3?

REVIEW FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Find examples of figurative language that help convey Macbeth's fears and doubts before the murder of Duncan, his horror of the act itself, and the guilt he feels afterward.



Act 3



SCENE 1

Macbeth's palace at Forres.

Banquo voices his suspicions of Macbeth but still hopes that the prophecy about his own children will prove true. Macbeth, as king, enters to request Banquo's presence at a state banquet. Banquo explains that he will be away during the day with his son Fleance but that they will return in time for the banquet. Alone, Macbeth expresses his fear of Banquo, because of the witches' promise that Banquo's sons will be kings. He persuades two murderers to kill Banquo and his son before the banquet.

[Enter Banquo.]

Banquo. Thou hast it now—King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the Weird Women promised; and I fear
Thou play'st most foully for't. Yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
5 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
10 And set me up in hope? But, hush, no more!

[Sennet sounded. Enter Macbeth, as King; Lady Macbeth, as Queen; Lennox, Ross, Lords, and Attendants.]

Macbeth. Here's our chief guest.

Lady Macbeth. If he had been forgotten,
It had been as a gap in our great feast,
And all thing unbecoming.

Macbeth. Tonight we hold a solemn supper, sir,
15 And I'll request your presence.

Banquo. Let your Highness
Command upon me, to the which my duties
Are with a most indissoluble tie
For ever knit.

Macbeth. Ride you this afternoon?

Banquo. Ay, my good lord.

20 **Macbeth.** We should have else desired your good advice
(Which still hath been both grave and prosperous)

3–4 **it was said . . . posterity:** it was predicted that the kingship would not remain in your family.

6–10 **If . . . in hope:** Banquo is impressed by the truth (verities) of the prophecies. He hopes the witches' prediction for him will come true too (be my oracles as well).

[Stage Direction] **sennet sounded:** A trumpet is sounded.

14–15 A king usually uses the royal pronoun *we*. Notice how Macbeth switches to *I*, keeping a personal tone with Banquo.

15–18 Banquo says he is duty-bound to serve the king. Do you think his tone is cold or warm here?

21 **grave and prosperous:** thoughtful and profitable.



In this day's council; but we'll take tomorrow.
Is't far you ride?

Banquo. As far, my lord, as will fill up the time

25 '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. Fail not our feast.

Banquo. My lord, I will not.

Macbeth. We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed

30 In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers
With strange invention. But of that tomorrow,
When therewithal we shall have cause of state
Craving us jointly. Hie you to horse. Adieu,
35 Till you return at night. Goes Fleance with you?

Banquo. Ay, my good lord. Our time does call upon's.

Macbeth. I wish your horses swift and sure of foot,
And so I do commend you to their backs.
Farewell.

[Exit Banquo.]

40 Let every man be master of his time
Till seven at night. To make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till supper time alone. While then, God be with you!

[Exeunt all but Macbeth and a Servant.]

Sirrah, a word with you. Attend those men
45 Our pleasure?

Servant. They are, my lord, without the palace gate.

Macbeth. Bring them before us.

[Exit Servant.]

Macbeth. To be thus is nothing,

But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
50 Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his mind
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him
55 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,

25–27 **Go not . . . twain:** If his horse goes no faster than usual, he'll be back an hour or two (twain) after dark.

29 **bloody cousins:** murderous relatives (Malcolm and Donalbain); **bestowed:** settled.

32 **strange invention:** lies; stories they have invented. What kinds of stories might they be telling?

33–34 **when . . . jointly:** when matters of state will require the attention of us both.

40 **be master of his time:** do what he wants.

43 **while:** until.

44–45 **sirrah:** a term of address to an inferior; **Attend . . . pleasure:** Are they waiting for me?

47–48 **To be thus . . . safely thus:** To be king is worthless unless my position as king is safe.

51 **dauntless temper:** fearless temperament.

55–56 **my genius . . . Caesar:** Banquo's mere presence forces back (rebukes) Macbeth's ruling spirit (genius). In ancient Rome, Octavius Caesar, who became emperor, had the same effect on his rival, Mark Antony.



They hailed him father to a line of kings.
60 Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
And put a barren scepter in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
65 For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;
Put rancors 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 seed of Banquo kings!
70 Rather than so, come, Fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance! Who's there?

[Enter Servant and two Murderers.]

Now go to the door and stay there till we call.
[Exit Servant.]

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?
Murderers. It was, so please your Highness.

Macbeth. Well then, now

75 Have you considered of my speeches? Know
That it was he, in the times past, which held you
So under fortune, which you thought had been
Our innocent self. This I made good to you
In our last conference, passed in probation with you
80 How you were borne in hand, how crossed; the instruments;
Who wrought with them; and all things else that might
To half a soul and to a notion crazed
Say "Thus did Banquo."

First Murderer. You made it known to us.

Macbeth. I did so; and went further, which is now
85 Our point of second meeting. Do you find
Your patience so predominant in your nature
That you can let this go? Are you so gospelled
To pray for this good man and for his issue,
Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave
90 And beggared yours for ever?

First Murderer. We are men, my liege.

Macbeth. Ay, 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 valued file
95 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one

60–69 They gave me a childless (fruitless, barren) crown and scepter, which will be taken away by someone outside my family (unlineal). It appears that I have committed murder, poisoned (filed) my mind, and destroyed my soul (eternal jewel) all for the benefit of Banquo's heirs.

70–71 Rather . . . utterance: Rather than allowing Banquo's heirs to become kings, he calls upon Fate itself to enter the combat arena (list) so that he can fight it to the death (utterance). Why does he feel that he needs to fight Fate?

75–83 Macbeth supposedly proved (passed in probation) Banquo's role, his deception (how you were borne in hand), his methods, and his allies. Even a half-wit (half a soul) or a crazed person would agree that Banquo caused their trouble.

87–90 He asks whether they are so influenced by the gospel's message of forgiveness (so gospelled) that they will pray for Banquo and his children despite his harshness, which will leave their own families beggars.



According to the gift which bounteous nature
Hath in him closed; whereby he does receive
Particular addition, from the bill

100 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,
105 Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
Which in his death were perfect.

91-100 The true worth of a dog
can be measured only by
examining the record (**valued file**)
of its special qualities (**particular**
addition).

103-107 Macbeth will give them a
secret job (**business in your**
bosoms) that will earn them his
loyalty (**grapples you to the heart**)
and love. Banquo's death will
make this sick king healthy.

Act 3, Scene 1: Macbeth with
the murderers (film 1971)





Second Murderer. I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
have so incensed that I am reckless what
110 I do to spite the world.

First Murderer. 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 on't.

Macbeth. Both of you
Know Banquo was your enemy.

Murderers. True, my lord.

115 **Macbeth.** So is he mine, and in such bloody distance
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,
120 For certain friends that are both his and mine,
Whose loves I may not drop, but wail 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
125 For sundry weighty reasons.

Second Murderer. We shall, my lord,
Perform what you command us.

First Murderer. Though our lives—

Macbeth. Your spirits shine through you. Within this hour
at most
I will advise you where to plant yourselves,
Acquaint you with the perfect spy o' the time,
130 The moment on't; for't must be done tonight,
And something from the palace (always thought
That I require a clearness), and with him,
To leave no rubs nor botches in the work,
Fleance his son, that keeps him company,
135 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.

Murderers. We are resolved, my lord.

Macbeth. I'll call upon you straight. Abide within.
[*Exeunt Murderers.*]

111 **tugged with:** knocked about by.

115–117 Banquo is near enough to draw blood, and like a menacing swordsman, his mere presence threatens (**thrusts against**) Macbeth's existence.

119 **bid my will avouch it:** justify it as my will.

127 **Your spirits shine through you:** Your courage is evident.

131–132 **and something . . . clearness:** The murder must be done away from the palace so that I remain blameless (**I require a clearness**).

135 **absence:** death. Why is the death of Fleance so important?

137 **Resolve yourselves apart:** Decide in private.

139 **straight:** soon.



140

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

[Exit.]

SCENE 2

Macbeth's palace at Forres.

Lady Macbeth and her husband discuss the troubled thoughts and bad dreams they have had since Duncan's murder. However, they agree to hide their dark emotions at the night's banquet. Lady Macbeth tries to comfort the tormented Macbeth, but her words do no good. Instead, Macbeth hints at some terrible event that will occur that night.

[Enter Lady Macbeth and a Servant]

Lady Macbeth. Is Banquo gone from court?

Servant. Ay, madam, but returns again tonight.

Lady Macbeth. Say to the King I would attend his leisure
For a few words.

Servant. Madam, I will.

[Exit.]

Lady Macbeth. Naught's had, all's spent,

5 Where our desire is got without content.
 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
 Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

[Enter Macbeth.]

10 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.

15 **Macbeth.** We have scotched the snake, not killed it.
 She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice
 Remains in danger of her former tooth.
 But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds 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,
20 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
 Than on the torture of the mind to lie
 In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
 After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
 Treason has done his worst: nor steel nor poison,

4-7 Nothing (naught) has been gained; everything has been wasted (spent). It would be better to be dead like Duncan than to live in uncertain joy.

8-12 Does Lady Macbeth follow her own advice about forgetting Duncan's murder?

16-22 He would rather have the world fall apart (the frame of things disjoint) than be afflicted with such fears and nightmares. Death is preferable to life on the torture rack of mental anguish (restless ecstasy).



View and Compare

Compare the facial expressions of these two Lady Macbeths. Which better fits your idea of her attitude as she tries to persuade Macbeth to forget about Duncan?



Act 3, Scene 2: Jon Finch
as Macbeth and Francesca
Annis as Lady Macbeth
(film, 1971)



Act 3, Scene 2:
Laurence Olivier as Macbeth
and Vivian Leigh as Lady Macbeth.
Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-
Avon, England (1955)



25 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.

Lady Macbeth. Come on.
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight.

Macbeth. So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you.
30 Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence both with eye and tongue:
Unsafe the while, that we
Must lave our honors in these flattering streams
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
35 Disguising what they are.

Lady Macbeth You must leave this.

Macbeth. O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.

Lady Macbeth. But in them Nature's copy's not eterne.

Macbeth. There's comfort yet; they are assailable.
40 Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
His cloistered flight, ere to black 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.

Lady Macbeth. What's to be done?

45 **Macbeth.** Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
50 Which keeps me pale! Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood.
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still:
55 Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
So prithee go with me.

[*Exeunt.*]

27 sleek: smooth.

31 present him eminence: pay special attention to him.

33 lave . . . streams: wash (lave) our honor in streams of flattery—that is, falsify our feelings.

34 vizards: masks.

38 in them . . . not eterne: Nature did not give them immortality.

40–44 jocund: cheerful; merry; Ere the bat . . . note: Before nightfall, when the bats and beetles fly, something dreadful will happen.

45 chuck: chick (a term of affection).

46 seeling: blinding.

49 great bond: Banquo's life.

51 rooky: gloomy; also, filled with crows (rooks).

55 Things brought about through evil need additional evil to make them strong.



SCENE 3

A park near the palace.

The two murderers, joined by a third, ambush Banquo and Fleance, killing Banquo. Fleance manages to escape in the darkness.

[Enter three Murderers.]

First Murderer. But who did bid thee join with us?

Third Murderer. Macbeth.

Second Murderer. He needs not our mistrust, since he delivers
Our offices, and what we have to do,
To the direction just.

First Murderer. Then stand with us.
The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day.
Now spurs the lated traveler apace
To gain the timely inn, and near approaches
The subject of our watch.

Third Murderer. Hark! I hear horses.

Banquo. [Within] Give us a light there, ho!

Second Murderer. Then 'tis he! The rest
That are within the note of expectation
Already are i' the court.

First Murderer. His horses go about.

Third Murderer. Almost a mile; but he does usually,
So all men do, from hence to the palace gate
Make it their walk.

[Enter Banquo, and Fleance with a torch.]

Second Murderer. A light, a light!

Third Murderer. 'Tis he.

15 First Murderer. Stand to't.

Banquo. It will be rain tonight.

First Murderer. Let it come down!

[They set upon Banquo.]

Banquo. O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!
Thou mayst revenge. O slave!

[Dies. Fleance escapes.]

Third Murderer. Who did strike out the light?

First Murderer. Was't not the way?

20 Third Murderer. There's but one down; the son is fled.

Second Murderer. We have lost

2-4 He needs . . . just: Macbeth should not be distrustful, since he gave us the orders (offices) and we plan to follow his directions exactly.

6 lated: tardy; late.

9 Give us a light: Banquo, nearing the palace, calls for servants to bring a light.

9-11 Then 'tis . . . court: It must be Banquo, since all the other expected guests are already in the palace.

15 Stand to't: Be prepared.

18 Thou mayst revenge: You might live to avenge my death.

19 Was't not the way: Isn't that what we were supposed to do? Apparently, one of the murderers struck out the light, thus allowing Fleance to escape.



Best half of our affair.

First Murderer. Well, let's away, and say how much is done.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 4

The hall in the palace.

As the banquet begins, one of the murderers reports on Banquo's death and Fleance's escape. Macbeth is disturbed by the news and even more shaken when he returns to the banquet table and sees the bloody ghost of Banquo. Only Macbeth sees the ghost, and his terrified reaction startles the guests. Lady Macbeth explains her husband's strange behavior as an illness from childhood that will soon pass. Once the ghost disappears, Macbeth calls for a toast to Banquo, whose ghost immediately reappears. Because Macbeth begins to rant and rave, Lady Macbeth dismisses the guests, fearful that her husband will reveal too much. Macbeth, alone with his wife, tells of his suspicions of Macduff, absent from the banquet. He also says he will visit the witches again and hints at bloody deeds yet to happen.

[*Banquet prepared. Enter Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Ross, Lennox, Lords, and Attendants.*]

Macbeth. You know your own degrees, sit down. At first
And last the hearty welcome.

Lords. Thanks to your Majesty.

Macbeth. Ourself will mingle with society
And play the humble host.

5 **Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time**
We will require her welcome.

Lady Macbeth. Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends,
For my heart speaks they are welcome.

[*Enter First Murderer to the door.*]

Macbeth. See, they encounter thee with their hearts' thanks.
10 Both sides are even: here I'll sit i' the midst.
Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure
The table round. [*Moves toward Murderer at door.*]
There's blood upon thy face.

Murderer. 'Tis Banquo's then.

15 **Macbeth.** 'Tis better thee without than he within.
Is he dispatched?

Murderer. My lord, his throat is cut. That I did for him.

Macbeth. Thou art the best o' the cutthroats! Yet he's good
That did the like for Fleance. If thou didst it,

1 your own degrees: where your rank entitles you to sit.

5 keeps her state: sits on her throne rather than at the banquet table.

11 measure: toast. Macbeth keeps talking to his wife and guests as he casually edges toward the door to speak privately with the murderer.

16 dispatched: killed.



20 Thou art the nonpareil.

Murderer. Most royal sir,
Fleance is scaped.

Macbeth. [*Aside*] Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect;

Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air.
25 But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.—But Banquo's safe?

Murderer. Ay, my good lord. Safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched gashes on his head,
The least a death to nature.

Macbeth. Thanks for that!
30 There the grown serpent lies; the worm that's fled
Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
No teeth for the present. Get thee gone. Tomorrow
We'll hear ourselves again.

[*Exit Murderer.*]

Lady Macbeth. My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
35 That is not often vouched, while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home.
From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;
Meeting were bare without it.

[*Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place.*]

20 nonpareil: best.

22 fit: fever of fear.

24 casing: surrounding.

30 worm: little serpent, that is, Fleance.

32 no teeth for the present: too young to cause harm right now. Contrast this comment with his privately expressed fears.

33 hear ourselves: talk together.

Act 3, Scene 4: Orson Welles as Macbeth faces Banquo's ghost (film, 1948)



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Macbeth. Sweet remembrancer!

Now good digestion wait on appetite,
40 And health on both!

Lennox. May't please your Highness sit.

Macbeth. Here had we now our country's honor, roofed,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present;
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance!

Ross. His absence, sir,
45 Lays blame upon his promise. Please't your Highness
To grace us with your royal company?

Macbeth. The table's full.

Lennox. Here is a place reserved, sir.

Macbeth. Where?

Lennox. Here, my good lord. What is't that moves your
Highness?

50 **Macbeth.** Which of you have done this?

Lords. What, my good lord?

Macbeth. Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
Thy gory locks at me.

Ross. Gentlemen, rise. His Highness is not well.

Lady Macbeth. Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
55 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.
Feed, and regard him not.—Are you a man?

60 **Macbeth.** Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.

Lady Macbeth. O proper stuff!

This is the very painting of your fear.
This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts
65 (Impostors to true fear) would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool.

70 **Macbeth.** Prithee see there! behold! look! lo! How say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel houses and our graves must send

33–38 Macbeth must not forget his duties as host. A feast will be no different from a meal that one pays for unless the host gives his guests courteous attention (**ceremony**), the best part of any meal.

38 **sweet remembrancer:** a term of affection for his wife, who has reminded him of his duty.

41–44 The best people of Scotland would all be under Macbeth's roof if Banquo were present too. He hopes Banquo's absence is due to rudeness rather than to some accident (**mischance**).

47 Macbeth finally notices that Banquo's ghost is present and sitting in the king's chair. As you read about this encounter, consider how Macbeth's reaction affects his guests.

52 **gory:** bloody.

54–59 **Sit . . . not:** Lady Macbeth tries to calm the guests by claiming her husband often has such fits. She says the attack will pass quickly (**upon a thought**) and that looking at him will only make him worse (**extend his passion**). Why does Lady Macbeth make up a story to tell the guests?

61–69 She dismisses his hallucination as utter nonsense (**proper stuff**). His outbursts (**flaws and starts**) are the product of imaginary fears (**impostors to true fear**) and are unmanly, the kind of behavior described in a woman's story. Do you think her appeal to his manhood will work this time?



Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

[Exit Ghost.]

Lady Macbeth. What, quite unmanned in folly?

75 Macbeth. If I stand here, I saw him.

Lady Macbeth. Fie, for shame!

Macbeth. Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time
Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been performed
Too terrible for the ear. The time has been
80 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.

Lady Macbeth. My worthy lord,
85 Your noble friends do lack you.

Macbeth. I do forget.
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends.
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to all!
Then I'll sit down. Give me some wine, fill full.

[Enter Ghost.]

90 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.

Lords. Our duties, and the pledge.

Macbeth. Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
95 Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!

Lady Macbeth. Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom. 'Tis no other.
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

100 Macbeth. What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again
105 And dare me to the desert with thy sword.

72-74 If burial vaults (**charnel houses**) give back the dead, then we may as well throw our bodies to the birds (**kites**), whose stomachs (**maws**) will become our tombs (**monuments**).

76-79 Macbeth desperately tries to justify his murder of Banquo. Murder has been common from ancient times to the present, though laws (**humane statute**) have tried to rid civilized society (**gentle weal**) of violence.

86 **muse**: wonder.

92-93 **To all . . . to all**: Macbeth toasts everyone, including Banquo.

94-97 **avaunt**: go away. Macbeth sees Banquo again. He tells Banquo that he is only a ghost, with unreal bones, cold blood, and no consciousness (**speculation**).



If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow!
Unreal mock'ry, hence!

[Exit Ghost.]

Why, so! Being gone,
I am a man again. Pray you sit still.

110 **Lady Macbeth.** You have displaced the mirth, broke the good
meeting
With most admired disorder.

Macbeth. 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 owe,
115 When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks
When mine is blanch'd with fear.

Ross. What sights, my lord?

Lady Macbeth. I pray you speak not. He grows worse and worse;
Question enrages him. At once, good night.
120 Stand not upon the order of your going,
But go at once.

Lennox. Good night, and better health
Attend his Majesty!

Lady Macbeth. A kind good night to all!
[Exeunt Lords and Attendants.]

Macbeth. It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
125 Augures and understood relations have
By maggot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood. What is the night?

Lady Macbeth. Almost at odds with morning, which is which.

Macbeth. How say'st thou that Macduff denies his person
130 At our great bidding?

Lady Macbeth. Did you send to him, sir?

Macbeth. I hear it by the way; but I will send.
There's not a one of them but in his house
I keep a servant feed. I will tomorrow
(And betimes I will) to the Weird Sisters.
135 More shall they speak; 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,

100–108 Macbeth would be willing to face Banquo in any other form, even his living self. If trembling . . . girl: If I still tremble, call me a girl's doll.

111 admired: astonishing.

111–117 Macbeth is bewildered by his wife's calm. Her reaction makes him seem a stranger to himself (strange even to the disposition that I owe): she seems to be the one with all the courage, since he is white (blanch'd) with fear.

120 Stand . . . going: Don't worry about the proper formalities of leaving.

123–127 Macbeth fears that Banquo's murder (it) will be revenged by his own murder. Stones, trees, or talking birds (maggot-pies and choughs and rooks) may reveal the hidden knowledge (augures) of his guilt.

129–130 How say'st . . . bidding: What do you think of Macduff's refusal to come? Why do you think Macbeth is suddenly so concerned about Macduff?

132–133 There's . . . feed: Macbeth has paid (feed) household servants to spy on every noble, including Macduff.

134 betimes: early.

135 bent: determined.

136–141 For mine . . . scanned: Macbeth will do anything to protect himself. He has stepped so far into a river of blood that it would make no sense to turn back. He will act upon his unnatural (strange) thoughts without having examined (scanned) them.



Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
140 Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned.

Lady Macbeth. You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

Macbeth. Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use.

145 We are yet but young in deed.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 5

A heath.

The goddess of witchcraft, Hecate, scolds the three witches for dealing independently with Macbeth. She outlines their next meeting with him, planning to cause his downfall by making him overconfident. (Experts believe this scene was not written by Shakespeare but rather was added later.)

[*Thunder. Enter the three Witches, meeting Hecate.*]

First Witch. Why, how now, Hecate? You look angrily.

Hecate. Have I not reason, beldams as you are,

Saucy and overbold? How did you dare
To trade and traffic with Macbeth
5 In riddles and affairs of death;
And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never called to bear my part
Or show the glory of our art?
10 And, which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you.
But make amends now. Get you gone
15 And at the pit of Acheron
Meet me i' the morning. Thither he
Will come to know his destiny.
Your vessels and your spells provide,
Your charms and everything beside.
20 I am for the air. This night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end.
Great business must be wrought ere noon.
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vap'rous drop profound.
25 I'll catch it ere it come to ground;

142 **season:** preservative.

143–145 His vision of the ghost (**strange and self-abuse**) is only the result of a beginner's fear (**initiate fear**), to be cured with practice (**hard use**).

2 **beldams:** hags.

7 **close contriver:** secret inventor.

13 **loves . . . you:** cares only about his own goals, not about you.

15 **Acheron:** a river in hell, according to Greek mythology. Hecate plans to hold their meeting in a hellish place.

20–21 **This . . . end:** Tonight I'm working for a disastrous (**dismal**) and fatal end for Macbeth.



And that, distilled by magic sleights,
Shall raise such artificial sprites
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion.
30 He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear;
And you all know security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

[*Music and a song within. "Come away, come away," etc.*]

Hark! I am called. My little spirit, see,
35 Sits in a foggy cloud and stays for me.

[*Exit.*]

First Witch. Come, let's make haste. She'll soon be back again.

[*Exeunt.*]

23–29 Hecate will obtain a magical drop from the moon, treat it with secret art, and so create spirits (**artificial sprites**) that will lead Macbeth to his destruction (**confusion**).

34–35 Like the other witches, Hecate has a demon helper (**my little spirit**). At the end of her speech, she is raised by pulley to the "Heavens" of the stage.

SCENE 6

The palace at Forres.

Lennox and another Scottish lord review the events surrounding the murders of Duncan and Banquo, indirectly suggesting that Macbeth is both a murderer and a tyrant. It is reported that Macduff has gone to England, where Duncan's son Malcolm is staying with King Edward and raising an army to regain the Scottish throne. Macbeth, angered by Macduff's refusal to see him, is also preparing for war.

[*Enter Lennox and another Lord.*]

Lennox. My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,
Which can interpret farther. Only I say
Things have been strangely borne. The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth. Marry, he was dead!
5 And the right valiant Banquo walked too late;
Whom, you may say (if't please you) Fleance killed,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
10 To kill their gracious father? Damned fact!
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight,
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too!
15 For 'twould have angered any heart alive
To hear the men deny't. So that I say
He has borne all things well; and I do think

1–3 **My former . . . borne:** Lennox and the other lord have shared suspicions of Macbeth.

6–7 **whom . . . Fleance fled:** Lennox is being ironic when he says that fleeing the scene of the crime must make Fleance guilty of his father's death.

8–10 **who . . . father:** He says that everyone agrees on the horror of Duncan's murder by his sons. But Lennox has been consistently ironic, claiming to believe in what is obviously false. His words indirectly blame Macbeth.

12 **pious:** holy.

15–16 **For 'twould . . . deny't:** Again, he is being ironic. If the servants had lived, Macbeth might have been discovered.



That, had he Duncan's sons under his key
(As, an't please heaven, he shall not), they should find
20 What 'twere to kill a father. So should Fleance.
But peace! for from broad words, and 'cause he failed
His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear
Macduff lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell
Where he bestows himself?

Lord. The son of Duncan,
25 From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
Lives in the English court, and is received
Of the most pious Edward with such grace
That the malevolence of fortune nothing
Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
30 Is gone to pray the holy King upon his aid
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward;
That by the help of these (with Him above
To ratify the work) we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
35 Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful homage and receive free honors—
All which we pine for now. And this report
Hath so exasperate the King that he
Prepares for some attempt of war.

Lennox. Sent he to Macduff?

40 **Lord.** He did; and with an absolute "Sir, not I!"
The cloudy messenger turns me his back
And hums, as who should say, "You'll rue the time
That clogs me with this answer."

Lennox. And that well might
Advise him to a caution t' hold what distance.
45 His wisdom can provide. Some holy angel
Fly to the court of England and unfold
His message ere he come, that a swift blessing
May soon return to this our suffering country
Under a hand accursed!

Lord. I'll send my prayers with him.

[*Exeunt.*]

21 from broad words: because of his frank talk.

24 bestows himself: is staying.

25 from . . . birth: Macbeth keeps Malcolm from his birthright. As the eldest son of Duncan, Malcolm should be king.

27 Edward: Edward the Confessor, king of England from 1042 to 1066, a man known for his virtue and religion.

28–29 that . . . respect: Though Malcolm suffers from bad fortune (the loss of the throne), he is respectfully treated by Edward.

29–37 Thither . . . for now: Macduff wants the king to persuade the people of Northumberland and their earl, Siward, to join Malcolm's cause.

40–43 The messenger, fearing Macbeth's anger, was unhappy (**cloudy**) with Macduff's refusal to cooperate. Because Macduff burdens (**clogs**) him with bad news, he will not hurry back.

from

HOLINSHED'S CHRONICLES



Preparing to Read

Build Background

As this passage from the *Chronicles* begins, Macbeth has been courting the favor of the people. As you read, follow the reasoning that leads Macbeth to murder.



This was but a counterfeit zeal of equity¹ showed by him, partly against his natural inclination, to purchase thereby the favor of the people. Shortly after, he began to show what he was, instead of equity practicing cruelty. For the prick of conscience (as it chanceth ever in tyrants and such as attain to any estate by unrighteous means) caused him ever to fear lest he should be served of the same cup as he had ministered to his predecessor. The words also of the three Weird Sisters would not out of his mind, which as they promised him the kingdom, so likewise did they promise it at the same time unto the posterity of Banquo. He willed therefore the same Banquo, with his son named Fleance, to come to a supper that he had prepared for them; which was indeed, as he had devised, present death at the hands of certain murderers whom he hired to execute that deed, appointing them to meet with the same Banquo and his son without the palace, as they returned to their lodgings, and there to slay them, so that he would not have his house slandered but that in time to come he might clear himself if anything were laid to his charge upon any suspicion that might arise.

It chanced by the benefit of the dark night that, though the father were slain, yet the son, by the help of almighty God reserving him to better fortune, escaped that danger; and afterward, having some inkling (by the admonition of some friends which he had in the court) how his life was sought no less than his father's, who was slain not by chance-medley² (as by the handling of the matter Macbeth would have had it to appear) but even upon a premeditated³ device, whereupon to avoid further peril he fled into Wales.

Thinking Through the Literature

1. Based on this and the preceding selection from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, what can you conclude about politics and power in Macbeth's Scotland?
2. What does the inclusion of the three witches suggest about the historical accuracy of Holinshed's *Chronicles*?
3. **Comparing Texts** Compare the information from Holinshed's *Chronicles* with the **plot** and **characters** so far in *Macbeth*. What events and characters are similar? What differences do you detect? Why do you think Shakespeare portrays King James's ancestor Banquo in a more flattering light than he appears in the *Chronicles*?

1. equity: fairness.
2. chance-medley: accidental homicide.
3. premeditated: premeditated.