

Cast list



The Three Witches - or Weird Sisters



Macbeth
Thane of Glamis
General to King Duncan



Lady Macbeth
Wife to Macbeth



Banquo
General to King Duncan



King Duncan
King of Scotland



Malcolm and Donalbain
The King's sons



Macduff
Thane of Fife



A servant of
Glamis Castle



Two
Murderers

The Scene

Scotland in the eleventh century.

5

*When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
When the burly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.*

First and Second Witches; L.i.

Macbeth



All day, the three witches waited on the edge of the battlefield. Hidden by mist and magic, they watched the Scottish army win a victory over the invading forces of Norway, and after the fight was done they lingered on, gloating over the moans of the dying.

7

As thunder rolled overhead and rain lashed down, one of the witches raised her long, hooked nose to the wind and sniffed like a dog taking a scent. "He will be here soon," she said.



The second witch stroked the tuft of silvery hair that sprouted from her chin, and grinned, showing her gums. "I hear the sound of hooves, sisters," she said.

The third witch held up a piece of rock crystal in front of her milky, blind eyes. Inside the crystal, something seemed to move. "I see him!" she screeched. "He comes! Let the spell begin."



* * *

Two Scottish generals rode slowly away from the battlefield, their heads lowered against the driving rain.



One was Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, the bravest soldier in King Duncan's army. He was tall, broad-shouldered and had a warrior's face, broken-nosed and scarred from old fights.

His companion and friend, Banquo was younger and slimmer, with a mouth that was quick to smile, although he wasn't smiling now.

Macbeth's dark eyes were distant as he recalled the details of the day's slaughter. 'A hard fight to protect an old, feeble King,' he thought. 'If I ruled Scotland...' His mind drifted off into a familiar daydream: he saw himself seated on the throne, with the golden crown of Scotland circling his brow...



Suddenly his horse reared and whinnied, its eyes rolling in terror. Macbeth struggled to control the horse, and at that moment a bolt of lightning turned the air violet. In the eerie light he saw three weird hags barring the way, their wild hair and ragged robes streaming like tattered flags in the wind.



Macbeth's hand
flew to his sword,
but Banquo hissed
out an urgent
warning. "No, my
friend! I do not think
swords can harm creatures like these."



A small, cold fear entered Macbeth's
heart, and he snarled to conceal it.
"What do you want?" he demanded of the
witches. "Stand aside!"



Moving as one,
the witches raised
their left arms and
pointed crooked
fingers at Macbeth.

They spoke, and
their voices grated
like iron on stone.

"All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis!"
"All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor!"
"All hail, Macbeth, who shall be King!"

Macbeth gave a startled gasp – how
had these withered crones come to read
his secret thoughts?

The witches turned their fingers to
Banquo. "All hail, Banquo!" they
chanted. "Your children shall be kings!"

And they vanished like a mist of breath
on a mirror.



"Were they ghosts?" Banquo whispered in amazement.

"They were madwomen!" snorted Macbeth. "How can I be Thane of Cawdor? He is alive and well and one of King Duncan's most trusted friends."

"And how could my children be kings if you took the throne?" Banquo asked.



The sound of hoofbeats made both men turn their heads.

Out of the rain appeared a royal herald. He pulled his horse to a halt and lifted a hand in salute. "I bring great news!" he announced. "The Thane of Cawdor has confessed to treason and has been executed. The King has given his title and lands to you, noble Macbeth. He has proclaimed you as his heir, after his sons Malcolm and Donalbain. All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis *and* Cawdor!"



Macbeth's face
turned deathly
pale. 'So the
witches told the
truth?' he thought.
'Only Duncan and
his sons stand between
me and the crown! My wife must know
of this – I will write to her tonight.'



Macbeth was so deep in thought that
he didn't notice the troubled look that



Banquo gave him.
The witches had
left a scent of
evil in the air,
and Banquo
seemed to smell
it clinging to
his friend.

* * *

Lady Macbeth stood at the window of her bedchamber, gazing out at the clouds gathering above the turrets of Glamis Castle. In her right hand, she held the letter from her husband, and its words echoed through her mind. "Glamis, Cawdor, King, you could have them all!" she whispered. "But I know you too well, my lord. You want greatness, but you shrink from what you must do to get it. If only..."



There was a knock at the door. Lady Macbeth started and turned, her long black hair whispering against the green silk of her gown. "Come!" she called.



A servant entered. "A message from Lord Macbeth, my lady," he said. "He bids you prepare a royal banquet, for the King will stay at Glamis tomorrow night."

"What?" Lady Macbeth gasped in amazement. "Are you mad?" She quickly recovered herself. "Go and tell the other servants to make ready for the King!" she commanded.

When she was alone again, Lady Macbeth opened the window, and a blast of cold air caught her hair and swirled it about her face. "Fate leads Duncan to Glamis!" she murmured.

"Come to me, Powers of Darkness! Fill me with cruelty, so I may teach my husband how to be ruthless!"

A low growl of thunder answered her.

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