Macbeth rode ahead of the King's party, and arrived at Glamis just after sunrise. When his wife greeted him he noticed a hard, determined look in her eyes. "The King sleeps here tonight," he said. "Is his room ready?"

"All is ready...for Duncan's last night on Earth!" said Lady Macbeth.

"What do you mean?" Macbeth asked.

Lady Macbeth moved closer, and spoke in a low voice. "I guessed the thoughts that lay behind your letter," she said. "Duncan is old and weak. His sons are not fit to rule, but you are! Kill the King while he sleeps, and let Malcolm and Donalbain bear the blame!"

Macbeth was astonished – first the witches, and now his wife had seen his innermost thoughts. Some strange force seemed to have taken control of his life, and he fought against it. "I will never commit murder and treason!" he declared.

"I will put a sleeping-potion in a jug of wine and send it to the guards at the King's door," Lady Macbeth said quickly. "They will sleep like babes. It will be easy for you to slip into Duncan's room."

"No! I cannot!" Macbeth groaned.

Lady Macbeth's face twisted into a sneer. "This is your real chance to be King," she said. "Are you too cowardly to take it?"

"I am no coward!" snapped Macbeth.

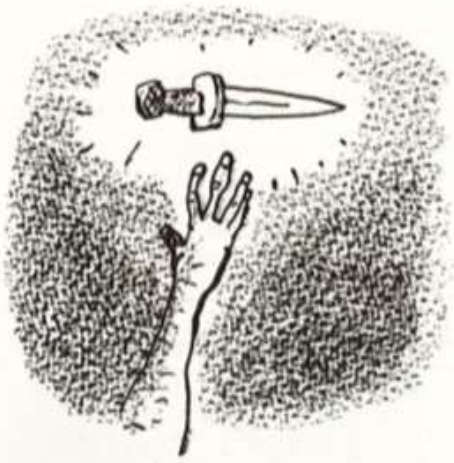
"Then prove it!" Lady Macbeth hissed. "Kill the old man and take the throne!"

Once more, the strange force moved through Macbeth, flowing into him from his wife until he was unable to resist. 'All hail, Macbeth, who shall be King!' he thought, and he could almost feel the crown upon his head.

* * *

Long after the castle had fallen silent, Macbeth left his room and crept along the corridors. His hands trembled, and the sound of his pulse in his ears was like the beating of a battle drum. 'This is the hour of the wolf and the witch,' he thought, 'when evil spirits roam the night.'

And as the words crossed his mind, a ghostly glow gathered in the darkness, shaping itself into a dagger that floated in the air, shining with a sickly green light. Macbeth almost cried out in terror.



"Be calm!" he told himself. "This is a trick of the mind!" To prove it, he reached out his hand to take the dagger, but it floated away from him and pointed the way to Duncan's door. Blood began to ooze from the blade, as though the iron were weeping red tears.

A bell tolled midnight.

"Duncan's funeral bell is ringing!" muttered Macbeth, and he followed the dagger through the gloom.

* * *

Lady Macbeth also heard the bell toll, and it seemed a long time before her husband returned. There was blood on his face and hands, and he carried two daggers.

"You should not have brought the daggers here!" said Lady Macbeth. "Go back and put them into the guards' hands, as we planned!"

Macbeth's eyes were blank. He shook his head. "I will not go back there!" he said hoarsely.

"Then *I will!*" said Lady Macbeth, and snatched the daggers from Macbeth's hands and left the room.

Macbeth stood where he was, shivering uncontrollably, seeing nothing but Duncan's dead eyes staring. He tried to pray, but his lips and tongue would not form the words.

In a short while, Lady Macbeth came back, holding her red hands up to the candle-light. "I smeared blood over the guards' faces, to make them seem guilty," she said. "In the morning, we will have them tortured until they say that Duncan's sons paid them to kill him!"

Her face was so full of triumph and cruelty, that Macbeth no longer recognised it. He turned away, and caught sight of his reflection in the mirror. It was as if he were looking at someone else – as if he and his wife had become strangers to themselves and each other.

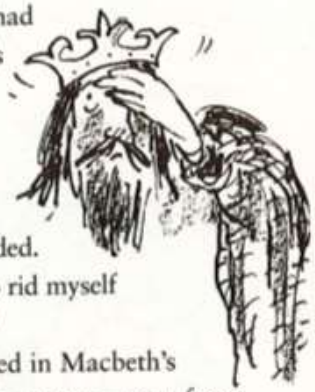
* * *

Though they knew it would be taken as proof of their guilt, Duncan's sons fled for their lives. Donalbain sailed for Ireland,

and Malcolm rode across the border into England, to put himself under the protection of the English King.

Now nothing stood between Macbeth and the throne.

He was crowned, but the crown did not bring him the pleasure he had imagined. His secret dream had come true, but he was disturbed by other dreams – dreams of what the witches had foretold for Banquo's descendants.



'Have I lied and murdered to set Banquo's spawn on the throne?' he brooded. 'I must find a way to rid myself of him, and his son.'

A dark plan formed in Macbeth's mind, and he kept it a secret – even from Lady Macbeth. Without either of them realising, the strange force that had compelled them to kill Duncan was slowly driving them apart.

Glamis Castle was woken in the grey light of dawn by voices shouting, "Murder! The King is slain!" Shocked guests ran from their rooms and spoke in whispers. Who could have murdered the King?

Rumours flew through the castle like swallows – and suspicion fell on Malcolm and Donalbain, who had the most to gain from their father's death.

Malcolm and Donalbain were convinced that Macbeth was the murderer, but they did not dare to accuse him – who would believe that the hero of the battle against the Norwegians would slay his own King?

* * *

Macbeth held a coronation feast in the royal castle at Dunsinane. Many of the nobles who attended remarked that Macbeth's old friend, Banquo, was not present, but Macbeth laughed when they mentioned it.

"Lord Banquo and his son must have been delayed on their way," he said lightly. Only he knew what had delayed them, for he had hired two murderers to ambush them on the road.

At the height of the feast, a servant brought Macbeth a message that two men wished to see him on urgent business. Macbeth hurried to his private chambers, and found the murderers waiting there.

"Have you done what I paid you to do?" Macbeth demanded.

"Banquo is dead, my lord," one of the murderers said. "We cut his throat and threw the body into a ditch."

Macbeth sighed with relief – perhaps now he would sleep peacefully. But then he sensed something wrong: neither of the murderers would look at him, and they kept anxiously shuffling their feet.

"And his son?" said Macbeth.

The reply was shattering. "He escaped, my lord. Banquo's son still lives."

As he returned to the banqueting hall, doubts tortured Macbeth like scorpions' stings. 'Banquo's son still lives!' he thought. 'Lives to take his revenge on me, to claim the throne and father sons who will rule after him. Is there no end to the blood that must be shed before I find peace?'

As he entered the hall, Macbeth put on a false smile to hide his troubled mind; but the smile froze when he saw a hooded figure seated in his chair. "Who dares to sit in my place?" he roared.

The guests fell silent and looked bewildered: the King's chair was empty.

"Why...no one, my lord!" said Lady Macbeth, with a forced laugh. She could see that something was wrong with her husband, but she could not guess what. "The King is jesting!" she told the nobles.

"This is no jest!" barked Macbeth. He strode angrily towards the figure, then recoiled in horror as it drew back its hood.

For what he saw was Banquo – with weed tangled in his hair, and mud streaked across his face, with a deep gash in his neck that sent a stream of blood pattering onto the flagstones and haunting, glassy eyes that stared and stared.

"Get rid of him!" Macbeth screeched.

The nobles sprang to their feet, drawing their daggers, knocking over chairs and wine cups in the confusion.

"Back to your grave!" sobbed Macbeth.

Banquo smiled – there was blood in his mouth, and his teeth shone white through it, then he faded into the shadows and the torchlight.

"My lords, the King is ill," Lady Macbeth said desperately. "Leave us now, and let him rest. In the morning, he will be himself again."

"Myself?" Macbeth moaned softly to himself. "I will not be myself again until Banquo's spirit is laid to rest. Only the witches can set me free!"

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