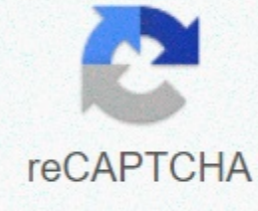




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Act 1, Scene 1 Amid thunder and lightning, three witches meet to plan their meeting with Macbeth, a Scottish general and the Thane of Glamis. They agree to gather again at dusk on a moor that Macbeth will cross on the way home from battle. Act 1, Scene 2 King Duncan of the Scots awaits news of the battle between his men and the rebels led by the Thane of Cawdor. The king and his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, meet a soldier who is weak and bleeding. He reports that Macbeth and Banquo have performed valiantly in battle. His admiration for the noble but brutal Macbeth is deep indeed: For valiant Macbeth - well he deserves that name - Contempt fortune, with his brandish'd steel, Which smok'd with bloody execution, Valour's minion carved from his passage... Until he dethroned him from the ship to the chaps, and recovered his head on our battlements. (1.2.15-20) King Duncan welcomes the courage of his captains, and when Angus and Ross arrive to tell him that the Thane of Cawdor has surrendered, Duncan is happy to hand over the title of the Thane and all his country to Macbeth. Act 1, Scene 3 The Witches meet on the dark and lonely moors to await Macbeth. To kill the time they exchange about their evil deeds. Macbeth and Banquo meet the Weird Sisters and we immediately see that Macbeth has a strange bond with the Witches, and mimic their famous words spoken earlier in the drama: So nasty and honest per day that I haven't seen(1.3.38) . The Witches address Macbeth as Glamis, Cawdor and King of the Scots. Macbeth is startled by what he clearly sees as a prophecy that he will be the next ruler of Scotland. He is too bewildered to speak and so Banquo asks the Witches if there is any more to their premonition. They do have something to add, not about Macbeth, but about Banquo. They talk in riddles and tell him that he is Less than Macbeth, and bigger and Not so happy, yet much happier (1.3.65-6). They also tell Banquo that although he will never be king himself, he will blame future kings of Scotland. Then the Witches disappear into darkness, despite the pleas of Macbeth, whose shock has turned to the lust for more information. Once alone, Macbeth and Banquo act as if they don't believe anything the Weird Sisters have said, but secretly they can't help thinking there's a little truth in the hags' words. Ross and Angus arrive and inform Macbeth that Duncan has appointed him Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth and Banquo are baffled by the turn of events, realizing that the Witches are right about a facet of prophecy, and Macbeth can't help but focus on their other, larger that he will be king. Act 1, Scene 4 Macbeth and Banquo reach King Duncan's castle and Duncan praises Macbeth for his loyalty and courage. He also embraces Banquo and thanks him for his courage during the uprising. He announces that he has decided to castle in Iverness, and that he has chosen his son, Malcolm, as prince of Cumberland and thus the next King of Scotland. Macbeth suggests that he leave for his castle early to make sure everything is perfect for the king's arrival, and Duncan likes to approve. But Macbeth is really only concerned with the king's choice of successor. With ambitious thoughts racing through his mind, Macbeth regains lust after the crown: Stars, hide your burn / Don't let light see my black and deep desires (1.4.50-1). Act 1, Scene 5 The scene opens in a room at Macbeth's castle in Iverness. Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband, in which she reports all the strange events he has seen. She learns from the prophecy of the witches and that a prophecy has already come true. Lady Macbeth is ecstatic and she fixes her mind on getting the throne for Macbeth by all means necessary. But Lady Macbeth knows that her husband has a weakness that will prevent him from taking the steps necessary to secure the crown. She is sure that because Macbeth is an ambitious man, he has entertained the thought of killing Duncan, no doubt several times. But she fears that without the wickedness that should be attending those murderous thoughts. Although the unusually cruel killing of his enemies on the battlefield have us questioning his propensity for evil, Lady Macbeth feels he is just too full o' the milk of human kindness to kill King Duncan. She, however, thinks herself not as compassionate as her husband, and when a messenger comes up with the word that Duncan intends to visit Iverness, she is overjoyed that the chance to kill the king has presented itself so quickly. She summons all evil spirits to ensure that no pleas from a man come between her and her monstrous deeds: Macbeth arrives at the castle and Lady Macbeth is ready to tempt him to join her in murder. She subtly alludes to her intentions: Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower / But be the snake underneath. He who comes / Must be provided... (1.5.65-7). Macbeth dodges the matter at hand and sheepishly tells her that they will continue to speak on the subject. Lady Macbeth confidently assures him: Leave the rest to me (1.5.74). Act 1, Scene 6 Duncan arrives at the castle with his sons, and Banquo, Lennox, Macduff, and others in his party. Ironically, Duncan and Banquo discuss the beauty of the castle while inside it smacks of moral decay. Banquo goes so far as to say that the temple-haunting martlet does approve of the castle and its sweet-smelling fresh air. Unbeknownst to Banquo, this is a particularly inappropriate reference to martlet, a bird known for building its nest near sacred sites. Lady Macbeth is the first to greet Duncan and his court. She gracefully welcomes them into her humble abode. As is the custom of the country, she tells the that she has prepared a record of everything she owns, so that Duncan can make an inventory of the belongings of his subjects. But Duncan won't talk about that. He once again expresses his love for Macbeth and they all move behind the castle walls. Act 1, Scene 7 Macbeth is alone in a dining room in the castle. His conscience acts on, and he is especially concerned about the punishment he will receive in the afterlife. When it was done, when 'tis done, then t'were well / It were done quickly. If there were no consequences for killing Duncan, Macbeth wouldn't be so reticent. But he concludes that even if heaven would not condemn him, he cannot bring himself to kill Duncan, who he believes is a good man and an excellent monarch. Lady Macbeth meets her husband and sees the indecision on his face. Macbeth tells her that he has changed his mind: We will not continue in this business (1.7.31). Lady Macbeth, who is ruthlessly incomprehensible, refuses to accept Macbeth's decision. Instead, Lady Macbeth plays on his emotions, calling him a coward and accusing him of not loving her. Her sly words work well on Macbeth, and she turns his mind back to thoughts of murder. However, he is still scared and he asks her: If we have to fail? (1.vii.53). With conviction and confidence enough for both, Lady Macbeth responds to her husband's doubts: We fail! But screw your courage to the bottleneck instead / And we will not fail (1.7.54-56). Macbeth is convinced once and for all -- they will continue to murder the king. Act 2, Scene 1 The night falls over the castle at Iverness. Banquo tells his son Fleance it's as black as he's seen one night. Banquo has trouble sleeping, because the prophecy of the Witches is mainly on his mind. He points out that he too has thought ambitious thoughts and he begs the heavens for the will to suppress them: Merciful forces/ Limit in me the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives way to rest (2.1.7-9). Banquo meets Macbeth in the courtyard and he tries to raise the subject of the Witches, but Macbeth refuses to discuss them or their predictions. He replies bluntly I don't think of them, and offers Banquo goodnight. Macbeth goes to an empty room and waits for his wife to ring the bell, indicating that Duncan's guards are in a drunken sleep. Macbeth's mind is racing with thoughts of the evil he's going to perform and he starts to hallucinate, seeing a bloody dagger appear in the air. He soliloquizes on the wickedness in the world before concluding that talking about the murder will only make the act that much harder to complete. Suddenly, there's a bell. Macbeth puts himself and utters these last words: I go, and it is done; The bell invites me. Don't hear it, Duncan, because it's a clock that calls you to heaven, or to hell. (2.1.62-4) Law Scene 2 Lady Macbeth drugged Duncan's guards and she waits in her room for Macbeth to commit the murder. She hears moans of torture from Duncan's room, and she loses some of her composure. She fears that they have awakened the guards and she confesses that she would have killed the king herself if he had not resembled her own father. Macbeth brings back a murderer; his hands dripping in the blood of his victims. The two whisper about the act and Macbeth nervously recounts the cries each man made before stabbing them. Lady Macbeth tells him to consider it not so deep (2.2.30), but Macbeth can only focus on their screams and the terrifying realization that, when one called God bless us!, he tried to say Amen in response, but the word stuck in his throat. Lady Macbeth begs her husband to put the deed out of his head, but Macbeth thinks harder about what he's done. He hears a voice cry Glamis has murder'd sleep: and therefore cawdor / Will not sleep anymore: Macbeth will not sleep anymore! (2.2.41-3). Lady Macbeth insists that he wash his face and hands and place the daggers that he has so carelessly returned to the hands of the guards. Macbeth refuses to return to the scene of the crime and so Lady Macbeth goes instead. Only Macbeth stares at his blood-soaked hands: What hands are here? Ha! They're picking my eyes out! Will all the great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean out of my hand? No, that's not the first thing this my hand will prefer The multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green red. (2.2.59-63) Lady Macbeth returns, now with hands equally bloody. They hear a knock on the castle doors and Lady Macbeth again demands that Macbeth wash up and go to bed, because they have to pretend to have slept well all night. Macbeth's words of regret bring the scene to an end: To know my deed, 'twere knew myself / Wake Duncan with your knock! I would thou couldst! (II.ii.73-6). Law 2, Scene 3 Knocking at the southern entrance becomes louder and more frequent. A doorman walks slowly to open the doors, pondering what it would be like to be the door-custodian of hell. Macduff and Lennox are at the door and come to visit King Duncan. Macbeth comes down to greet the two nobles. At night he has completely regained his composure and pretends their early morning knock has awakened him. Macduff goes to the King's rooms while Lennox Macbeth talks about the violent storm they encountered on their journey to Iverness. In the howling wind they heard 'strange cries of death' (2.3.46), and there were reports of the earth shaking. Macbeth's response is ironic and cruelly comical: 'Twas a rough night (2.3.47). Macduff's coming back. That the king has been killed. He tells Lennox it's a horrible and bloody face, comparing it to Medusa himself. He calls the alarum bell while Macbeth walks to King King Quarters. Macbeth reaches the guards who are awakened by the bell. Before they can proclaim their innocence, Macbeth kills them and reports to Macduff that he killed Duncan's killers in a fit of rage. Lady Macbeth pretends to collapse in shock and while the rest of the men tend before her, Malcolm whispers to his brother Donalbain. The brothers are not as easily deceived as the others and they know that their lives are in grave danger: There are daggers in the eyes of men Donalbain adds, and they agree to flee Scotland. Malcolm is going to England and, to be extra careful, Donalbain will go to Ireland. Act 2, Scene 4 In this short transition scene, an old man reports to Ross the strange omens that coincided with Duncan's murder. Macduff comes in and tells Ross that, since King's two sons have fled Scotland, they are believed to be the masterminds behind their father's murder. As a result of their betrayal, their claim to the throne has been forfeited, and Macbeth will be called the new king of the Scots. Continue to summarize Acts 3, 4 and 5 How to quote this article: Mabillard, Amanda. Macbeth: Plot summary. Shakespeare Online. 20 Aug. 2000. < >. ____ More Resources Daily Life in Shakespeare's London Life in Stratford (Structures and Guilds) Life in Stratford (Crafts, Laws, Furniture, Hygiene) Stratford School Days: What Did Shakespeare Read? 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