

MACBETH

Summary:-

Act 2, scene 1

Banquo, who has come to Inverness with Duncan, wrestles with the witches' prophecy. He must restrain himself from the "cursed thoughts" that tempt him in his dreams. When Banquo raises the topic of the prophecy as Macbeth enters the scene, Macbeth pretends that he has given little thought to the witches' prophecy. After Banquo and his son Fleance leave the scene, Macbeth imagines that he sees a bloody dagger pointing toward Duncan's chamber. Frightened by the apparition of a "dagger of the mind," he prays that the earth will "hear not his steps" as he completes his bloody plan (38, 57). The bell rings—a signal from Lady Macbeth—and he sets off toward Duncan's room.

Act 2, scene 2

Lady Macbeth waits fitfully for Macbeth to return from killing Duncan. Upon hearing a noise within, she worries that the bodyguards have awakened

before Macbeth has had a chance to plant the evidence on them.

Macbeth enters, still carrying the bloody daggers with which he killed Duncan. He is deeply shaken: as he entered Duncan's chamber, he heard the bodyguards praying and could not say "Amen" when they finished their prayers. Lady Macbeth's counsels to think "after these ways" as "it will make them mad" (32). Nonetheless, Macbeth also tells her that he also thought he heard a voice saying, "'sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep. . . Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more" (33-41).

Lady Macbeth again warns him not to think of such "brain-sickly of things" and tells him to wash the blood from his hands (44). Seeing the daggers he carries, she chastises him for bringing them in and tells him to plant them on the bodyguards according to the plan. When Macbeth, still horrified by the crime he has just committed, refuses to reenter Duncan's chamber, Lady Macbeth herself brings the daggers back in.

While she is gone, Macbeth hears a knocking and imagines that he sees hands plucking at his eyes.

He is guilt-stricken and mourns: “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / clean from my hand?” (58-59)? When Lady Macbeth hears his words upon reentering, she states that her hands are of the same color but her heart remains shamelessly unstained. “A little water,” she continues, “will clear [them] of the deed” (65). As the knocking persists, the two retire to put on their nightgowns so as not to arouse suspicion when others arrive.

Act 2, scene 3

In a scene of comic relief, the Porter hears knocking at the gate and imagines that he is the porter at the door to Hell. He imagines admitting a farmer who has committed suicide after a bad harvest, an "equivocator" who has committed a sin by swearing to half-truths, and an English tailor who stole cloth to make fashionable clothes and visited brothels. Since it is "too cold for hell" at the gate, he opens the door instead of continuing with a longer catalogue of sinners (16). Outside stand Macduff and Lennox, who scold him for taking so long to respond to their knocking. The Porter claims that he was tired after

drinking until late and delivers a short sermon on the ills of drink.

Macbeth enters and Macduff asks him whether the king is awake yet. On hearing that the king is still asleep, Macduff leaves to wake him. While he is gone, Lennox tells Macbeth that the weather by night was full of strange events: chimneys were blown down, birds screeched all night, the earth shook, and ghostly voices were heard prophesying ominously. A stunned Macduff returns with the news that the king is dead. He tells them to go see for themselves and calls to the servants to ring the alarm bell.

Lady Macbeth and Banquo enter and Macduff informs them of the king's death. Macbeth and Lennox return and Macbeth laments the king's death, proclaiming that he wishes he were dead instead of the king. When Malcolm and Donalbain arrive, Lennox blames the regicide on the guards by pointing to the incriminating bloody evidence. Macbeth states that he has already killed the bodyguards in a grief-stricken rage. At this point, Lady Macbeth feigns shock and faints. Aside, Malcolm and Donalbain confer and decide that their

lives may be at risk and that they should flee Scotland. As Lady Macbeth is being helped off-stage, Banquo counsels the others to convene and discuss the murder at hand. Left behind on stage, Malcolm decides that he will flee to England while Donalbain will go to Ireland.

Act 2, scene 4

Ross and an old man discuss the unnatural events that have taken place recently: days are as dark as nights, owls hunt falcons, and Duncan's horses have gone mad and eaten each other. When Macduff enters, Ross asks whether the culprit has been discovered. Macduff tells him that the bodyguards killed the king. The hasty flight on the part of Malcolm and Donalbain, however, has also cast suspicion on the two sons as well. Ross comments that Macbeth will surely be named the next king, to which Macduff responds that he has already been named and has gone to Scone to be crowned. Ross leaves for Scone to see the coronation while Macduff heads home to Fife.