

MACBETH

Summary

Act 5, scene 1

At the Scottish royal home of Dunsinane, a gentlewoman has summoned a doctor to observe Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. The doctor reports that he has watched her for two nights now and has yet to see anything strange. The gentlewoman describes how she has seen Lady Macbeth rise, dress, leave her room, write something on a piece of paper, read it, seal it, and return to bed—all without waking up. The gentlewoman dares not repeat what Lady Macbeth says while thus sleepwalking.

The two are interrupted by a sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, who enters carrying a candle. The gentlewoman reports that Lady Macbeth asks to have a light by her all night. The doctor and the gentlewoman watch as Lady Macbeth rubs her hands as if washing them and says " Yet here's a spot. . . Out, damned spot; out I say" (27-30). As she continues to "wash" her hands, her words betray her guilt to the two onlookers. Lady Macbeth seems to

be reliving the events on the night of Duncan's death. She cannot get the stain or smell of blood off her hand: "What, will these hands ne'er be clean. . . All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (37-43). As the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth imagines she hears knocking at the gate and returns to her chamber, the doctor concludes that Lady Macbeth needs a priest's help and not a physician's. He takes his leave, asserting that he and the gentlewoman had better not reveal what they have seen or heard.

Act 5, scene 2

The Thanes Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox march with a company of soldiers toward Birnam Wood, where they will join Malcolm and the English army. They claim that they will "purge" the country of Macbeth's sickening influence (28).

Act 5, scene 3

At Dunsinane, Macbeth tires of hearing reports of nobles who have defected to join the English forces. He feels consoled, however, by the witches' prophecy that he has nothing to fear until Birnam

Wood comes to Dunsinane, or until he counters a man not born of woman. Since both of the events seem impossible, Macbeth feels invincible.

A servant enters with the news that the enemy has rallied a thousand men but Macbeth sends him away, scolding him for cowardice. After calling for his servant Seyton to help him put on his armor, Macbeth demands the doctor's prognosis about Lady Macbeth. The doctor replies that she is "not so sick" but troubled with visions (39). In some way or other, she must cure herself of these visions—an answer that displeases Macbeth. As attendants put on his armor, he declares that he would applaud the doctor if he could analyze the country's urine and therein derive a medicine for Lady Macbeth. Abruptly, Macbeth leaves the room, professing once again that he will not fear "death and bane" until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane (61). Aside, the doctor confesses that he would like to be as far away from Dunsinane as possible.

Act 5, scene 4

Malcolm, Siward, Young Siward, Macduff, Menteith, Caithness, and Angus march toward Birnam Wood.

As they approach the forest, Malcolm instructs the soldiers to cut off branches and hold them up in order to disguise their numbers. Siward informs Malcolm that Macbeth confidently holds Dunsinane, waiting for their arrival. Malcolm comments that almost all of Macbeth's men have deserted him. The army marches on.

Act 5, scene 5

Macbeth orders his men to hang his banners on the outer walls of the castle, claiming that it will hold until the attackers die of famine. If only the other side were not reinforced with men who deserted him, he claims, he would not think twice about rushing out to meet the English army head-on. Upon hearing the cry of a woman within, Macbeth comments that he has almost forgotten the taste of fears. Seyton returns and announces the death of Lady Macbeth. Seemingly unfazed, Macbeth comments that she should have died later, at a more appropriate time. He stops to muse on the meaning of life.

A messenger enters and reports that he has seen something unbelievable: as he looked out toward Birnam Wood, it appeared that the forest began to

move toward the castle. Macbeth is stunned and begins to fear that the witch's words may come true after all. He instructs his men to ring the alarm.

Act 5, scene 6

Malcolm tells his soldiers that they are near enough to the castle now to throw down the branches they carry. He announces that Siward and Young Siward will lead the first battle. He and Macduff will follow behind. The trumpeters sound a charge.

Act 5, scene 7

Macbeth waits on the battlefield to defend his castle. He feels like a bear that has been tied to a stake for dogs to attack. Young Siward enters and demands his name. Macbeth responds that he will be afraid to hear it. Macbeth kills Young Siward in the ensuing duel, commenting that Young Siward must have been "born of woman" (12).

Act 5, scene 8

Macduff enters alone and shouts a challenge to Macbeth, swearing to avenge the death of his wife

and children. As he exists, he asks Fortune to help him find Macbeth.

Act 5, scene 9

Malcolm and Siward enter and charge the castle.

Act 5, scene 10

Macbeth enters, asserting that he should not “play the Roman fool” and commit suicide (2). Macduff finds him and challenges him. Macbeth replies that he has thus far avoided Macduff but that he is now ready to fight. As they fight, Macbeth tells him that he “bears a charmed life”: he will only fall to a man who is not born of a woman (12). Macduff replies that the time has come for Macbeth to despair: "let the angel whom thou still hast served / Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped"—Macduff was born through the equivalent of a caesarian section (13-16). Hearing this, Macbeth quails and says that he will not fight. Macduff replies by commanding him to yield and become the laughing stock of Scotland under Malcolm's rule. This enrages Macbeth, who swears he will never

yield to swear allegiance to Malcolm. They fight on and thus exit.

Act 5, scene 11

Malcolm, Siward, and the other thanes enter.

Although they have won the battle, Malcolm notes that Macduff and Young Siward are missing. Ross reports that Young Siward is dead and eulogizes him by stating that "he only lived but till he was a man, / The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed / In the unshrinking station where he fought, / But like a man he died" (6-9). After confirming that his son's wounds were on his front—in other words, that the Young Siward died bravely in battle—Siward declares that he not wish for a better death for his son.

Macduff enters, carrying Macbeth's severed head and shouting "Hail, King of Scotland!" The men echo this shout and the trumpets flourish as Malcolm accepts the kingship. Malcolm announces that he will rename the current thanes as earls. He will call back all the men whom Macbeth has exiled and will attempt to heal the scarred country. All exit towards

Scone, where Malcolm will be crowned as King of Scotland.