

MACBETH

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MACBETH

A Novelization by
CHRISTOPHER ANDREWS

Adapted from the play
The Tragedy of Macbeth
by
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Macbeth

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DUNCAN, King of Scotland

MALCOLM

} Duncan's sons

DONALBAIN

MACBETH, a General in the King's army, Thane of Glamis

BANQUO, a General in the King's army

MACDUFF

}

LENNOX

}}

ROSS

}}}
}}} noblemen of Scotland

MENTETH

}}

ANGUS

}

CATHNESS

FLEANCE, son to Banquo

SIWARD, Earl of Northumberland, General of the English forces, and Uncle to Malcolm and Donalbain

YOUNG SIWARD, his son

SEYTON, an officer attending on Macbeth

BOY, son to Macduff

An ENGLISH DOCTOR

A SCOTCH DOCTOR

A bleeding SERGEANT

A PORTER

An OLD MAN

Three MURDERERS

LADY MACBETH

LADY MACDUFF

GENTLEWOMAN, attending on Lady Macbeth

HECATE

Three WITCHES, the Weïrd Sisters, the Sisters of Fate

Three other WITCHES

APPARITIONS

LORDS, GENTLEMEN, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS,
and MESSENGERS

LOCATIONS

SCOTLAND; ENGLAND

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

A desolate place. An open, hushed, lonely place.

In the distance, the sound of battle. Sword on sword; the frightened neighs of the horses; the cries of the wounded, and the dying...

But that was elsewhere, for now. Near, but not here. Not in this place.

This dark place.

Thunder and lightning abound. As with the dissonance of combat, they were not here, not quite. And yet, their flavor marked the dominant repast. For the three sisters had come.

The Weïrd Sisters. The *witches*.

Together they huddled, clawing at the earth. Mincing abhorrent things, vile things; mincing, scattering, and, as required, eating.

The first witch, the eldest of the sisters, croaked, "When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

The second witch, the middle child, considered this only briefly, then stated, "When the turmoil of combat is done, when the battle is lost ... and won."

The third, the youngest, proclaimed, "That will happen before the setting of the sun."

More mincing, more scattering about ... more eating. Then, the first: "Where shall we meet?"

The second: "Upon the heath, the open wasteland."

The third: "There to meet with Macbeth."

Across the barren expanse echoed a summons which would have chilled mortal bones to the marrow, save that only the witches

could glean the beckoning of their familiars.

“I come, Graymalkin!” the first witch called to her cat.

“Paddock calls,” the second witch spoke of her toad.

“Soon!” the third witch assured her great harpy.

They stood to leave and, joining hands, chanted as one:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

Having paid toll to the forces beyond, the three sisters disappeared into the shadows.

For this is their hour, when darkness reigns.

PART ONE

CHAPTER TWO

From their camp near Forres, on the Moray coast in the north of Scotland, King Duncan surveyed the battlefield before him, and his heart sank. The trumpet call to arms promised honor and victory, with great glories that would live on in song ... but the truth was, the King felt nothing but regret and bitterness over this wasteful death. So many lives lost, Scots on both sides.

Duncan knew better than most how tenuous was the hold of the crown upon Scotland. Barely two centuries had passed since Scotland had been little more than feuding tribes, huddled together in their highlands from the reach of the Romans or the Saxons. Even now, few could appreciate the threat that England held over their sovereignty, as was evidenced by the pointless battleground before him now. Always there weighed the threat of one chieftain or another, seeking either their independence from Duncan's reign or to seize the throne for themselves.

Macdonwald was merely the latest in the long line of would-be usurpers, aye, but with the Irish supporting him from the Hebrides, the islands west of Scotland, his threat was not to be dismissed.

But though it pained Duncan to see the blood of his loyal subjects seeping into Scottish earth, there appeared to be more insurgent corpses to number. He required verification, of course, but his elder son Malcolm had promised as much to this end.

In timely fashion, Duncan was broken from his reverie by the direct approach of a grievously wounded soldier, who was nevertheless still moving under his own power.

Duncan stepped forward so that his companions – his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, and loyal noble Lennox, as well as their ever-

present attendants – should flank him. Stroking his grey beard in a manner which he believed viewed as “kingly,” Duncan demanded, “What bloody man is this?” He indicated the nearing soldier even as Malcolm moved to meet the man in question. “Judging by his plight, he can report the current state of the revolt.”

Malcolm confirmed that this was the very soldier for whom he had been waiting. “Father, this is the Sergeant who, like a good and hardy soldier, fought against my capture by the enemy.” He greeted the wounded man, “Hail, brave friend! Say to the King your knowledge of the battle as you left it.” Malcolm then offered the man his personal handkerchief, that he might staunch the blood-flow from a beastly scalp wound as he made his report.

The Sergeant accepted the offering with some reluctance, but then bowed his head in thanks as he applied it to the cut. Clearing his throat, he addressed his King.

“Doubtful the outcome stood; like two exhausted swimmers that do cling together and, in doing so, choke their skill. The merciless Macdonwald – worthy to be called a ‘rebel,’ for to that end the multiplying villainies of nature do swarm upon him – is supplied from the Western Isles of Scotland, with light- and heavy-armed Irish foot soldiers; and the goddess Fortune smiled on his damned cause, appearing to our forces like a rebel’s whore!” The Sergeant coughed from his sudden exertion, but then offered a smile of his own, marred somewhat by the blood on his teeth. “But they were all too weak! For brave Macbeth – and well he deserves to be called ‘brave’ – showed his disdain for Fortune with his brandished sword, which smoked with bloody execution, and like Valor’s darling, he carved out his passage ‘til he faced Macdonwald, who lacked time to shake hands or bid farewell to him, before Macbeth unseamed him from the navel to the jaws ... and fixed Macdonwald’s head upon our battlements.”

King Duncan was so pleased by this report of Macbeth’s triumph, he clapped his hands – which prompted his supporters to follow suit. “Oh, valiant cousin!” Duncan praised Macbeth. “Worthy gentleman!”

But the Sergeant wasn’t finished. “But as the shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break when the sun begins shining in Spring ... so, too, from that very Spring from whence comfort seemed

to come, discomfort swells. Mark, my King of Scotland, mark ...”

Duncan frowned, resisting the temptation to silence the soldier before he could deliver bad tidings so close to the clutches of apparent victory. But denial was not a trait Duncan valued, and so he gestured for the wounded man to continue.

“No sooner had Justice, with armed valor, compelled these Irish soldiers to take to their heels, but the Norwegian Lord, spying his opportunity, began a fresh assault with furbished arms and new supplies of men.”

Duncan, having heard not even a glimmer of such news, was aghast. The King of Norway had struck? Madness! “Did this not dismay our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?”

Again, the Sergeant was showing a bloody-toothed grin. “Yes ... as sparrows dismay eagles, or the hare dismays the lion. If I say truly, I must report that Macbeth and Banquo were as cannons overcharged with double explosives, how they *doubly* redoubled strokes upon the foe! Perhaps they meant to *bathe* in their enemies’ reeking wounds, or echo the slaughter of Golgatha, where Christ was crucified, I cannot tell ...”

The Sergeant looked as though he might say more, but another coughing fit left his eyes so unfocused that Malcolm stepped forward to brace the man. When he could again breathe, he bowed his head to his King.

“But I am faint,” he apologized, “my gashes cry for help.”

Duncan waved the soldier’s regrets away. “Your words become you as well as your wounds; they both smack of honor.” He turned to two of his many attendants. “Go, get him surgeons.”

His attendants nodding and bowing, they rushed to escort the wounded man to the army’s doctors. And before their footsteps had faded away, another party approached their camp.

Peering toward the next group of figures, Duncan again turned to Malcolm. “Who comes here?”

Malcolm recognized the newcomer and his attendants. “The worthy Thane of Ross,” he gestured, deliberately using the man’s title of Scottish nobility.

Lennox commented, “What a hasty look in his eyes! So should a man look that seems about to speak of strange things.”

The Thane of Ross reached them, and knelt. “God save the King!”

Duncan gestured for Ross to rise. “Where did you come from, worthy Thane?”

Regaining his feet, he replied, “From Fife, great King, where the Norwegian banners insult the sky and fan our people with cold fear. The King of Norway himself, backed with terrible numbers and assisted by that most disloyal *traitor*, the Thane of Cawdor, began an ominous conflict ... ‘til the war goddess Bellona’s bridegroom, our great Macbeth, clad in battle-tested armor, confronted Norway with valor to match his own – point against point, rebellious arm against arm – curbing Norway’s insolent spirit...” Ross paused, and then proudly added, “and, to conclude, the victory fell on *us*.”

Lifting his arms in exultation, Duncan cried, “Great happiness!”

Pleased to be the bearer of such good tidings, Ross continued, “Now Sweno, Norway’s King, craves truce; nor would we allow him the burial of his men ‘til he disbursed from the small island, Saint Colme’s Inch, ten thousand dollars to our general use.”

This, too, pleased the King, but Duncan’s honor demanded greater satisfaction. “*No more* shall that Thane of Cawdor betray our dearest interests.” He pointed out toward the field of battle. “Go pronounce his immediate death ... and greet *Macbeth* with Cawdor’s former title.”

Ross bowed once more. “I’ll see it done.”

Duncan declared to all, “What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won!”

PART ONE

CHAPTER THREE

The eldest of the Weïrd Sisters waited upon an open heath not far from Forres, listening in sexual pleasure to the rumbling of thunder. Storms always gathered when the Sisters met, and she would have it no other way. The cauldron roiled with its many foul ingredients, and the oldest witch relished the scent, hacking up a mouthful of mucus to add to its elements.

From seemingly nowhere – categorically impossible, given the openness of the heath, but this was the way of things – her two sisters appeared.

The first witch faced the second. “Where hast thou been, sister?”

The second witch held up gory intestines and raw pig flesh, quite proud of her work. “Killing swine,” she crowed.

The youngest then asked of the oldest, “And where thou, sister?”

The first witch cackled. “A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap, and munched, and munched, and munched them. ‘Give me one,’ quoth I. ‘Be gone, witch!’ the fat-rumped scab cried.” A sick, amorous grin grew across her lips as she shared, “Her husband’s gone to Aleppo, master of the ship *Tiger*. But in a kitchen sieve I’ll sail thither, and, shaping myself as a rat without a tail, I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do things to him.”

The second witch nodded her approval. “I’ll give thee a wind to sail upon.”

The first witch bowed her head. “Thou art kind.”

The youngest piped up. “And I another.”

The eldest then proclaimed, “I myself have all the other winds,

and the very ports to which they blow, all the directions that they know in the shipman's compass. I will drain him dry as hay! Neither night nor day shall sleep hang upon his eyelids; he shall live a man accursed. Weary weeks, nine times nine, shall he dwindle, waste away and pine for relief. And though his ship cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tossed!" She reached into the folds of the filthy rags that served as clothing upon her body. "Look what I have ..."

The middle sister craned forward. "Show me, show me!"

Producing the sought item, the eldest held it out for her siblings to see. "Here I have a pilot's thumb, wrecked as homeward he did come."

But before her sisters could comment upon the decomposed length of flesh, all three heads shot upward as a sound echoed across the heath – though from the air or their minds, even they could not say.

"A drum," the third witch cried, "a drum! Macbeth doth come."

The eldest returned the sailor's putrid digit to her folds, so that all three could hold hands, closing their triad. Together, they chanted:

"The Weïrd Sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine."

As they ended their intonation, the eldest squeezed her sisters' hands and leered, "Peace! The charm's wound up."

They tightened their triad, coming shoulder to shoulder, bowed heads to bowed heads, until they virtually disappeared behind the steam rising from the simmering cauldron.

From out of the gloom, two soldiers emerged, men wearing well-adorned, if also well-blemished and bloody, armor. Under normal circumstances, these men would have been accompanied by an escort – not by personal attendants, as were King Duncan and his lot, but armed enlisted men or even low-rung officers. But the two Generals of Duncan's army were taking brief advantage of their rank, shedding the trappings of their status and putting some distance between themselves and the bloody fighting they had endured in the many hours and days until this point. The two traveled to meet their King, but they traveled

at their leisure and they traveled alone.

Taking in the beclouded expanse of the heath – and, indeed, looking beyond it to where he knew the wounded suffered their ministrations – Macbeth, Thane of Glamis and Lord of the great castle at Inverness, commented to his companion, “So foul and fair a day, I have never seen.”

His fellow General, Banquo, grunted his agreement. “How much further is it to Forres?”

Macbeth turned to answer Banquo, and that was when he spotted the cauldron. This alone was strange and out of place, so as Banquo followed his friend’s gaze, each of them placed a firm hand upon the hilt of his sword. And when, a moment later, they spied the three ragged women looming beyond it, both blades were drawn.

They stood fixed, swords at the ready, Macbeth’s gaze darting about in search of possible ambush.

The women said nothing. The eldest and youngest had released hands, so that the three sisters now stood in a joined line behind the steam. They were so motionless, they might not have been among the living.

“What are these,” Banquo spoke at last, taking in the women’s tattered, grunge-smearred garments, their decrepit, savage faces, “so withered and so wild in their attire, they look not like the inhabitants of the Earth, and yet stand here on it?”

Macbeth shook his head; he had no idea what to make of the trio.

Banquo called across to them, “Do you live? Are you beings that a man may question?”

The middle sister released her siblings’ hands, but only so that they all might raise their rights in a shushing gesture.

Banquo grunted. “You seem to understand me, by each at once laying her cracked finger upon her skinny lips.” He cocked his head to one side, further evaluating them, and a caustic smirk graced his own lips. “You *seem* to be women, and yet your *beards* forbid me to interpret that you are.”

If the women felt anything for his gibe, their faces did not betray it.

At length Macbeth demanded, “Speak, if you can: What are

you?”

While Banquo’s words had fallen as flat as the heath, Macbeth’s words sent an almost erotic shudder through the trio. What *were* these dingy creatures—?

Then the women raised their hands into the air, and the one on the left, who appeared to be the oldest of the three, exclaimed, “All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!”

Macbeth and Banquo shared a furtive look. How had she known his name, his status? Was this some bizarre ambush after all?

Next, the middle woman cried, “All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!”

Thane of *Cawdor*? Why would they—?

Finally, the woman on the right, the youngest, proclaimed the boldest yet, “All hail, Macbeth! Thou shalt be King hereafter!”

Now the *King*? Ridiculous rubbish. Madness!

... and yet, something about the announcement slithered like a cold worm through Macbeth’s guts, a sensation both repulsive and thrilling. He retreated a step.

Banquo, for his part, stood amused. “Good sir,” he chuckled at Macbeth’s expense, “why do you start, and seem to fear things that do sound so pleasing?”

Macbeth said nothing, fixing his gaze upon the three strange beings beyond the cauldron.

Banquo shrugged and spoke to the women. “In the name of truth: Are you fantastical, or indeed that which you outwardly appear to be? You greet my noble partner with his present title, and with such great *prediction* of noble having and of royal hope, that he stands speechless by it. To me, you speak not.” He shrugged again, this time for deliberate show. “If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not ... speak then to *me*, who neither begs your favors nor fears your hate.”

For a moment, the three women remained stock still, and Banquo could not tell if they were considering his petition or not ... then they shifted their baleful gazes from Macbeth to him.

“Hail!” called the first.

“Hail!” the second

“Hail!” the third.

The first continued, “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.”

The second, “Not so happy, yet much happier.”

The third, “Thou shalt beget Kings, though thou be none.” She paused a heartbeat, as if to let that sink in, then added, “So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!”

Banquo blinked. So they knew his name as well ...

Back to the first, “Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!”

And with that, the three women made as though to drift away, away from their cauldron, away from their bewildered audience.

Finally breaking free of his bedazzlement, Macbeth strode forward until he stood directly opposite the cauldron, brandishing his sword without thought. “Stay, you imperfect speakers; tell me more,” he insisted. “By my father Sinel’s death, I know I am Thane of Glamis ... but how of *Cawdor*? The Thane of Cawdor lives, a prosperous gentleman. And to be *King* stands not within the prospect of belief, no more than to be Cawdor.” He consciously lowered his weapon and implored, “Say from whence you possess this strange information? Or why you stop our way upon this barren heath with such prophetic greeting?” When the sisters remained silent – *were* they sisters? Yes, to compare their grisly faces, he believed they were – his ire spiked, and he raised his sword once more. “*Speak*, I command you!”

The sisters responded, but not in the way Macbeth sought.

They laughed at him. And as their shrewish mirth faded away, so did they.

Macbeth and Banquo cast about in all directions, their sense of peril again writhing through their core. But no danger was in evidence, nor were the three women. Were it not for the cauldron – which remained fixed, emitting less vapor than before – they might have believed the strange beings to have been figments of their shared imagination.

Banquo grunted. “The earth has bubbles, as the water has, and these women are of them. Whither are they vanished?”

Macbeth stared down into the cauldron, and swallowed against his rising gorge upon the sight of what stewed therein. “Into the air; and what seemed corporeal melted as breath into the wind. If only they had stayed!”

Sheathing his sword, Banquo sighed and shook his head. “Were

these things we do speak about really here? Or have we eaten of the root of insanity, which takes the reason prisoner?”

After a long moment, Macbeth also returned his sword to its sheath, and turned to Banquo with a crafty gleam in his eye. “Your children shall be Kings.”

Banquo chuckled. “*You* shall be King.”

“And Thane of Cawdor, too!” Macbeth laughed openly. “Went it not so?”

“To the selfsame tune and words—”

The echoes of footsteps crunching toward them brought both swords whipping out once more. The gait suggested neither furtiveness nor threat, but the Generals were understandably high-strung after their otherworldly encounter.

“Who’s here?” Banquo demanded.

A familiar voice eased the men back from the edge. “The King hath happily received, Macbeth, the news of your success ...”

Macbeth and Banquo exchanged a knowing, and somewhat embarrassed, look as they put away their weapons once more and joined hands with the arriving noblemen, Ross and Angus.

Ross continued, “... and when he reads of your personal venture in the rebels’ fight, his astonishment and his admiration do contend which should be yours or his! Silenced by this conflict, and in viewing over the rest of the selfsame day, Duncan finds you fighting amongst the stout Norwegian ranks, never afraid of what you yourself did make – strange images of death for those you fought. Messenger after messenger came as thick as hailstones, and *every one* did bear your praises in his Kingdom’s great defense, and poured them down before him.”

“We are sent,” Angus chimed in, “to give you thanks from our royal master – only to herald you into his sight, not pay your reward ourselves.”

“*And,*” Ross continued, showing faint irritation toward Angus for the interruption, “for a pledge of a greater honor, Duncan bade me, from him, call you *Thane of Cawdor* – in which title: Hail, most worthy Thane! For it is yours.” Both he and Angus bowed their heads.

Had they not done so, had they not been so caught up in the excitement of bearing such wonderful tidings, they might have noted

the ashen pallor which overwhelmed Banquo and, even more so, Macbeth.

Banquo whispered to his companion. “What, can the Devil speak true?”

To Ross and Angus, Macbeth cleared his throat and insisted, “The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?”

Angus was pleased to explain. “He who *was* the Thane lives yet, but bears that life – which he deserves to *lose* – under heavy judgement. Whether he was allied with those of Norway or did reinforce the rebel Macdonwald with hidden help and vantage, or that he labored with *both* in his country’s ruin, I know not. But treasons capital, confessed and proved, have overthrown him.”

Macbeth forced his expression to remain neutral, but within, he stood awestruck. *Thane of Glamis, now Thane of Cawdor! And the greatest to come.*

Clearing his throat once more, he laid his hands upon the forearms of Ross and Angus. “Thanks for your pains.”

The men beamed at his appreciation, and thought nothing of it as Macbeth then stepped aside and spoke to Banquo under his breath.

“Do you not hope,” Macbeth asked, “that your children shall be Kings, when those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me promised no less to them?”

Banquo grunted, and it was not a happy sound. “That, trusted to the utmost, might yet offer *you* hopes for the crown, besides the Thane of Cawdor.” He glanced toward the cooling cauldron, the fires beneath having died out. “But it is a strange business. And oftentimes, to woo us toward our own harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trivialities ... to then *betray* us in matters of greater importance.” Shuddering, wishing to distance himself from these thoughts, Banquo spat toward the cauldron, turned on his heel, and approached Ross and Angus with a raised voice. “Fellow Lords, a word, I pray you.”

Macbeth, for his part, held his gaze upon the cauldron. *Two truths are told, as happy prologues to the stately act of my imperial theme.*

A moment later, Macbeth realized that the others had presumed

his joining Banquo, as all three men looked toward him, expectant. He smiled and gestured to Ross and Angus, stating, “I thank you, gentlemen.” He then deliberately turned his back and drifted a few steps away, making it clear that he sought a few moments of privacy.

In particular, he wanted to avoid Banquo, did not want his friend to glean the look in his eye, lest he decipher to which direction Macbeth’s musings flowed.

This supernatural temptation, his thoughts continued, cannot be ill, nor cannot be good. If ill, why has it predicted my earnest success, which commenced to be true? I am Thane of Cawdor. But ... if good ... why am I allured by that suggestion – whose horrid image does unfix my hair and make my seated heart knock at my ribs – against the custom of nature, to kill my King? Macbeth closed his eyes. Fears of the here and now are less frightening than these horrible imaginings! My thoughts, where murder is nothing yet but fantastical, so shakes my mortal constitution that normal function is smothered in speculation, and nothing matters but what is not yet real.

Striving to keep his comment light – both for his fellow noblemen, as well as himself – Banquo gestured toward the brooding Macbeth and remarked, “Look, how our partner is rapt.” He said it loudly and with forced mirth, intending Macbeth to overhear and be jarred from his daze.

Perhaps some part of Macbeth heard it, for though he did not outwardly respond, he strove to shake himself loose from these traitorous wonderings. What were these treasonable notions, of *killing* Scotland’s monarch? Prompted by the wild predictions of three deranged women – if women they were – he contemplated regicide? As a General and a Thane twice over, he of all should stand better! Why, had he not just shed oceans of blood in defense of that crown?

Still ... it was a violent world, an unjust world. He was Duncan’s cousin, and well honored by his countrymen. Perhaps the sisters’ prophetic proclamations would prove true, in time – *without* the wanton betrayal of his own action!

If chance will have me King ... why, chance may crown me, without my initiative.

“New honors come upon him with this title of Cawdor,” Banquo continued, still with strained good humor, “which, like

unfamiliar garments, cleave not to their owner's shape but with the aid of usage and time."

Come what may, Macbeth concluded, *time and the hour runs through the roughest day*.

At the wit's end of subtlety, Banquo cut to the chase and addressed him directly. "Worthy Macbeth, we only stay upon your leisure."

Finally snapping free of his uncomfortable contemplation, Macbeth scoffed at himself. "Give me your pardon! My dull brain was troubled with things forgotten." To Ross and Angus, he said, "But, kind gentlemen, the pains you have taken for me are registered in my memory where, every day, I shall turn the leaf to read them. Let us go toward the King."

But even as Ross and Angus began their march, Macbeth placed his hand upon Banquo's arm, slowing him so that – although they continued after the other noblemen – within a few strides, they had some privacy.

"Think upon what has happened this day," Macbeth said in a low voice, "and, at a more opportune time, having weighed it in the interim, let us speak our thoughts freely, each to the other."

Banquo grunted. "Very gladly."

"Until then, enough." The others had noted his and Banquo's lingering, so he increased his stride until he surpassed them. "Come, friends!"

And as the quartet departed the heath, Macbeth almost fooled himself into believing that he took no note of the cauldron's exact location, might he have reason to return here at another time.

Almost ...