

## ***Macbeth: Synopsis***

The play opens with Macbeth and Banquo, two of the Scottish King Duncan's generals, returning from battle when they encounter three witches in the woods. The witches tell Macbeth of how he will become the Thane (Lord) of Cawdor and then the King of Scotland. For Banquo, they prophesize that his sons will also be Scottish Kings, though he will never become king himself. The two are very skeptical and continue their journey home.

However, when the two come closer to their camp, they meet a messenger from King Duncan who announces that Macbeth has been made the Thane of Cawdor, immediately putting the prophecy into perspective, making Macbeth wonder how he might become king. He invites Duncan to dinner at his castle that evening and goes ahead to tell his wife of the day's events.

Unlike Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is very sure of her husband's future. She desires the throne and tells him that they must murder Duncan to make sure Macbeth actually becomes King. Lady Macbeth is able to convince her husband to take initiative and murder Duncan that very night.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth plan to get Duncan's chamberlains (servants) to drink enough wine at dinner that they will not remember the evening, so Macbeth can blame Duncan's murder on the servants. When the body of Duncan is discovered in the morning by Macduff, Macbeth quickly kills the "culprits" and becomes King. All the while, Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee the country, afraid for their own lives.

Immediately, Macbeth's doubts and belief in the witches' prophecies causes him to murder Banquo, afraid that his heirs will seize the throne. Although Macbeth's men manage to kill Banquo, they fail to kill Banquo's son Fleance.

The night of his murder, Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth and sends him into hysteria (panic or madness), scaring his guests and angering his wife. His very presence as the King of Scotland has angered the other nobles, and Macbeth becomes even more paranoid that they will try to kill him.

To ease his fears, he visits the witches again and they offer to him more prophecies. They tell him that he must beware of Macduff, a chief opponent to Macbeth taking the throne. They also say that Macbeth is safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth believes this is impossible, so he leaves relieved. However, when he returns home, he finds out that Macduff has fled to England to join Malcolm. In fear, Macbeth seizes Macduff's castle and orders the murder of his wife and children, angering Macduff even more. With Malcolm, the two raise an army and ride to Scotland to take on Macbeth with the support of the Scottish nobles who fear Macbeth's tyranny and murderous ways.

While Macbeth waits for his opponents, Lady Macbeth is in the process of going mad with guilt for Duncan's murder, unable to wash the blood from her hands. She eventually dies. Meanwhile, Macbeth waits for Macduff and the English with confidence, since he believed that the witches' second prophecy. However, Macduff's forces arrive under the cover of branches cut from the trees in Birnam Wood, making it appear that the forest was moving. Macbeth's army is overwhelmed and he meets Macduff face-to-face. Macduff kills Macbeth and returns the throne back to Malcolm, the rightful heir.