

Macbeth

*When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.*

First and Second Witches; I.i.



All day, the three witches waited on the edge of the battlefield. Hidden by mist and magic, they watched the Scottish army win a victory over the invading forces of Norway, and after the fight was done they lingered on, gloating over the moans of the dying.

As thunder rolled overhead and rain lashed down, one of the witches raised her long, hooked nose to the wind and sniffed like a dog taking a scent. "He will be here soon," she said.



The second witch stroked the tuft of silvery hair that sprouted from her chin, and grinned, showing her gums. "I hear the sound of hooves, sisters," she said.

The third witch held up a piece of rock crystal in front of her milky, blind eyes.

Inside the crystal, something seemed to move. "I see him!" she screamed. "He comes! Let the spell begin."



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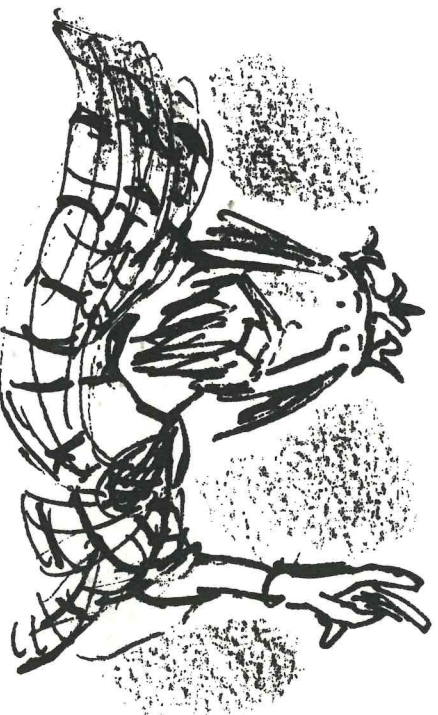
Two Scottish generals rode slowly away from the battlefield, their heads lowered against the driving rain.



One was Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, the bravest soldier in King Duncan's army. He was tall, broad-shouldered and had a warrior's face, broken-nosed and scarred from old fights.

His companion and friend Banquo was younger and slimmer, with a mouth that was quick to smile, although he wasn't smiling now.

Macbeth's dark eyes were distant as he recalled the details of the day's slaughter. 'A hard fight to protect an old, feeble King,' he thought. 'If I ruled Scotland...' His mind drifted off into a familiar daydream: he saw himself seated on the throne, with the golden crown of Scotland circling his brow...



Suddenly his horse reared and whinnied,
its eyes rolling in terror. Macbeth
struggled to control the horse, and at that
moment a bolt of lightning turned the air
violet. In the eerie light he saw three weird
hags barring the way, their wild hair and
ragged robes streaming like tattered flags
in the wind.

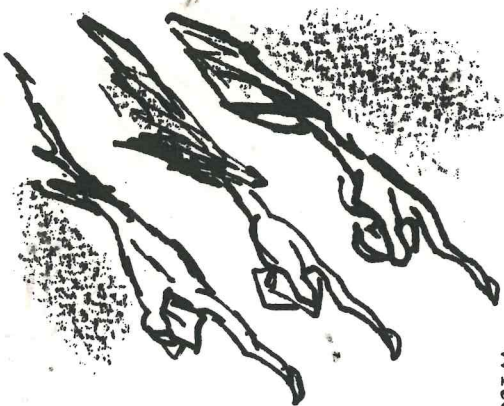


Macbeth's hand
flew to his sword,
but Banquo hissed
out an urgent
warning. "No, my
friend! I do not think
swords can harm creatures like these."



A small, cold fear entered Macbeth's
heart, and he snarled to conceal it:

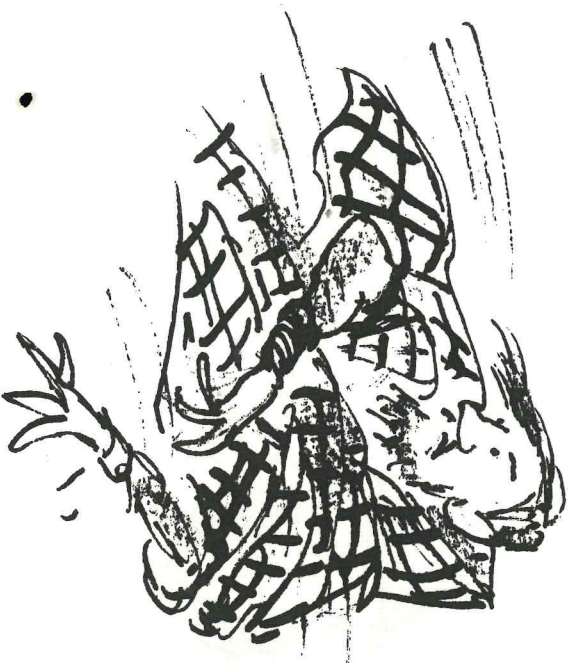
"What do you want?" he demanded of the
witches. "Stand aside!"



Moving as one,
the witches raised
their left arms and
pointed crooked
fingers at Macbeth.
They spoke, and
their voices grated
like iron on stone.

"All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis!"
"All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor!"
"All hail, Macbeth, who shall be King!"
Macbeth gave a startled gasp – how
had these withered crones come to read
his secret thoughts?

The witches turned their fingers to
Banquo. "All hail, Banquo!" they
chanted. "Your children shall be kings!"
And they vanished like a mist of breath
on a mirror.



"Were they ghosts?" Banquo whispered in amazement.

"They were madwomen!" snorted Macbeth. "How can I be Thane of Cawdor? He is alive and well and one of King Duncan's most trusted friends."

"And how could my children be kings if you took the throne?" Banquo asked.

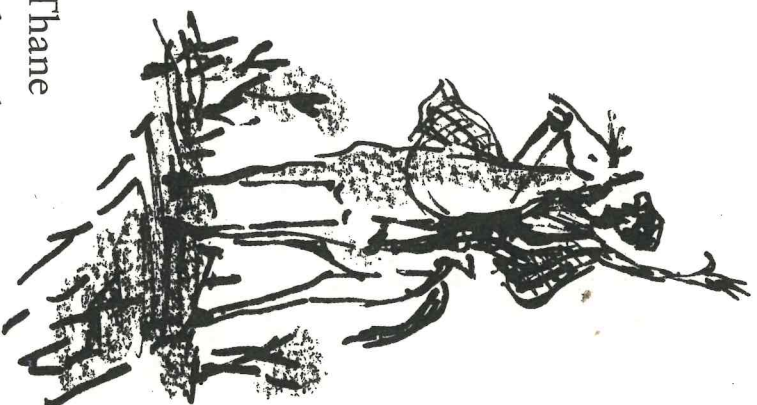


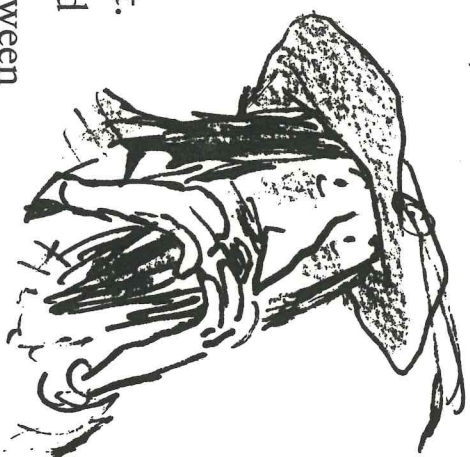
The sound of hoofbeats made both men turn their heads.

Out of the rain appeared a royal herald. He pulled his horse to a halt and lifted a hand in salute. "I bring great news!" he

announced. "The Thane of Cawdor has confessed

to treason and has been executed. The King has given his title and lands to you, noble Macbeth. He has proclaimed you as his heir, after his sons Malcolm and Donalbain. All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis *and* Cawdor!"





Macbeth's face turned deathly pale. 'So the witches told the truth?' he thought. 'Only Duncan and his sons stand between me and the crown! My wife must know of this – I will write to her tonight.'

Macbeth was so deep in thought that he didn't notice the troubled look that



Banquo gave him.

The witches had left a scent of evil in the air, and Banquo seemed to smell it clinging to his friend.

* * *

Lady Macbeth stood at the window of her bedchamber, gazing out at the clouds gathering above the turrets of Glamis Castle. In her right hand, she held the letter from her husband, and its words echoed through her mind. "Glamis, Cawdor, King, you could have them all!" she whispered. "But I know you too well, my lord. You want greatness, but you shrink from what you must do to get it. If only..."

