

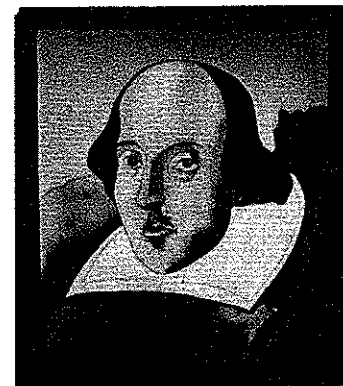
such brightness that Bottom, when he thought about it, shone like a star in boots. He smiled, and it was a rare smile, for Bottom, of all mortals, had walked, waking, in the kingdom of dreams.

"I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream," he decided. "It shall be called, 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom."

With that he went back to the town where his companions greeted him with relief and joy. Now the play could go forward, for Bottom was come among them again; and none but Bottom could ever have played Pyramus. Their pensions were certain and, for bully Bottom, as Flute the bellows-mender put it, "sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing."

That very day the Duke and his queen, and the two pairs of lovers, were married with due solemnity; and that night the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe was enacted before them with all the delicacy, wit and grace that Peter Quince and his company could command. Snug the joiner played the Lion to perfection, and Snout the tinker rose to great heights as the Wall. Starveling the tailor shone in the necessary part of the man in the moon; and Flute was a Thisbe to wring all hearts. But bully Bottom the weaver was best of all. He lived Pyramus, he died Pyramus, and lived again to take his bow, so powerfully that there was not, as they say, a dry eye in the house . . . although whether the tears shed were of grief or laughter, none could say.

The play done, the married lovers went their ways to bed. For a little while the hall was empty; then Puck and Oberon and Titania, with all their gossamer train, came with glow-worm lamps to bless the house and bid goodnight.



Macbeth

Three old women out in a storm. But what old women, and what a storm! It banged and roared and crashed and rattled. The sky was quick with sudden glares, and the earth with sudden darkneses, darkneses in which wild images of rocks and frightened trees, like scanty beggars in the wind, leaped out upon the inner eye! And the old women! Ancient hags with backs hooped like question marks and their shabby heads nesting together, like brooding vultures . . .

"When shall we three meet again?" howled one, above the shrieking of the wind. "In thunder, lightning or in rain?"

"When the hurly-burly's done!" came an answer, lank hair whipping and half muffling the words. "When the battle's lost and won!"

"Where the place?"

"Upon the heath."

"And there to meet with Macbeth!"

The sky stared, then shut its eye . . . and when it looked again, the old women had gone. Had they been real or had they only been fantastic imaginings made up out of strange configurations of the rocks? Yet their words had been real enough. There was a battle being fought, and there was a man called Macbeth.

Macbeth! A giant of fury and courage, his sword arm whirling and

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beating like a windmill as he fought for his king against the treacherous enemies who sought to overturn the state. So tremendously did he fight that he made killing almost holy, and they say his blade smoked with traitors' blood.

A soldier from the battlefield, a gaudy, staggering patchwork of blood and gashes, came stumbling into the royal camp to tell the King of Macbeth's mighty deeds, of how he had come face to face with the worst of the King's enemies and, with one blow had "unseamed him from the nave to the chops; and fixed his head upon our battlements".

Amazed, good King Duncan listened to the eager account of his general's almost supernatural bravery and success; and, while he stood wondering how he might justly reward such service, news came of yet another victory. The treacherous Thane of Cawdor had been captured. The King sighed. The price of victory was high. He had once loved and trusted Cawdor.

"Go pronounce his present death," he commanded sombrely; "and with his former title greet Macbeth . . . What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won."

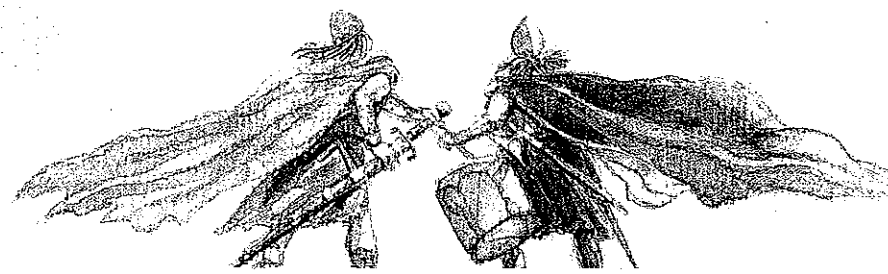
He sent two messengers post-haste to greet the great general with his new title and with the heartfelt gratitude of his King.

The King's messengers travelled swiftly, but even before they had set out, other messengers were on their way to meet Macbeth, messengers who travelled as fast as thinking, messengers whose purpose was as dark as the King's was bright: the three old women of the storm.

It was towards evening. There was thunder in the air and little lightnings, like bright adders, wriggled across the sky. Here and there on the open heath naked trees seemed to hold up their hands in fear and dismay; and the three old women crouched and waited, still as stones. Presently there came a rolling and a rattling, as if a small thunder had lost its way and was wandering in the dark. The three old women nodded.

"A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come!"

The drummer was Banquo, friend and companion-in-arms of Macbeth. The drum he carried had been salvaged from the battlefield, taken, perhaps, out of the cradling arms of some dead drummer-boy. Cheer-



Macbeth

fully he thumped it as he and mighty Macbeth strode on through the gathering night, their kilts swinging and their heads held high.

Suddenly they halted and the drum ceased like a stopped heart. Their way was barred. Three old women had appeared before them, three hideous old women who crouched and stared. For an instant, an uncanny fear seized the two warriors; then Banquo recovered himself. Imperiously he thumped on his drum and demanded:

“What are these, so withered and so wild in their attire?”

Silence. He thumped again.

“Live you?”

Their silence remained unbroken.

“Or are you aught that man may question?”

At this, the old women’s eyes glinted, and slowly each raised a finger to her lips. Thus they crouched, like crooked answers awaiting only the right question, and the right questioner. They turned to the great, battle-stained figure of Macbeth. For the smallest moment, he hesitated; then commanded:

“Speak if you can! What are you?”

The right questioner. One by one they rose and greeted him.

“All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!”

His rightful title, and Banquo thumped approval on his drum.

“All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!”

The drum faltered . . .

“All hail Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!”

King! The drum stopped. King! It seemed that another drum was beating. Macbeth could hear it, thudding and thundering in his ears. It was his furious heart! He trembled and grew pale, fearing that Banquo would hear the tell-tale sound. But Banquo was no more proof than he against the golden promise in the weird old women’s words.

“If you can look into the seeds of time,” he begged them eagerly, “and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me . . .”

As before they answered, one by one.

“Lesser than Macbeth and greater,” promised the first.

“Not so happy, yet much happier,” promised the second.

“Thou shalt get kings though thou be none,” promised the third.

"Stay, you imperfect speakers!" shouted Macbeth. "Tell me more!"

But even as he spoke, the weird sisters vanished, as abruptly as if, whispered Banquo, "The earth hath bubbles as the water has, and these are of them . . ."

It was then, as the two men stood, staring at one another and wondering if what they had seen and heard had been real, that the King's two messengers appeared, and the first of the weird sisters' prophecies came true. The King had made him Thane of Cawdor!

"What! Can the Devil speak true?" cried Banquo, involuntarily; and Macbeth's thoughts turned helplessly to the second prophecy: he would be King! If one had come true, why not the other? Dark thoughts filled his head, thoughts of how that prophecy might be made to come true. He tried to put them from him. He shook his head violently. "If Chance will have me King," he reasoned to himself, "why Chance may crown me without my stir."

But Chance proved as wayward as a woman, first offering, now denying. When he returned to the royal camp with the messengers, he heard King Duncan pronounce Malcolm, his son, as heir to the throne of Scotland. Chance had mocked him; all was lost. Then Chance offered again. The kindly King declared that he would travel to Inverness, and stay one night as the guest of his loyal and well-loved subject, Macbeth.

"Stars, hide your fires!" whispered Macbeth, as he set off ahead of the King to warn his wife to prepare for the royal night. "Let not light see my black and deep desires!"

The lady of the castle had a letter in her hand. Over and over again she read it as she paced back and forth across her tall chamber where the light came through a narrow window like a knife. Each time she crossed the beam, her red hair blazed, as if there was a furnace in her head. The letter was from her husband, Macbeth. It told of his meeting with the weird sisters, of their strange prophecies, and of how the first had already been fulfilled. She put the letter aside.

"Glamis thou art," she breathed, "and Cawdor, and shalt be what thou art promised . . ."

King! He must be King! But how was it to be brought about? Even as she wondered, a servant entered the room.

"What is your tidings?" she demanded.

"The King comes here tonight."

She caught her breath; she started violently.

"Thou'rt mad to say it!" she cried out, before she could prevent herself; for in that instant she knew that the messenger had announced the death of the King. She and her husband together would murder him.

When her husband came, wild and breathless from his furious ride, she embraced him passionately; and, as they talked in low, rapid tones of the approaching King, she saw in his face that his thoughts were the same as hers. Yet perhaps they showed too plainly . . .

"Your face, my Thane," she warned him, "is as a book where men may read strange matters."

He nodded; then he faltered a little. Between the thinking and the doing of a deed, there was a line to be crossed. Though he was mighty in the trade of public blood, he shrank from private murder in the dark.

"We will speak further," he muttered.

But she would have none of it. Fate had promised him the crown, and the crown he would have.

"Only look up clear," she commanded. "Leave all the rest to me."

It was late afternoon when King Duncan, his two sons and his nobles, reached Inverness; and the lady of the castle, all smiles and bending like a flower, came out to greet them.

"Give me your hand," said the gentle King, and the lady, with welcome in her face and murder in her heart, gave the King her hand and drew him into her house.

That night, sounds of cheerful feasting filled the air; torches flamed in the stony passages and courtyards, making fantastic shadows of the hurrying servants, and the castle ran red with wine. But Macbeth, the host, was not at the feast. He had left the table in a mood of sudden horror at the thought of what he was to do. He stood alone in a courtyard, close against the wall.

"He's here in double trust," he whispered wretchedly: "first as I am his

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kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed; then as his host who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself."

"Why have you left the chamber?"

It was his wife. She had come in search of him. Her looks were fierce. He tried to avoid them.

"We will proceed no further in this business."

Furiously she turned on him for his cowardice.

"I dare do all that may become a man," he protested; "who dares do more is none."

Her eyes blazed, her scorn increased and stung him unbearably. He weakened. "If we should fail?"

"We fail!" she cried triumphantly. "But screw your courage to the sticking-place and we'll not fail!"

He stared at her, and she at him. He bowed his head. The matter was settled.

Past midnight. The feast was ended and the feasters all in bed. The torches were out and the castle was dark and quiet. Yet there was an uneasiness in the air, and sleep was restless. Two men crossed a court that was open to the black sky. One was Banquo, the other was Fleance, his son. A light approached.

"Who's there?"

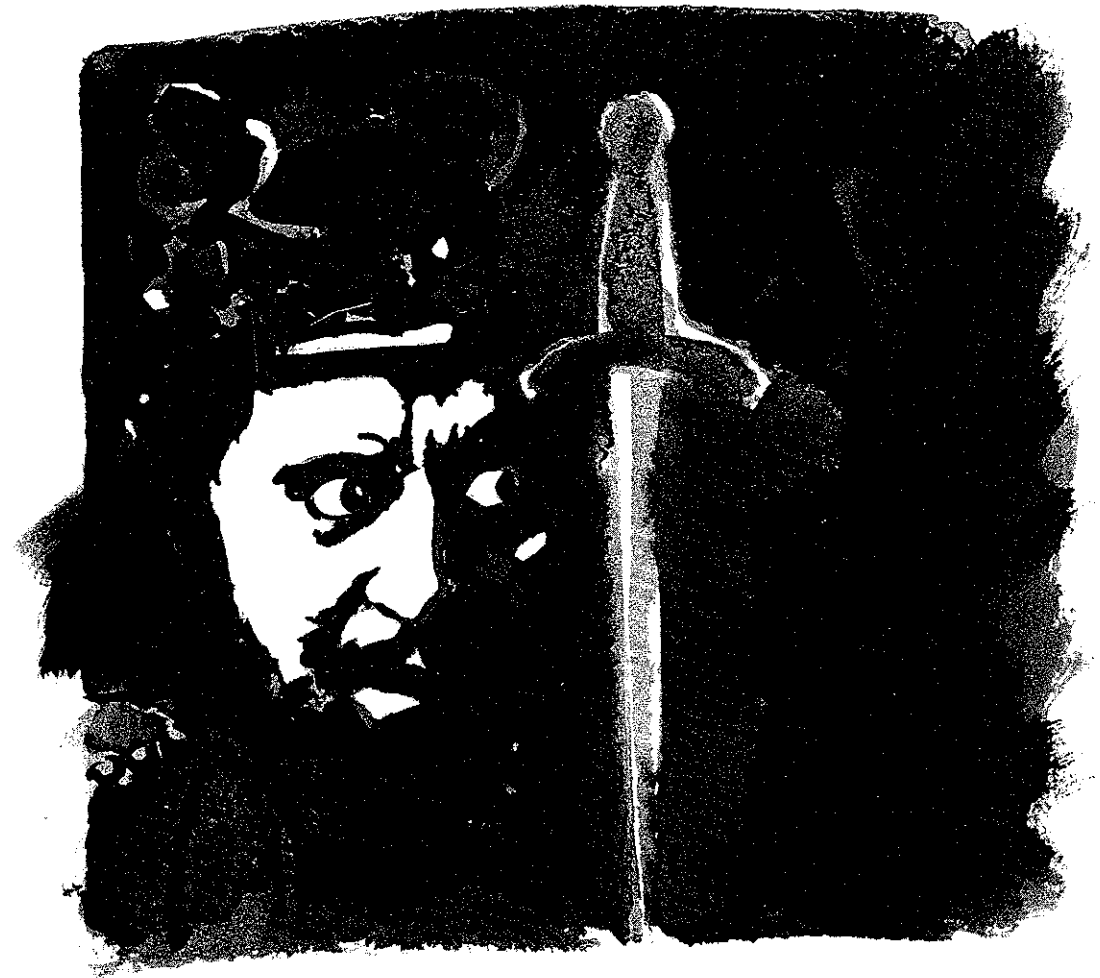
It was the master of the house with a servant carrying a torch. His face was a rapid mingling of firelight and shadows, now seeming to scowl, now to grin, now plunged into utter gloom.

"I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters," murmured Banquo to his friend. "To you they have showed some truth."

"I think not of them," said Macbeth, and looked away. The friends parted. For a moment, Macbeth stared after Banquo and his son. Then he turned to his servant. "Go bid thy mistress," he ordered, "when my drink is ready she strike upon the bell."

The servant departed, and Macbeth waited, listening. Once again, horrible thoughts filled his head, and strange fancies . . .

"Is this a dagger which I see before me?" he breathed; for he did indeed



seem to see such a weapon, eerily in the air, and it was thick with blood. Then, faintly, he heard the sound of a bell. Although he expected it, had been waiting for it, he started violently when it came.

"Hear it not, Duncan," he whispered, "for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell." Then, drawing his own dagger, he crept from the court like a ghost.

There was silence. Nothing stirred, nothing breathed. Then Lady Macbeth appeared. Her face was white; her eyes blazed with inward fire. She waited. Suddenly an owl screamed, and the night sighed. She stared towards the chamber where the King slept.

"He is about it."

A shadow moved. It was Macbeth.

"My husband!" she cried, and tried to embrace him. He pushed her aside.

"I have done the deed," he said, and stared down at his hands. He was holding two daggers: their blades and his hands were dripping with blood.

"This is a sorry sight," he said.

"A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight," cried she. But for once her words had no force for him. What he had done had put him out of her reach. To her, he had done no more than to kill an old man to get a crown; to himself, he had murdered sleeping innocence, he had murdered his own honour, he had killed his own soul. Already, he was a man apart.

"Why did you bring these daggers from the place?" she demanded. "They must lie there. Go . . ."

He shook his head. "I'll go no more. I am afraid to think what I have done; look on't again I dare not."

"Give me the daggers!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures . . ."

She seized the daggers and left him. No sooner had she gone than there came a knocking on the outer gate. He shook and trembled and stared down at his murderer's hands. Lady Macbeth returned. Her hands were now as guilty as his.

"My hands are of your colour," she said, holding them up before him; "but I shame to wear a heart so white." She rubbed her hands together, and, as if comforting a child, said: "A little water clears us of this deed."

Then the knocking was heard again. It was loud and urgent. Husband and wife stared at one another—and fled.

It was Macduff who knocked at the gate, Macduff, the great Thane of Fife. He had come to rouse the King. His knocking had been so loud that all the castle had been awakened—all, that is, except for the King.

"I'll bring you to him," offered the master of the house. "This is the door," he said, gesturing with a white hand and a whiter smile. He stood aside and Macduff went in to the King.

He waited, at ease, it seemed, with the world. He waited for Macduff to cross the outer chamber; to reach the inner chamber; to open the door. He waited, still easy, until he heard the shout, the cry, the shriek of discovery, as Macduff saw what lay on the bed within. Then Macduff ran out. His looks were wild and frantic. The King was dead! He had been slaughtered as he slept!

"Murder and treason!" he shouted. "Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm, awake!"

Murder and treason! The castle rocked. The very stones seemed to shake and glare. Murder and treason! Torches, like maddened fireflies, rushed hither and thither, throwing up faces, like sudden paintings of amazement and horror, as nobles and servants came tumbling upon the scene. Murder and treason! The King had been killed in the night! Who had done it? Why, his guards, of course, who else? Question them! Impossible! Macbeth had already stopped their tongues. Rage had overcome him and he had slaughtered them for the crime!

"Wherefore did you so?" demanded Macduff, a terrible suspicion awakening in his heart.

"Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious, loyal and neutral in a moment?" cried Macbeth. "No man."

The King's two sons looked fearfully to one another. Their father had been murdered. Would they be next?

"Where we are, there's daggers in men's smiles," muttered one.

"Therefore to horse," answered the other, "and let us not be dainty of leave-taking but shift away!"

They fled from the hall and from the castle, and from Scotland itself, leaving behind the dead King, the crown—and Macbeth.

The old women's prophecy was fulfilled. The grain they had spied in Macbeth's heart had grown and flourished in that dark place. He seized the crown and mounted the throne. He was King, and none dared oppose him: not murdered Duncan's sons, not great Macduff, nor even Banquo, who, of all men, knew enough to bring him down.

"Thou hast it now," murmured Banquo thoughtfully: "King, Caw-

dor, Glamis, all as the weird women promised; yet I fear thou playedst most foully for it . . .”

He was at Forres in the royal palace, soon after Macbeth and his Lady had been crowned. There was to be a banquet that night. All the Scottish nobles, himself included, had been summoned to do homage to the new King. Banquo watched, but kept his thoughts to himself. This was partly caution, and partly because he also had been given a promise by the weird sisters. Though he would not be King himself, he would be father to kings.

“Ride you this afternoon?” inquired Macbeth, coming upon his old companion-in-arms, and fondly greeting him.

“Aye, my good Lord,” answered Banquo, and confided that he would not be back till an hour or two after nightfall.

“Goes Fleance with you?”

“Aye, my good Lord . . .”

Macbeth nodded, and wished Banquo and his son Godspeed.

“Fail not our feast,” he said and stared after Banquo long and deep. He had not forgotten the old women’s prophecy to his friend; and the recollection of it festered in his heart.

A servant approached, bringing in two strange, muffled-looking men. They were grim fellows that the world had treated badly; and, in return, they were prepared to take their revenge upon the world—and upon Banquo, in particular.

They talked together and soon the matter was settled between them. The men departed, and Macbeth breathed harshly. “It is concluded!” he whispered. “Banquo, thy soul’s flight, if it find heaven, must find it out tonight!” His friend and his friend’s son were to be murdered that night.

“How now, my Lord? Why do you keep alone?”

Lady Macbeth approached the brooding King. Her face was worn, her eyes had lost their fire. She scarcely knew her husband any more. The deed he had done had set him apart, and now they seemed to face different ways: she without, and he, within.

“What’s done is done,” she urged; for to her it was, but not so for him.

“We have scorched the snake, not killed it,” he warned. Banquo and his son still lived.

“What’s to be done?” she asked. He shook his head.

“Be innocent of the knowledge,” he bade her, “dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed . . .”

Banquo was not at the feast. All the world was there, laughing, smiling, jesting, drinking—but not Banquo. Macbeth, the royal host, walked among his guests in high good humour, found a place at table, sat down . . .

“We’ll drink a measure,” he proposed; when he saw a man appear in the doorway, a grim, muffled-looking man whose eye caught his, and who beckoned. Macbeth left the table and went to the man. He stood close, stared at him.

“There’s blood upon thy face,” he murmured.

“ ’Tis Banquo’s then.”

“Is he dispatched?”

“His throat is cut.”

Macbeth nodded. And Fleance? What of the son? The man shook his head. The son had escaped. Dismay filled Macbeth’s heart. Then he recovered himself. The worst, at least, was done. Banquo was dead. He dismissed the man and returned to the feast. He hesitated. The guests looked up at him.

“May it please your Highness sit?”

Macbeth frowned in puzzlement. “The table’s full,” he said.

“Here is a place reserved, Sir.”

“Where?”

“Here, my good Lord.”

He looked. He grew deathly white. He shook and trembled till he could scarcely stand. He tried to speak. His voice was thick with dread.

“Which of you have done this?”

The place offered to him was filled. Banquo was sitting in it! Banquo, his head half off, and all painted with his life’s blood! Grimly the ghost of the murdered man glared at his murderer.

“Thou canst not say I did it,” groaned Macbeth; “never shake thy gory locks at me!”

Amazement seized the table as the guests saw the whitened King shake and stare and mutter at an empty stool. Urgently the Queen tried to calm the company, and still more urgently to calm her frantic husband.

"Why do you make such faces?" she whispered to him. "When all's done, you look but on a stool!"

Neither she nor anyone else could see what he could see. The ghost had come for him alone. Then it departed and briefly Macbeth recovered himself. But not for long. The gashed and bleeding spectre returned, and its dreadful looks drove the King into a frenzy.

The feast broke up in dismay, and the guests rose in confusion. The King was ill. What was wrong?

"I pray you speak not," cried the distressed Queen; "he grows worse and worse. Question enrages him. At once, good night. Stand not upon the order of your going; but go at once!"

Once alone, the Queen and King stared at one another across the ruins of the feast.

"It will have blood, they say," muttered Macbeth; "blood will have blood."

The Queen was silent.

"How sayest thou, that Macduff denies his person at our bidding?" he murmured, his thoughts turning to another enemy as he recollected that Macduff had failed to attend the feast.

"Did you send to him, Sir?"

"I heard it by the way," he said; "but I will send." Another crime, another murder . . . but did it matter any more? "I am in blood stepped in so far," he sighed, "that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er."

He shook his head. On the next day he would seek out those who had first set him on the dark and bloody path along which he had already travelled so far. The weird sisters.

"More shall they speak," he said; "for now I am bent to know by the worst means the worst."

They were waiting for him, even as once they'd waited before. They knew he would come. They waited in a dark room in a dark house in

Forres, not very far from the royal palace; and, while they waited, they made ready.

"Double, double toil and trouble," they chanted, as they moved about a cauldron that smoked and reeked in the middle of the room; "fire burn and cauldron bubble." And into it they cast weird, unholy things.

Then they stopped.

"By the pricking of my thumbs," cried one, "something wicked this way comes!"

It was Macbeth. They stared at him, but did not speak. As before, they were answers awaiting a question.



"What is't you do?" he demanded, gazing at the cauldron.

"A deed without a name."

"Answer me to what I ask you."

"Speak," said one. "Demand," said another. "We'll answer," said the third. Then the first said: "Say if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths or from our masters."

"Call 'em," commanded Macbeth; "let me see 'em."

The weird sisters obeyed. They poured blood into the cauldron, and presently there arose from it, wreathed in smoke and wearing a warlike helmet, a severed head. It hovered in the air and stared at Macbeth.

"Tell me, thou unknown power . . ." he began; but one of the sisters bade him only listen, as the apparition already knew what he had come to ask.

"Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth," it chanted; "beware Macduff! Beware the Thane of Fife!"

Then the head dissolved and its place was taken by another, even stranger sight. There floated in the air before him an infant, a little child all streaked with blood.

"Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth," it piped. "Be bloody, bold and resolute . . . for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth!"

He would have asked more, but this second apparition had already vanished, and its place was taken by a third. Another child. But now it was a child wearing a crown and holding out the branch of a tree.

"Macbeth shall never vanquished be," this apparition told him, "until great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him."

"That will never be!" cried Macbeth, as the third apparition sank into smoky nothingness. What he had been told lifted up his heart and bewitched his spirits as if with wine! No man born of woman could ever harm him; and he would never fall till Birnam Wood came to Dunsinane. Such things could never happen, so he would never fall!

Yet there was still one thing he wanted to know. "Shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?" he asked. "Seek to know no more," he was told. But he insisted, and, at length, he had his answer. Before his peering eyes the cauldron sank away and out of the thick air, silent and gleaming, there stalked a procession of kings. One by one they passed him by, each

with a stare and each with a nod: five; six; seven; eight in all. And then came Banquo! Banquo, thick and clotted with blood. He pointed to the last of the kings who held up a glass; and in the glass were kings and more kings, stretching out into future time. Banquo smiled. Those kings to come were his!

Suddenly Macbeth was alone. Banquo, the kings and the weird sisters had vanished.

"Where are they?" he cried wildly. "Gone! Let this pernicious hour stand aye accursed in the calendar!"

Banquo's children would be kings. Macbeth would be barren. He himself was the beginning and the end of his line. But that was in the future. Present matters needed present action. That very day he sent men to murder Macduff.

But Macduff had forestalled him. He had fled to England and joined Malcolm, dead King Duncan's son. But he had left his wife and children behind.

"Where is your husband?" demanded Macbeth's murderers as they burst into her home.

She would not tell them; so they killed her, and all her children, and every living soul in the house.

In England, in peaceful, sunlit England, Malcolm and Macduff talked together of the sad plight of their own land that lay under the shadow of the tyrant King. Presently a messenger approached, a nobleman from Scotland. His looks were strange, his speech, halting.

"How does my wife?" asked Macduff.

"Why, well."

"And all my children?"

"Well too."

"The tyrant has not battered at their peace?"

"No. They were well at peace when I did leave 'em."

Then the messenger could keep back his terrible news no longer.

"Your castle is surprised, your wife and babes savagely slaughtered."

The great blow fell. Grief turned Macduff to stone. The world was empty for him now. Nothing remained but revenge.

Macbeth had gone to Dunsinane, and with him, like a painted shadow, went his Queen. Malcolm and Macduff were marching against him and he must needs prepare for war. He had no fear. No man born of woman could ever harm him, and he would not be vanquished till Birnam Wood should move and come to Dunsinane. Those were the promises of Fate. Yet he must be ready because Fate, he knew of old, needed a helping hand.

It was night in the castle of Dunsinane, and two figures stood close together in the dark hall. One was a doctor, the other a waiting-woman of the Queen.

"When was it she last walked?" asked the doctor, quietly.

"Since His Majesty went into the field."

"Besides her walking, and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?"

"That, sir, which I will not report after her."

"You may, to me . . ."

"Neither to you nor anyone," said the waiting-woman. "Lo you! Here she comes."

It was the Queen. She carried a taper and was in her night attire. Her eyes were open; but she was asleep.

"What is it she does now?" whispered the doctor. "Look how she rubs her hands."

"It is an accustomed action with her," murmured the woman, "to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour."

"Hark! She speaks," said the doctor eagerly; and he and the waiting-woman listened intently to the strange mutterings of the Queen.

"Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" Her hands seemed to gnaw at each other like feverish mice, and the taper tipped and tilted, making wild shadows behind her. Then she cried out, in a voice that filled the listeners with horror: "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

"She has spoke what she should not," whispered the waiting-woman. "I am sure of that."

Then her mistress, the Queen, still rubbing at her hands, complained

that the smell of blood would not go; and she who had once told her husband that a little water cleared them of the deed, now cried out in anguish:

"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!" Then she drifted away. "To bed, to bed," she sighed. "What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed."

Malcolm and his army drew near. Already Birnam Wood was before them. It was thick and leafy.

"Let every soldier hew him down a bough," commanded Malcolm, "and bear it before him . . ."

Quickly it was done, and presently it seemed that Birnam Wood itself was moving towards Dunsinane.

Macbeth, secure in his prophecies, awaited the oncoming army. Suddenly he heard a cry, a desolate cry of women. Once, such a sound would have alarmed him; but now he was past all feeling, past all fear. Warily he asked the reason for the cry.

"The Queen, my Lord, is dead," he was told.

He shrugged his shoulders. "She should have died hereafter," he sighed. "There would have been a time for such a word. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time . . ."

A messenger broke in upon his life-weariness, a messenger amazed and scarcely able to speak. He had been watching from a hill, and, as he watched, it had seemed to him that Birnam Wood was moving, moving towards Dunsinane.

"Liar and slave!" shouted Macbeth, rousing himself. Rage filled him, not against Malcolm, nor even against Macduff, but against the weird sisters, the Fates! They had deceived and entrapped him into destroying the great man that once he had been.

"They have tied me to a stake," he cried, "I cannot fly, but bear-like I must fight the course. What's he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none."

This last promise sustained him as he rushed from the castle to face his

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enemies. He fought like a giant, for who could harm him? His life, though he valued it at nothing, was charmed. Then, in the smoke of battle, he came face to face with Macduff.

"Of all men else I have avoided thee," he cried. "But get thee back; my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already."

"I have no words; my voice is in my sword!" shouted Macduff, and rushed upon him.

"I bear a charmed life," warned Macbeth, parrying his enemy's blows, "which must not yield to one of woman born!"

"Despair thy charm!" panted Macduff, his murdered wife and children ever in his thoughts. "Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped!"

The last promise had been broken, and the last prophecy fulfilled. The end had come. Nothing now remained for him but to perish bravely, like the soldier that he had been.

"Lay on, Macduff!" he cried, his sword and shield grasped firmly. "And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'"

They fought, and Macduff killed Macbeth. Then he cut off his head and carried it, dripping, to Malcolm, the new King. He held it up on high, and its sightless glare bore witness to the double truth of Fate.

