

# Macbeth Synopsis

## ACT ONE

As a bloody civil war draws to a close, King Duncan executes the lead rebel, Cawdor, as three darkly mystical figures - the Witches - find the general Macbeth and his chief ally, Banquo, in the aftermath of a battle, predicting he will soon have Cawdor's title as well as the crown, while Banquo will be father to a royal line. The Witches vanish as the soldier Ross arrives, presenting Cawdor's title to Macbeth on Duncan's orders. The first part of the Witches' prophecy fulfilled, Macbeth returns home, telling his wife all he has been promised. That night, Duncan, his son and heir Malcolm, and Banquo arrive at Macbeth's home to celebrate with their victorious army.

## ACT TWO

Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to force the rest of the Witches' predictions to come true by murdering the King. She drugs the guests. Macbeth stabs Duncan in his sleep, while Lady Macbeth frames two of Duncan's guards for the crime, smearing their faces with the king's blood as they lie drugged and unconscious. Let in by a drunken Porter, the warrior Macduff arrives and discovers Duncan's body, waking up the entire house. Enraged, Macbeth kills Duncan's guards, then shifts the blame for Duncan's murder onto Malcolm, the only one to profit by the king's death. Fearing for his life, Malcolm escapes.

## ACT THREE

Macbeth is crowned king. Banquo, believing Macbeth to have murdered Duncan, decides to leave with his young son, Fleance. Macbeth, remembering Banquo was hailed by the Witches as father of a line of future kings, realizes that Banquo and Fleance must now be killed to secure his own line. He hires two murderers for the job. Although Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes. That night, Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth at a banquet, tormenting him. As Lady Macbeth calms him and ushers their guests out, they realize they must keep killing in order to maintain their throne, finding themselves locked in an unending cycle of murder.

## ACT FOUR

Macbeth goes to the Witches, demanding they tell him what the future still holds in store for him. They present Macbeth with a vision of spirits, who warn him to beware of Macduff but assure him he cannot be harmed by any man born of a woman and that he need fear nothing until the forest marches against him. Confident all this is impossible, Macbeth is triumphant but decides to "make assurances double sure" by murdering Macduff and his entire family. He dispatches the two murderers to Macduff's home, but Macduff himself has since left to raise an army to support the rightful king, the exiled Malcolm, in his bid for the throne. Malcolm initially rejects Macduff's offer to help, believing him to be in league with Macbeth, but when Ross arrives and tells Macduff his entire family has been murdered on Macbeth's orders, Malcolm and Macduff assemble an invasion force to attack Macbeth.

## ACT FIVE

Sleepwalking and insane with guilt, Lady Macbeth attempts to wash the blood from her hands. Meanwhile, Macbeth is haunted by the ghosts of all those he has killed, which now includes his wife, who has committed suicide. His time for grief is short lived, however, as Macduff and Malcolm's army approaches camouflaged using trees as cover to advance on him. Although the first half of the Witches' seemingly impossible warning has come true, Macbeth still believes he is safe, as there is no man living who was not born of a woman. But his confidence evaporates when he is confronted by Macduff, who tells him he "was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd" and so was not, strictly speaking, born. Macbeth curses the Witches and is killed by Macduff. Malcolm is crowned king.