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Sample pages

Back at Dunsinane, all was awry. Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman had called in a doctor to witness the very strange behaviour of her mistress. She told the doctor what she had seen. 'Ever since the king went into the field, I have seen her get up from bed, put on her gown, go to her cupboard, take out a piece of paper, write on it, read it, seal it and then go back to bed — and she does it all in her sleep.'

Suddenly Lady Macbeth came by with a candle. 'Where did she get the candle from?' asked the doctor.

'By her bed — she has commanded that there be a light near her at all times.'

'What is she doing now?' asked the doctor.

'She does this often — as if she's washing her hands. I have seen her do it for a quarter of an hour,' replied the gentlewoman. Lady Macbeth spoke, 'Oh, here is a spot. Out damned spot, get out!' Thinking she heard the bell strike, she counted, 'One, two — it is time to do it. Hell is dark.' The doctor and gentlewoman listened as Lady Macbeth spoke of things treacherous and evil in what seemed to be a series of unrelated sentences, but to all who knew or sensed what she and Macbeth did that night, what she said made perfect sense.

'Fie, my Lord, fie — you are a soldier! How can you be afraid? Who would have thought the old man would have so much blood in him? The Thane of Fife had a wife — where is she now?'

As Lady Macbeth became more agitated, she rubbed her hands even harder. 'What? Will these hands never be clean?' She raised her hands to her face. 'I can still smell blood. There is not enough perfume in all of Arabia to take that smell away. Put on your nightgown, my lord, don't look so pale — I told you before that Banquo is dead and buried and the dead cannot rise from their graves. Quickly — to bed, there is knocking at the gate. What is done cannot be undone. Come to bed.' Finally, Lady Macbeth went to bed. The doctor concluded, 'She does not need a doctor — she needs a priest.'

Out in the countryside, near Macbeth's castle, troops were gathering. Lennox, Menteith, Caithness and Angus were there with the Scottish soldiers. The English army, led by Malcolm and Macduff, was close by. They were waiting just behind Birnam Wood, contemplating the battle to come.

Inside the castle, Macbeth was sick of hearing the reports of what forces were gathering against him. 'Don't bring me any more reports! I have nothing to fear until Birnam Wood uproots itself and comes here! The spirits have told me to fear no one that was born of a woman. So run, all you traitors, run to the English! This battle will be the end — the end of my worry or my life. My life has withered.

What one should have in their old age — the friends, the honour and love — I cannot have. Instead, I will have curses and falsely spoken obedience. I will fight — and I will fight until the flesh is hacked off my bones. Bring me my armour!' he demanded. In the middle of this, he asked 'How is the queen, your patient, doctor?'

'Not so much sick, my lord, as troubled and in need of rest,' he replied carefully.

'Then cure her of it. Can you not minister to a diseased mind as you can to a diseased body? Have you no antidote?'

'In these kinds of cases, the patient must heal herself,' observed the doctor, wisely.

At Birnam Wood the Scottish forces were joined by the English forces. To disguise their numbers, they ordered all soldiers to take a tree branch from Birnam Wood and hold it over them as they marched towards Dunsinane. The battle lines were drawn.

Macbeth waited. From inside the castle he had heard women crying. Quietly he observed, 'I had almost forgotten what fear feels like. There was a time when a shriek in the night or a frightening story would make my hair stand on end.' Seyton entered with the news that Lady Macbeth had killed herself. 'She should have died in a time other than this,' responded Macbeth. 'Then there would have been time to say "the queen is dead". Every day goes by in the same way to the end of the record of time and everything we have done has led us to dark death. So put out the candle of life — we walk as shadows between the light of life and the darkness of death. We are poor actors who strut and fret throughout our life on the stage and then are heard of no more. Life is a tale told by an idiot — full of sound and fury but meaning nothing.' His musing was disturbed by a messenger. 'You've come to tell me something — say it quickly.'

'As I stood as the watch on the hill, I looked towards Birnam Wood and before long I thought I saw it move.'

'If you are lying,' warned Macbeth, 'you will hang on the next tree until you starve to death, but if you are telling the truth then it does not matter if you punish me the same way. I begin to feel weary of this world. Ring the alarm! Whatever happens, we will go down fighting!' and Macbeth went forward to battle. And in doing so, he enabled those outside to penetrate the castle and discover him. Indeed, Dunsinane castle was virtually impenetrable; but, in his hurry to determine his destiny, Macbeth gave this no thought at all.

The English forces approached the castle. Old Siward and his son were assigned to lead the troops into battle while Malcolm and Macduff agreed to do everything else that needed to be done. It was clear, though, that there was no turning back until they, or Macbeth, were dead.

Inside the castle, Macbeth was aware of his plight — he could not run so he would fight. Young Siward was the first to find him. They fought, but young Siward was no match for the great soldier that Macbeth was. As Siward fell to the ground, Macbeth thought, *You were born of a woman*. He moved off. As he left, Macduff came to that part of the field. He called out for Macbeth to fight but he could not find him — so on he went. Malcolm and Old Siward met to update each other about the state of the battle. Macbeth's forces were surrendering and the few who would not were easily dispatched.

Finally, Macduff found Macbeth. 'Turn, you hell-hound — turn!' shouted Macduff.

'Of all men in this world, I have made an effort to avoid you. Go from here — I am guilty of too much of your blood already.' It was a genuine attempt to do no more harm to Macduff, but Macduff did not care about this. 'I have nothing to say to you. My sword is my voice!'

'You are wasting your time,' replied Macbeth. 'Go and fight something you can kill — my life cannot be ended by any man born of a woman!'

'Then your charm is expired. Let the devil that you have served tell you that I, Macduff, was cut out of my mother.'

'Curse you — at last I am afraid! These devils have told me untruths — their promises mean nothing! It is hopeless. I will not fight with you,' cried Macbeth.

'Then surrender!' demanded Macduff. 'And we will hold you in captivity forever so that others may come and see the monster.'

'Never! I will not surrender to be held up for scorn. Though Birnam Wood has come to Dunsinane and you, my enemy, are not born of woman, I will fight. Come on, Macduff, and damned be the man who cries stop, enough!' The fight was bloody and fierce. With all the hatred in his being, Macduff ran his sword through Macbeth's chest and then cut Macbeth's head off and carried it across the field to his allies.

Malcolm and Ross were comforting Old Siward on the loss of his son when they saw Macduff approaching. They were not sure what they were seeing until Macduff called out to Malcolm, 'Hail, king, for king you now are! Here is the traitor's head. We are free.'

Macbeth

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (CAST)

DUNCAN	King of Scotland
MALCOLM	Duncan's elder son
DONALBAIN	Duncan's younger son
MACBETH	General in the king's army
BANQUO	General in the king's army
MACDUFF	Nobleman of Scotland
LENNOX	Nobleman of Scotland
ROSS	Nobleman of Scotland
MENTEITH	Nobleman of Scotland
ANGUS	Nobleman of Scotland
CAITHNESS	Nobleman of Scotland
FLEANCE	Son of Banquo
SIWARD	Earl of Northumberland, general of the English forces
YOUNG SIWARD	His son
SEYTON	An officer attending Macbeth
BOY	Son of Macduff
LADY MACBETH	Macbeth's wife
LADY MACDUFF	Macduff's wife
HECATE	The witches' mistress

Three witches, a gentlewoman attending Lady Macbeth, an English doctor, a Scottish doctor, a soldier, a porter and an old man

Lords, gentlemen, officers, soldiers, murderers, attendants, and messengers

The ghost of Banquo and several other apparitions