

At the end of the last scene of the 1st Act Lady Macbeth plans to kill Duncan when he is asleep. His guards will be made drunk and condemned as the murderers. They will use the guards' dagger to kill the king and mark them with his blood to prove that they have done it. Macbeth is resolved and is ready for the act and mislead the whole world.

MACBETH ACT 2

Sc 1

In a court within the castle of Macbeth Banquo and his son Fleance are found walking in the midnight. Banquo is disturbed and cannot sleep because evil power is working in him. As he meets Macbeth, informs that the king ended the day with deepest possible pleasure and sent gifts to his office and Lady Macbeth, 'most kind hostess'. Banquo also tells Macbeth that he dreamt last night of the three witches. They decide to discuss the significance of the encounter at some other time. Banquo agrees to help Macbeth if he can maintain his blamelessness and allegiance to the king.

Macbeth waits for the sound of the bell as a signal to know that the murder preparation has been done.

Macbeth's second soliloquy--- he has the vision of a dagger which illustrates the power of Macbeth's imagination. The dagger recedes from him as he seeks to grasp it leading him to Duncan's room. It seems as real as his own dagger but cannot touch it. He calls it a 'fatal vision', fatal to Duncan. He sees drops of blood on the blade and handle of the dagger. Macbeth follows the dagger as if he were a sleep walker. The entire hemisphere seems to be dead, there is no sound or motion. Only evil dreams seem to be real, and he himself in such a dream moves to Duncan's room like a ghost. Then the sound of the bell breaks the silence and rouses him to perform his terrible deed.

Sc 2

Lady Macbeth is waiting tensely for her husband to commit the murder. She hears the owl's shriek and compares it with the fatal bellman. She has drugged the guards of Duncan to sleep and they are struggling between life and death. She envisages Macbeth killing Duncan. She would have killed him herself, 'Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, she confesses. The murder takes place off the stage. Once the saviour of the country kills the king. Macbeth coming back to Lady Macbeth says, 'This is a sorry sight'. He also hears somebody as he passed the room, roused from his sleep by a dream, called out 'Murder' before he could continue. He could not utter 'Amen' when one cried, "God bless us". He also heard a voice proclaiming that, since he had murdered sleep, he would sleep no more. Lady Macbeth tells him to wash his hands, and put the daggers into the hands of the sleeping guards, and smear their faces with blood so that suspicion may fall upon them. But Macbeth refuses to go back to the scene of murder because he is afraid to think of what he has done. Lady Macbeth goes to perform the task. A knocking at the gate startles Macbeth, and he wishes that it could rouse Duncan. He wonders whether all the waters of the ocean can wash the blood clean from his hands. It seems to him that his bloody hands can turn the entire water of the oceans to a red colour. On Lady Macbeth's return, the knocking continuing, she hurries him off to get the blood off his hands and change into a dressing-gown to show that they have been roused from sleep.

Sc 3

The comic interlude of the Porter serves a number of purposes. It is dramatically necessary to fill the interval while Macbeth and Lady Macbeth go to change their clothes. Macbeth's castle has been transformed into a hell by his awful act. The Porter's jesting acts as a relief from extreme tension, but it is thematically significant.

The drunken Porter imagines himself the keeper of the Hell Gate and admits the sinners like a farmer ruined. Then comes an equivocator, Father Garnet, a Jesuit priest who was put on a trial for his part in the Gunpowder plot to blow up the King and Parliament. The third sinner is an English tailor who was caught stealing cloth from his customers.

Finally the Porter admits the noblemen Macduff and Lenox. Macbeth enters in his dressing-gown to greet them. Macduff goes to wake the king. Lenox comments on his experience of the last night, nature was profoundly disturbed. Chimneys were blown down, earth seemed to shake, there were continuous owl-screeching and strange screams. Macduff returns crying out in horror and rouses the occupants of the castle. In the midst of the expressions of horror and dismay, Macbeth tells the company that he killed the evidently guilty grooms, carried away by rage. Lady Macbeth pretends to faint and is carried away. Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's sons, express their fear and suspicion of their kinsmen and decide to run away, Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland.

The knocking at the gate had appalled Macbeth, it seemed terrifyingly ominous. The knocking of Macduff was as the sound of fate.

The sight of dead Duncan is as awful as the Day of Judgment.

Sc 4

An old man and Ross, standing outside Macbeth's castle, discuss the strange natural phenomena that have taken place. The old man acts as a choric commentator. He says that, during his life time he has not witnessed such a dreadful night. Rosse also comments on the unnaturalness of nature, there is darkness, no light in the day time. The birds and the animals also behaved unnaturally.

Macduff appears on the scene and informs Rosse that Malcolm and Donalbain have fled from Scotland, apparently of guilty fear. They might have instigated the killers. Macbeth has been chosen king and is to be crowned at Scone. Macduff is not going to the coronation and expresses uneasiness about the future.

The old man's couplet at the end of the scene is a seer's vision. The words act as a warning of things to come, but they are also an assurance that good, though deceived by evil, will finally triumph.

To be continued