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Macbeth

CHARACTER/ACT BREAKDOWN

KEY CHARACTERS:

Duncan, King of Scotland

Malcolm, Duncan's elder son

Donalbain, Duncan's younger son

Macbeth, Thane of Glamis, later King of Scotland

Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's wife, later Queen of Scotland

Banquo, Macbeth's friend

Fleance, Banquo's son

Macduff, a Scottish lord, loyal to Duncan

ACT I:

There has been a rebellion against King Duncan.

Macbeth has successfully quelled it.

He and his sidekick Banquo return in triumph, when three witches stop them.

The witches greet Macbeth three times:

1. using his current title, Thane of Glamis
2. another title, Thane of Cawdor
3. and as "King Hereafter"

Macbeth is stunned at this greeting, because Cawdor is not his title and certainly King is WAY beyond his reach.

Suddenly a messenger arrives from King Duncan telling Macbeth that he has been proclaimed Thane of Cawdor.

Score one for the witches.

Baquo asks the witches if they can see his future.

They say that he will not be king, but will father kings.

Macbeth writes to his wife to tell her about the witches' prophesy, and then his promotion.

She takes it as a sure sign that they must ACT and take the crown, by force. She is, however, concerned that Macbeth is too nice to do such a thing...to kill a king to take the crown.

In order for Macbeth to be king, they must get rid of Duncan and his two sons. Duncan is on his way home and will be staying with the Macbeths that very night, so that must be the time to act.

Macbeth is hesitant.

Lady M comes up with a fail-safe plan to get Duncan's guards drunk and then frame them for Duncan's murder.

Finally Macbeth agrees.

ACT II:

Banquo and his son Fleance are up and about in the middle of the night.

They meet Macbeth and Banquo delivers gifts from the King.

He reminds Macbeth about the witches' prophesy, Macbeth says it hasn't crossed his mind....LIE!!

Later, Macbeth sees an apparition of a dagger...the handle moves toward his hand to reveal that the blade is covered with blood.

A guilty conscience is taking him over, evidently.

Lady M has done her job and set up the murder scene, all Macbeth has to do is go into the chamber and kill Duncan.

When he goes to stab him, he starts to hear voices...yes, definitely a guilty conscience. He bails out and returns to his wife, terrified.

She takes the daggers from him and finishes the job, smearing Duncan's blood on the sleeping guards...and she is furious with Macbeth for his 'weakness'.

Macduff discovers Duncan's body and awakens everyone, crying "murder and treason".

Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain are certain that it wasn't the guards who killed their father, it's just way too fishy....they must flee, because most likely, they are next.

And so goes politics.

Malcolm goes to England, Donalbain to Ireland.

To the Scottish Lords, their flight smacks of guilt...they think that the boys hired the guards to kill Duncan.

ACT III:

Banquo is no slouch. He sees that the witches' prophecy has come true, but suspects that Macbeth has used foul play in achieving it. Macbeth suspects that Banquo suspects him, so he hires assassins to kill Banquo and Fleance. According to the witches, Banquo's destiny is to father kings, but Macbeth wants to thwart that prophecy by killing Banquo and his son.

The Macbeths now have a banquet, as King and Queen. His guilty conscience is now doubled from killing his friend Banquo as well as Duncan.

He freaks out...

Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth and sits at the table.

Lady M tries to cover for him, basically saying that he is really really tired.

She then kicks everyone out, with her apologies.

Fleance actually escaped the assassins, but now the rumors are that he killed his father.

Macduff doesn't believe Macbeth is innocent in any of it...he follows Malcolm to England and tried to get the English King to help attack Macbeth in Scotland.

ACT IV:

Macbeth prepares for war.

Greedily, he goes to the witches to find out what to expect. They tell him two things:

1. he will not die; except by the hand of one who was not born of a woman.
2. His army will not be overthrown until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill.

Both prospects seem impossible. Macbeth is therefore confident.

But, now he is power-crazed and cannot seem to get out of the habit of killing. When he finds out about Macduff going to England, he seeks revenge by murdering Macduff's wife and children.

In England, Malcolm is at first reluctant to side with Macduff. Malcolm mistrusts him for a time, but is eventually swayed.

A lord comes and tells Macduff the horrid news about his family.

Macduff realizes that for himself, and for the good of Scotland, he must strike.

ACT V:

Back at the Macbeth's, Lady M has gone round the bend with madness and MASSIVE guilt for her deeds....she imagines that she has blood-soaked hands and cannot get them clean.

She kills herself, in a fit of misery.

Macduff and Malcolm, with the English army, gather at Birnam Wood.

Macbeth is resolute...even with the death of his wife.

He thinks that because of the witches prophecy the last time, that he will win the war no matter what.

The attacking army disguise themselves to move....with branches of the woods from Birnham, and advance undetected.

Macduff faces Macbeth...the prophecy is realized by the fact that Macduff reveals that he was born from a C-Section, therefore not "of woman".

He kills Macbeth.

Malcolm is made king and order is restored.

Macbeth, Act 5 Scene 5

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.

It is a tale told by an idiot,
full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.