

(The hall of the royal palace, Forres. Duncan is discovered sleeping on the king's high seat. He is in the grip of a nightmare. There is a table with a flagon of wine and a cup)

When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning or in rain?
When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
That will be the set of sun.
Where the place?
Upon the heath,
There to meet with Macbeth.

(He wakes)

Treason!

(He fumbles around, orientating himself)

Pray you, keep seat;
The fit is momentary; upon a thought
I will again be well.

(He drinks some wine to recover himself)

Do not muse at me, most worthy friends. It is nothing.

How far my state has fallen! What I dream is ever prophet
of my fate. Yet I call this, nothing. It is but stale news
- Scotland drips with treason.

Why, three days since the Thane of Cawdor swore he'd drive
Norway from our realm. Aye, and made brave show of it.

I'll meet him dareful, beard to beard,
And beat him backwards home.

Where is he now? In Norway's camp, with Macdonwald and his
rebels. Fortune cannot bless such treason.

There's vain hope. Fortune has no conscience. Let Cawdor
hear this. I'll not bow to kiss the ground beneath that
traitor's feet. In the great hand of God, here I'll stand.

(He poses defiantly, before deciding before the throne is more impressive)

No, my blood should stain the throne; be memorial that here died a king.

Fantasy! No king can win his fame by dying. I will be a tale told by an idiot. Then be heard no more.

I must curb these thoughts. The scenes they paint me are too horrid. Say Norway is Goliath. I still have Davids loyal to me. Macbeth. Banquo. Even Ross. And Macduff, that weathervane, cannot think me lost. Love for me would not keep him from the rebels' camp.

Are these barren hopes? Or groundless fears? My thoughts are as some stricken boat that floats upon a wild and violent sea.

How long this tedious day.

I would forget myself in sleep. But the three weird sisters haunt my dreams. I've not thought of them since I threw earth on Bethoc's grave. A cloudless day. What mockery is that when Bethoc's dead. Stepping back, I heard Banquo whisper to the queen, he'd wed no more, wives were not for him. I knew then the witches spoke but airy nothings and could safely be forgot.

Now their words come back to me, as raw as when they spoke them. Banquo then was a boy. We were riding north from Forres to bury Moray. Remember that good thane? His nephew slew for envy of his lands. Much good it did the villain. Macbeth avenged his father - and wed his cousin's widow in the bargain.

Friends, it is a hateful road. All trackless waste and brooding moor. Though summer, we ride huddled, for the wind cuts soul from body. I say to Banquo, is this not the devil's place? Suddenly a mist - we cannot see three arm lengths - and as sudden clear again.

I wish it were not.

A withered tree, pale as bone, hangs over a stagnant pool. And God forbid - on the surface of that pool, flames. My

eyes revolt against it, but true it is, the water burns.
At its edge three shapes - I can not call them women -
crouch, spinning wool, keening as they work.

(He sings a few bars of their wordless song)

Banquo grips my arm.

What are these,
So wither'd, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth?

I must give courage to the boy, though in truth I feel
none myself. No shame in that. Even our horses dare not
rear for fright.

Speak, if you can; what are you?

Was it my voice that rang so hollow? They give no answer.
We might be phantoms of the mist for all they note us. I
wish we were some other place. But our legs will not move
us.

One turns to us. What kind she might be I cannot tell. Her
face is lost within the shadow of her cowl.

All hail, Duncan.

Her voice is cloying sweet.

All hail, brave prince, thy shall be king hereafter.

I stand amazed that this is said of me. Proud too. Then
comes a sinful thought - what can I do to make it so?

See how these witches play on us? It needs no dark art to
tell me that future. I am King Malcolm's only blood. In
time the throne will come to me. Even so, when he takes me
by the hand and calls me Prince of Cumberland, which makes
me heir immediate to him, I think, what prophecy!

For this is brisk with custom. Our first kings were two
brothers, who each left a family line descended. The king
must come from each in turn. As Malcolm followed Kenneth,
so should my cousin follow Malcolm. Only then do I
inherit.