



Macbeth
by
William Shakespeare

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A Short Story for ESOL & Functional
Skills Learners



Scotland is at war and has just won a great battle. Macbeth, a general in the Scottish army, is the hero of the battle. On his way home afterwards, Macbeth and his friend meet three mysterious witches.



Somehow, the witches already know Macbeth's name. They tell him that he is going to be promoted. They also say that he will be given more money, land and power.



When they say “Macbeth – the future king”, Macbeth is confused. He doesn’t really believe the witches. Soon afterwards, Macbeth receives a message from Duncan, the king of Scotland.



King Duncan wants to reward Macbeth for his victory. He has decided to promote him. Duncan gives Macbeth more money, land and power.



This is exactly what the witches said would happen. So Macbeth wonders if it is also true that he will become king one day. Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth, soon hears about her husband's success and the witches' predictions.



She becomes excited about the idea of her husband becoming king. She wants to be the queen herself. But she's worried that Macbeth won't do anything to make it happen.



So she comes up with a plan to murder King Duncan. King Duncan is coming to stay at the Macbeths' castle that night. At first Macbeth doesn't like the idea.



But Lady Macbeth has a very powerful personality. She is very cold-blooded. She persuades him that murdering Duncan is the best thing to do.



She tells him that she will plan everything. That night, while King Duncan is sleeping, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth make his guards drunk. When the guards are asleep, Macbeth comes into Duncan's room and kills him with a knife.



Next morning, when the king's death is discovered, Macbeth kills the guards. He tells everyone that he did this because they killed the king. Duncan's son Malcolm is frightened that he might be killed too.



So Malcolm escapes to England to lie low and stay safe. With Duncan dead, and Malcolm away in England, Macbeth becomes King of Scotland. Lady Macbeth becomes Queen.



But Macbeth is worried that his friends might become his enemies. He thinks they might want to kill him so that they can become king. So he hires murderers to kill his friends and their families.



But now Macbeth starts imagining that he can see the ghost of his murdered friend. At dinner that night, the ghost appears to Macbeth. No one else can see it.



Macbeth behaves very strangely in front of all his guests. Macbeth goes to see the witches again. The witches make more predictions.



They tell him that he will be safe until a nearby forest comes to his castle. Macbeth is relieved. After all, forests obviously cannot move.



Lady Macbeth is tortured by the guilt of Duncan's murder. She has started sleepwalking. She thinks she can see blood on her hands.



She cannot get her hands clean. She finally goes mad and kills herself. In the meantime, King Duncan's son Malcolm has organised an army in England.



He wants to invade Scotland and punish Macbeth for killing his father.
Macbeth's other enemies join with him.
The army marches towards Scotland.



Macbeth waits for the English army at his castle. He is convinced the witches' predictions mean he's safe. But he's terrified when he hears the English army is using branches from the trees of the forest to protect themselves.



He realises what this means: the forest really is coming to his castle! Macbeth is no longer safe, and he is killed in the battle. With Macbeth dead, and his head cut off, Malcolm becomes the new king of Scotland.