

Macbeth: Act II

(A summary of the action)

Scene i: Banquo and his son, Fleance, are standing watch outside Macbeth's castle after the dinner party. Macbeth comes outside and Banquo compliments him on how well Duncan has enjoyed his stay there – he has even given Lady Macbeth a gift. Banquo says that he has had a dream about the witches and what they said, but Macbeth feigns to have not thought about it at all. He does ask Banquo to talk with him about it sometimes and to pledge loyalty to him if indeed the third prophesy comes true. Banquo goes in to bed. Macbeth then left alone outside sees a bloody dagger in the air and contemplates what it means.

Scene ii: Inside the castle, Lady Macbeth has drugged the servants, and Macbeth kills Duncan but is troubled by it. Lady Macbeth tells him to “wash his hands” of the evidence. Lady Macbeth then takes the daggers and wipes the blood on the sleeping guards. They hear knocking at the door of the castle and go to put on sleeping clothes so that they can look innocent.

Scene iii: The scene begins with the porter also hearing the knocking and mumbling about all the people he'd have to open the gate for if he had the job at the gates of hell instead of at Macbeth's castle. Macduff and Lennox (two more of Duncan's thanes) enter, wondering why people have slept so late. Macbeth enters, pretending that the knocking at the gate door has awakened him. He is greeted by Macduff and Lennox who say the king asked them to come and wake him up early. Macbeth leads them to Duncan's room where Macduff discovers the murder and calls out to all how horrible it is. Macbeth, on seeing Duncan, claims he'd rather had died before having to endure such a horror as knowing his king has been murdered. He then “in a fury” kills the ‘obviously’ guilty and still sleeping guards, and Macduff is a bit suspicious of this act of ‘passion.’ Both Malcolm and Donalbain (Duncan's sons) wonder why Macbeth is so passionate about their father's death also. Macbeth, Macduff, and Banquo all decide to meet and see what can be figured out about the crime. Lady Macbeth has fainted on hearing the news and is carried out; Malcolm and Donalbain decide to leave since they feel that their lives are probably also in danger.

Scene iv: Ross (yet another thane) and an old man enter. The old man says he's never seen so many strange things in nature before: The sun itself is covered over and it is dark even though it is daytime; and tame horses have all gone mad and are eating each other. Macduff enters and Ross asks who has killed the king. Macduff answers “Those who Macbeth has killed” meaning the guards and that probably since the sons have run off, they were behind the whole thing. Macbeth has been named successor to the throne and is off to scone to be crowned king. Macduff has decided to go to his own home.

Questions:

1. What does Macbeth think the dagger means?
2. What does Macbeth think the bell he hears means? Before he goes inside, what does he say at the end of the scene? How is this like/unlike his soliloquy in Act I?
3. Why doesn't Lady Macbeth kill Duncan herself?
4. What couldn't Macbeth say when Duncan's sons cry out in their sleep? Why does it bother him so much?
5. Why is “murdering sleep” such a bad thing to do? List all the things that Macbeth says that sleep normally does for us – explain each.
6. What does Macbeth fear about his bloody hands? What Biblical allusion is indicated by Lady Macbeth's response? What does this tell you about each of them as characters?
7. Give further evidence of Macbeth's regret for killing the king.
8. Why do we have comic relief with the porter?
9. Why does Lady Macbeth faint?
10. What happened during the night out in the regions around the castle? (More than what the old man gives us and that I recounted for you in the summary!) Why is this important?!!!!!!