

Malcolm calls  
macbeth and lady  
macbeth "this dead  
butcher and his fiend-  
like quee...



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However Malcolm has been out of Scotland in England, only hearing from people in Scotland what is going on so doesn't really know for himself. The audience see what he doesn't, mainly due to Lady Macbeth's soliloquies and the things she says that other characters don't hear. The audience have seen more of Lady Macbeth's human side. In Act I, Scene v Lady Macbeth is reading a letter sent to her by Macbeth after he had met the witches. This is a device to show the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's mind immediately looks forward to the fulfilment of the witches' prophecy but she feels that Macbeth is too mild to seize the throne.

A message arrives with the news that Duncan plans to spend the night in the Castle and, by the time her husband enters, Lady Macbeth has already prepared her mind for the murder of Duncan, Macbeth wavers but Lady Macbeth's resolution is absolute. Lady Macbeth immediately understands the full implications of her husband's letter and her response is direct and uncompromising; her husband must be what he has been promised. Lady Macbeth appears in this scene as a ruthless, totally committed woman whose every effort is to strive for the greater glory of her husband.

Macbeth's tendency to speculate and think round problems is seen by his wife as a crucial weakness and she doesn't think he would be ruthless to do what is necessary: 'Yet do I fear thy nature, It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness' She understands that to get what they want he will have to be ruthless.

The hardness necessary for an assassination must come from her. There is an element in Lady Macbeth's attitude strongly like that of the Witches; she talks of pouring her spirits in Macbeth's ear like some potion to alter his

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character: 'Hie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear' She invokes the spirits of evil to 'defeminise' her, dehumanise her and make her cruel: 'Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here And fill me from the crown to the tow topfull, Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood' The chain of imperatives ('come', 'fill', etc) gives her speech a special urgency and determination. When Macbeth appears there is little trace of endearment from his wife. She sees him and forces him to see himself in terms of her plan for power. She addresses him as he had been addressed by the witches and her language is brief and determined: 'He that's coming must be provided for.'

'In this scene Lady Macbeth has more to say and is shown to be more dominant and controlling than Macbeth. King Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle with his sons and attendant lords. He admires the location of the castle. Lady Macbeth - without her husband - greets Duncan and they exchange pleasant courtesies.

Duncan takes her hand and is led into the castle. This scene uses dramatic irony because the air and castle appear delightful, but are in reality to be the site of murder. The emphasis on this scene is on peace, trust and courtesy. After the passion and vicious emotions of scene 5 we are presented with images of tranquillity.

Lady Macbeth appears as the perfect, sophisticated hostess: 'Your majesty loads our house. For those of old, And the late dignities heaped up to them, We rest your hermits.' However we remember her advice to her

husband: 'Look like the innocent flower But be the serpent under't. This is the recurring theme of the play.

She is lulling them into a false sense of security and safety showing how she is cunning and crafty. In Act I, scene vii Macbeth has slipped out of the supper-room and is having second thoughts on the plan to murder Duncan. He is aware of the seriousness of his proposed crime against an innocent guest. When Lady Macbeth finds him, Macbeth has decided to cancel the plan but his wife persuades him to change his mind. They argue but she outlines her tactics and Macbeth agrees to it.

Macbeth's final words in scene v were ' We shall speak further'. His wavering is continued into this scene but when Lady Macbeth joins him she takes over and tells him what is to be done. She pressures him into doing it by going into the heart of what he values, being a man: 'When you durst do it, then you were a man.' She says he has to prove his manhood by acting decisively. Lady Macbeth does what she says she will do in Act I scene v: ' pour my spirits in thine ear'.

Macbeth argues but it is obvious Lady Macbeth is dominant, her strength of purpose and leadership are a remarkable contrast to Macbeth's performance at this stage. In the end he is reduced to the cowardly line: ' If we should fail?' Failing is not something Lady Macbeth even bothers to contemplate and she reassures him that nothing will go wrong: 'We fail? But screw your courage to the sticking-place, And we'll not fail.' Even though Macbeth is a strong warrior and Lady Macbeth is only a woman, she is the strong one in the relationship. She uses wit and knowledge of him to manipulate him.

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Showing she is cunning and devious. In Act II, scene ii Lady Macbeth has drugged Duncan's servants and now, stimulated by wine, she awaits the completion of the murder and the return of her husband. Macbeth enters, almost out of his mind, unable to distance himself from the scene in Duncan's room. He is rebuked by his wife who, seizing control of the situation, finds that she has to take the daggers back because Macbeth has removed them and is incapable of returning to the scene of his crime. A sound of knocking is heard and Macbeth is lead out by his wife to wash off the blood and change into his dressing-gown.

Lady Macbeth is clearly - despite some nervous apprehension - in control of herself and of her husband. Her mood is exultant and bold, and she boasts how she has drugged the guards. However there is a redeeming quality because she would have murdered Duncan herself, except his sleeping form reminded her of her father: 'Had he not resembled My father as he slept, I had done't.' This shows she is not all bad and does have tender feelings like a normal human. She also had to have alcohol before she did the deed, showing that Lady Macbeth might not be as bold as she seems and it could just be the alcohol that's making her so confident: 'That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold.

' When Macbeth appears the conversation between him and Lady Macbeth is short, jerky dialogue suggesting panic and nervousness: 'Macbeth: When? Lady Macbeth: Now. Macbeth: As I descended? Lady Macbeth: Ay. Macbeth: Hark, who lies i'th' second chamber? Lady Macbeth: Donaldbain. Macbeth: This is a sorry sight.' Lady Macbeth reacts towards Macbeth with scorn and

frustration ordering him to pull himself together and stop being so paranoid and childish. She is practical and controlling.

' Lady Macbeth: Consider it not so deeply Macbeth: But wherefore could not I pronounce ' Amen'? I had most need of blessing and ' Amen' Stuck in my throat. Lady Macbeth: These deeds must not be thought After these ways; so, it will make us mad.' Lady Macbeth planned the execution and it is her readiness of mind and strength of purpose that compensates for Macbeth's failure to act decisively once the murder is committed, for example, how she masterfully takes the daggers back. Ironically, Lady Macbeth imagines that washing one's hands will wash away guilt; however by the final act it is she, finally, who is unable to wash her hands clean. This scene is a clever dramatic device that is carried on until the end of the play.

Lady Macbeth's comment to Macbeth, ' Infirm of purpose!' comes back to haunt her, as he strengthens in evil resolve, whilst she becomes madly suicidal - anticipated in her dismissive comment ' so, it will make us mad'. In Act II, scene iii the knocking increases and the Porter, still drunk, organises himself to open the gate and, eventually, he lets Macduff and Lennox enter. Macbeth appears apparently wakened by the noise. When Macduff, who has gone to waken the King, returns with the news of his murder and raises the alarm, Macbeth and Lennox go to investigate.

Lady Macbeth enters followed by Banquo and, while the news is discussed, Macbeth relates how he killed the blood-covered servants in his fury. Lady Macbeth faints and in the ensuing confusion Malcolm and Donalbain decide to slip away because they fear for their lives. Banquo proposes a general

meeting to discuss the situation and the others agree. It can be argued that Macbeth's justification for killing the two guards becomes so colourful and rhetorical that he is in danger of being exposed through what might be 'overacting' his part.

Lady Macbeth's swoon, therefore, at this point conveniently distracts attention away from her husband and the question he poses. This shows how cunning Lady Macbeth is. On the other hand this could be a redeeming feature; that Lady Macbeth really is fainting. Either because of Macbeth killing the guards, something she didn't know he was going to do, or realising what she had done.

In Act III, scene ii Lady Macbeth realises that the satisfaction she and Macbeth had sought has not been achieved. She tries to enter into her husband's obsessive involvement while, at the same time, trying to reassure him and urge him to cheerfulness. Macbeth is tormented, his thoughts fixed on Banquo. He hints at black deeds to come but won't tell Lady Macbeth about them. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth feel similarly about the situation but are unable to share their thoughts with each other and, by now, Macbeth has detached himself from his reliance on his wife and pursues his own course.

In the encounters so far, Lady Macbeth has been dominant but now we see the situation changing. Macbeth is keeping to himself and brooding on the crimes committed, and on the crimes he intends to commit: 'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife! Thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance lives.' He is not sharing his thoughts with his 'dearest partner of greatness'

and so she herself is feeling isolated. For the first time we hear Lady Macbeth say 'What's to be done?'. She doesn't know of Macbeth's plans for Banquo and planning has passed from her hands to Macbeths. For Macbeth this proves a period in which he seems to grow stronger - 'Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill' - and seems to get used to doing evil; for Lady Macbeth it is the start of her disintegration - she will take control one more time, at the banquet, and then she will be overwhelmed by remorse for the evil she has helped unleash, and go mad.

Their roles are reversing. In act III, scene iv Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are welcoming the guests to the feast when one of the murderers arrives and tells Macbeth of the death of Banquo and the escape of Fleance. Macbeth turns back to the table and comments on Banquo's absence. Banquo's ghost enters and occupies Macbeth's place; he is visible only to Macbeth. Lady Macbeth tries to calm her husband and keep control of the situation, but after the ghost has gone and Macbeth seems to be recovering, suddenly, again on Macbeth's mentioning his name, Banquo's ghost reappears and Macbeth is helpless.

After the ghost has gone for the second time, Lady Macbeth brings the feast to a hurried end. Macbeth informs Lady Macbeth that he intends to visit the withes and press on with eliminating all opposition. This is the final appearance of a sane Lady Macbeth. Her self-control, loyalty to her husband, organising skill, apparent hard nature - all evident in this scene - are qualities she possesses and could be redeeming features. She tries to cover up for Macbeth and takes control when she tells the lords to go: 'I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse.

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Question enrage him. At once, good night. Stand not upon the order of your going, But go at once.' However the strain on Lady Macbeth is evident.

Although he himself has been terrified, Macbeth, by the end of the scene, seems casual in his attitude to what has happened. His comment, ' We are yet but young in deed' suggests that this mere problem will soon pass. She, however, has had to use all her resources and wit to contain the potential damage of exposure and seems to show more humanity and feeling than in the previous scenes. This part in the play is where Lady Macbeth could get the full enjoyment out of being the queen; she is on her throne, surrounded by subjects.

Yet this, through Macbeth's actions becomes a hollow and empty event, lacking any dignity or royal significance. Her mind then does begin to question the value of what it has accomplished. Macbeth no longer talks of ' we' - himself and his partner of greatness - but of himself alone: 'For mine own good All causes shall give away' This shows that the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are weaker and they are more detached. In Act V scene I a doctor and Lady Macbeth's lady-in-waiting are watching to see if Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep as her servant has reported to the doctor. She enters and begins to rub her hands as if struggling to clean them and before she departs she refers to the deaths of Duncan, Macduff's wife and Banquo.

The doctor confesses that he is incapable of dealing with such cases. This scene shows Lady Macbeth's carefully contrived mask has slipped. In her sleep-walking she reveals the guilts and anxieties by which she is tortured.

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Particularly she re-enacts the first murder scene when she took the initiative and organised a stumbling Macbeth: 'To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand' Now, alone, her loyalty to her husband remains intact; only once does she reproach him: 'No more o' that; you mar all with this starting'. The fact that after everything Lady Macbeth is still loyal to her husband is a redeeming quality.

Her behaviour is revealing and moving. She has given all and now her present is overwhelmed by the past. She is weaker than herself and the audience thought and has had a mental breakdown from guilt. As with all guilt, Lady Macbeth has an obsession with the past.

It was her who said, ' what's done is done', thus suggesting that it would no longer be of concern. Here, despite all her courage and ambition and strength of purpose, all that has been ' done' is not past, but present - and ever present - in her mind. She herself refers to her earlier declaration when she says, ' What's done cannot be undone'. Ironically the physical symptoms of her guilt include the forlorn hope of washing clean her hands. This links to her statement that ' a little water cleans us of this deed'.

Most of the play is written in blank verse but the appearance of Lady Macbeth in this scene is an exception. Before, and particularly in the first two acts, Lady Macbeth's speech had been blazing and fiery blank verse - the strong rhythms reflecting her strong grasp on reality, and her determination. Now she speaks in prose - choppy, abrupt and lurching from one incident to another. This represents her breakdown; the language is breaking down under the strain she is under. It is therefore not surprising that she commits

suicide - she can no longer hold it together and on death language disappears altogether.

Lady Macbeth is a controversial figure. She is seen by some as a woman of strong will who is ambitious for herself and who recognises her husband's strengths and weaknesses, and is ruthless enough to exploit them. They see her in her commitment to evil and in her realisation that getting the Crown has not brought her the happiness she had expected, and finally, as one who breaks down under the strain. Others see her as a woman ambitious for her husband whom she loves. She recognises the good in him, and feels that, without her, he will never win the Crown.

She allies herself with the powers of darkness for his sake, but here she breaks down under the strain of the murder of Duncan and the alienation of her husband. One of the main redeeming qualities of Lady Macbeth is her love, loyalty and support to her husband. She does have personal attributes, for example she is resourceful, brave, quick thinking and focused. She may be emotionally disturbed and unbalanced due to loss of a child which could have pushed her to act like she did. Although she seems evil and callous at the beginning, we see her break down and struggle with her conscience later on in the play, showing she is not all bad.