

## **MACBETH, Abridged**

By Lee Karvonen

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### **ESTABLISHING THE RHYTHM**

To find the proper rhythm for this piece, first read-aloud and clap through the sections as you go. Each underlined word or word part falls directly on a beat. As you read, clap on each underlined word, keeping the rhythm steady. Be careful not to read too fast!

This is a rehearsal technique and readers will not clap throughout these sections during performance. After you have established the beat, it is time to start interpreting, experimenting, and having fun with the words by varying tempo, volume, inflection, and expression. Be careful not to allow the development of a "sing-song" delivery while rehearsing and performing this script.

### **STAGING**

This script may be staged as either a Readers Theater Reading or as a Traditional Play: If you are staging it as RT, hang signs around each characters neck telling the audience the name of that character. (MACBETH, LADY MACBETH, BANQUO, DUNCAN, etc.). Since most RT productions do not involve much stage movement, ask some of the characters who have smaller parts to hold up large signs at the proper moments to inform the audience which stage movements are happening at the time. (ASIDE, WITCHES DISAPPEAR, ENTER ROSS AND LENNOX, TO BANQUO, EXITS, MORE KNOCKING, TO DONALBAIN, etc.).

If you are staging the piece as Traditional Theater, simply block your actors as you normally would, following the stage directions in the script.

**23 CHARACTERS:** MACBETH, LADY MACBETH, BANQUO, DUNCAN, MACDUFF, LADY MACDUFF, 3 WITCHES, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, ROSS, LENNOX, SETON, GENTLEWOMAN, DOCTOR, SOLDIER, PORTER, 2 MURDERERS, 3 APPARITIONS.

## SCENE ONE

1 WITCH: WHEN SHALL WE THREE MEET AGAIN?  
IN THUNDER, LIGHTNING, OR IN RAIN?

2 WITCH: WHEN THE HURLYBURLY'S DONE,  
WHEN THE BATTLE'S LOST AND WON.

3 WITCH: THAT'LL BE SOON, SO LET'S GET CRACKIN'  
WE MEET MACBETH OUT IN THE BRACKEN.

1 WITCH: HEY, SISTER WEIRD, DON'T YOU MEAN HEATH?

3 WITCH: NO, STUPID, THE HEATH'S WHAT'S DOWN BENEATH!

2 WITCH: ANYWAY, LET'S HIT IT, GIRLS  
IT'S TIME TO CAST OUR SWINE BEFORE PEARLS.

1 WITCH: IT'S TIME WE GO AND STRIKE HIM DUMB.  
LOOK OUT, MACBETH, HERE WE COME!

## SCENE TWO

DUNCAN: WHAT FELLOW IS THIS, WHO'S WOUNDED SO BAD?

SOLDIER: I'M A SURVIVOR, AND, BOY, AM I GLAD!

DUNCAN: TELL US WHAT HAPPENED, AND TELL IT RIGHT QUICK,  
FOR, I FEAR, IN A MOMENT YOU MAY BE TOO SICK.

SOLDIER: MACDONWALD THE REBEL ATTACKED US IN FORCE,  
BUT BANQUO AND MACBETH WERE TOO STRONG, OF  
COURSE.  
MACBETH SWUNG HIS SWORD AND HE SWUNG FROM THE  
HIPS  
AND MACDONWALD WAS SPLIT FROM HIS GUT TO HIS  
LIPS.

DUNCAN: WHAT A GUY IS MACBETH! HERO, LEADER OF MEN!  
I'LL REMEMBER TO THANK HIM, AGAIN AND AGAIN!

SOLDIER: THEN THE NORWEGIAN KING BROUGHT A WHOLE NEW ASSAULT.  
IF MACBETH HAD THEN RUN, YOU COULD NOT GIVE HIM FAULT.  
BUT HE SWUNG EVEN HARDER, AND BANQUO DID TOO,  
AND THEY SLASHED BLOOD AND GUTS THROUGH THE NORWEGIAN CREW.  
THEN CAWDOR, THE TRAITOR, BEGAN FRESH ATTACK  
BUT NOT EVEN HE COULD MAKE MACBETH GO BACK.  
MACBETH, YES, AND BANQUO, FOUGHT AND WOULD NOT BEND,  
AND THE VICTORY WAS OURS, NOW IT'S OVER, THE END!

DUNCAN: GET DOCTORS FOR THIS MAN, HE'S BRAVE AND HE'S HURT,  
BUT FROM ALL HE HAS TOLD US, CAWDOR IS DIRT!  
GO MEET WITH OUR GENERALS, AND BID THEM COME HERE,  
CALL MACBETH BY CAWDOR; THAT WILL GIVE HIM CHEER

### SCENE THREE

MACBETH: HEY, BANQUO, DO YOU DIG THIS SCENE?  
IT'S THE WEIRDEST WEATHER THAT I'VE EVER SEEN!

BANQUO: I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU GET YOUR HAIR IN A TIZ,  
THIS IS THE WEATHER! IT IS WHAT IT IS!  
HEY, CHECK THIS OUT! LOOK THERE UP AHEAD.  
IT COULD BE THREE OLD MEN WHO SHOULD BE DEAD.  
AND YET, DESPITE YOUR GREY BEARDS AND ALL  
YOU COULD BE WOMEN, AND NOT MEN, Y'ALL.

1 WITCH: ALL HAIL, MACBETH! THANE OF GLAMIS IS HE!

2 WITCH: ALL HAIL, MACBETH! THANE OF CAWDOR YOU BE!

3 WITCH: ALL HAIL, MACBETH! SCOTLAND'S KING, QUITE SOON!

BANQUO: HOW ABOUT ME? DON'T I GET A HAIL TOO?

1 WITCH: HAIL TO BANQUO, LESSER, BUT REALLY GREATER!

2 WITCH: NOT SO HAPPY, BUT MUCH HAPPIER MUCH LATER!

3 WITCH: YOU WILL SIRE KINGS, BUT NOT BE ONE YOURSELF!

BANQUO: YOU MEAN OLD MACKIE HERE GETS PUT ON THE SHELF?

(Witches disappear.)

MACBETH: THEY TURNED INTO VAPOUR! WERE THEY REALLY HERE?

BANQUO: THE PREDICTIONS THEY MADE WERE AWFULLY CLEAR.  
OR ARE WE GONE CRAZY AND JUST SEEING THINGS?

MACBETH: AND HEARING THEM TOO. WHAT PROMISE THEY BRING!

(Enter Ross and Lennox.)

ROSS: HEY, MACBETH, I MEAN, CAWDOR! WHAT'S HAPPENIN'  
DUDE?

MACBETH: YOU JUST CALLED ME CAWDOR; DON'T MEAN TO BE  
RUDE,  
BUT CAWDOR'S ALIVE, SO I CAN'T BE THAT THANE.

ROSS: HE IS GOING TO DIE, SO I'LL SAY IT AGAIN.  
YOU'RE CAWDOR, MACBETH, IT'S THE KING'S OWN  
PROMOTION  
YOU GET A REWARD FOR YOUR TIMELY DEVOTION.

MACBETH: (aside) CAWDOR AND GLAMIS, THE GREATEST BEHIND  
ME.  
I SOON COULD BE KING. JUST THINK! YES, I COULD BE!

(To Banquo)

WHAT DO YOU THINK? YOUR KIDS SHALL BE KINGS!

BANQUO: MACBETH, IT'S NEAR TREASON TO SPEAK OF SUCH  
THINGS!  
BUT REMEMBER THE CREATURES OF DARKNESS DO TELL  
A FEW TRUTHS TO WIN US, THEN SEND US TO HELL.  
I WOULD BE WARY OF THINKING IT'S SET,  
SO, I'LL JUST BIDE MY TIME AND I WON'T TAKE THAT  
BET.

MACBETH: (aside) THINGS ARE LOOKING SO GOOD, IT WOULD SO CRAPPY  
TO DENY I'LL BE KING. OH, I'D BE SO HAPPY!  
BUT LIKE BANQUO HAS SAID, WHY NOT JUST PLAY ALONG  
AND I MAY BE SCOTLAND'S NEW KING BEFORE LONG!

## SCENE FOUR

DUNCAN: MACBETH, MY GREAT FRIEND, THIS IS JUST THE LEAST,  
I'M INVITING US TO YOUR PLACE TO HAVE A GREAT FEAST.  
IT'S, OF COURSE, IN YOUR HONOUR. YOU ARE  
SCOTLAND'S BRAVE  
FOR YOU ARE THE CHIEF REASON SCOTLAND IS SAVED.

MACBETH: YOU DO ME MUCH HONOUR, MORE THAN I DESERVE  
FOR IT IS MY HONOUR SIMPLY TO SERVE.  
I'LL GO ON AHEAD TO PREPARE FOR YOUR COMING.  
WE'LL CLEAN UP THE PLACE SO YOU WON'T THINK YOU'RE SLUMMING.

## SCENE FIVE

LADY MAC: HE SENT ME A LETTER, MY HUSBAND, MY DEAR,  
THAT TELLS ME PREDICTIONS THAT I LIKE TO HEAR.  
THESE WITCHES ARE CLEVER, FOR CAWDOR THEY KNEW  
AND THEY ALSO TOLD HIM HE WOULD BE KING TOO.  
BUT HE'S SUCH A NICE GUY, HE MAYBE WOULD WAIT  
AND NOT HELP OLD DUNCAN TOWARD HIS NEW FATE.  
I HAVE TO CONVINCE HIM, TO HELP HIM TO KICK,  
SO HE'LL CLAIM THE CROWN WITH JUST ONE MORE TRICK.

PORTER: MADAM, YOUR HUSBAND HAS SENT ME TO TELL  
IN OUR CASTLE TONIGHT - THE KING, HE WILL DWELL.

LADY MAC: AHA! IT IS WORKING! THE WITCHES WERE RIGHT!  
DUNCAN WILL DIE IN OUR CASTLE TONIGHT!  
JUST MAKE ME AS EVIL AS EVIL CAN BE.  
MAKE ME JUST LIKE A MAN! NO COMPASSION FROM ME!  
MAKE THE NIGHT JUST AS DARK AND AS SMOKY AS HELL,

SO NO ONE CAN SEE ME KILL DUNCAN. THAT'S SWELL!  
HEY, MACKIE! IT'S FABULOUS! DUNCAN COMES HERE!  
WE BARELY WILL HAVE TO RAISE FINGERS, MY DEAR!

MACBETH: NOW, HOLD IT A MINUTE. THE KING IS OUR GUEST.  
HIS VISIT'S AN HONOUR AND WE'LL DO OUR BEST  
TO HONOUR HIS PRESENCE AND TREAT HIM WITH CARE  
TO DO HIM SOME HARM, I WOULD NOT EVEN DARE!

LADY MAC: HEY, MACKIE, HAVE COURAGE, TWO THIRDS ARE ALL  
DONE  
AND WE'RE ALMOST HOMEFREE, AND THEN WE'LL HAVE  
WON!

MACBETH: WE'LL SPEAK OF THIS LATER. NOW, HERE COMES THE  
KING.

LADY MAC:(Aside) AND THIS IS THE NIGHT THAT HIS DEATH KNELL  
SHALL RING!

## SCENE SIX

MACBETH: IF I WERE TO KILL HIM, THEN I'D BURN IN HELL!  
BUT IF I MOVE QUICKLY, THEN ALL MIGHT BE WELL.  
FOR IF THIS ONE KILLING COULD JUST BE THE END  
I'D NOT KILL ANOTHER, BE EVERY MAN'S FRIEND.  
BUT IF I KILL THE KING THEN SOMEONE MIGHT KILL ME  
FOR I'VE SHOWN THE EXAMPLE; I'VE MADE HISTORY.  
AND HE'S SUCH A NICE GUY AND I AM HIS FRIEND,  
HIS FRIEND AND RELATION, SO HOW COULD I SPEND  
HIS DEAR BLOOD IN THIS FASHION? AN OGRE AM I,  
FOR IT'S JUST MY AMBITION THAT WANTS HIM TO DIE.

LADY MAC: DUNCAN HAS ASKED FOR YOU. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

MACBETH: I'VE BEEN THINKING THIS OVER. TO KILL HIM IS MEAN.

LADY MAC: YOU'RE A MOUSE, NOT A MAN, AND YOU MAKE ME  
ASHAMED  
KILL AND BE KING! YOU WILL NOT BE BLAMED!  
WHERE IS THE COURAGE YOU SHOWED IN THE FIELD?

BY NOW DUNCAN'S FATE SHOULD MOST SURELY BE  
SEALED!  
IF I BROKE MY WORD, AS YOU HAVE DONE TO ME,  
I WOULD PICK UP MY CHILD AND SMASH IT, YOU SEE?

MACBETH: BUT WHAT IF WE FAIL?

LADY MAC: BUT WE WON'T, DON'T YOU SEE!  
HAVE COURAGE AND ALL COMES TO YOU AND TO ME!  
WITH DUNCAN ASLEEP AND HIS CHAMBERLAINS  
DRUGGED  
IT'S EASY TO SNEAK IN AND MAKE SURE HE'S MUGGED.  
WE'LL STAB HIM WITH DAGGERS, WE'LL STEAL FROM THE  
GUARDS  
WE'LL FRAME THEM! SO FAILURE IS NOT IN THE CARDS!

MACBETH: BRING FORTH MEN-CHILDREN ONLY, BECAUSE *YOU* HAVE  
GUTS  
WE WILL DRAIN DUNCAN'S LIFE WITH A SERIES OF CUTS,  
THEN WE'LL BLOODY HIS GUARDS, AND RETIRE TO BED,  
AND WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE DISCOVERS HE'S DEAD.

## SCENE SEVEN

BANQUO: THE CLOUDS HIDE THE MOON AND MY THOUGHTS  
TROUBLE ME  
I WISH I COULD SLEEP, BUT IT'S CURSES I SEE.

MACBETH: BANQUO, THAT YOU? IT'S YOUR BUDDY, MACBETH  
I JUST CAME OUT HERE TO CATCH ME A BREATH.

BANQUO: I DREAMED OF THE WITCHES LAST NIGHT, ONCE AGAIN

MACBETH: DID YOU? I DIDN'T. THEY GIVE ME A PAIN.  
BUT I THINK WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE  
SAID.

BANQUO: YOU'RE RIGHT. I'LL SLEEP EASIER NOW IN MY BED

(Exits)