**Macbeth Act III Summary**

Directions: Use this summary to complete the Guided Notes for Act III of *Macbeth*.

**Summary: Act 3, scene 1**

In the royal palace at Forres, Banquo paces and thinks about the coronation of [Macbeth](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/character/macbeth/) and the prophecies of the weird sisters. The witches foretold that Macbeth would be king and that Banquo’s line would eventually sit on the throne. If the first prophecy came true, Banquo thinks, feeling the stirring of ambition, why not the second? Macbeth enters, attired as king. He is followed by [Lady Macbeth](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/character/lady-macbeth/), now his queen, and the court. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth ask Banquo to attend the feast they will host that night. Banquo accepts their invitation and says that he plans to go for a ride on his horse for the afternoon. Macbeth mentions that they should discuss the problem of Malcolm and Donalbain. The brothers have fled from Scotland and may be plotting against his crown.

Banquo departs, and Macbeth dismisses his court. He is left alone in the hall with a single servant, to whom he speaks about some men who have come to see him. Macbeth asks if the men are still waiting and orders that they be fetched. Once the servant has gone, Macbeth begins a soliloquy. He muses on the subject of Banquo, reflecting that his old friend is the only man in Scotland whom he fears. He notes that if the witches’ prophecy is true, his will be a “fruitless crown,” by which he means that he will not have an heir (3.1.62). The murder of Duncan, which weighs so heavily on his conscience, may have simply cleared the way for Banquo’s sons to overthrow Macbeth’s own family.

The servant reenters with Macbeth’s two visitors. Macbeth reminds the two men, who are murderers he has hired, of a conversation he had with them the day before, in which he chronicled the wrongs Banquo had done them in the past. He asks if they are angry and manly enough to take revenge on Banquo. They reply that they are, and Macbeth accepts their promise that they will murder his former friend. Macbeth reminds the murderers that Fleance must be killed along with his father and tells them to wait within the castle for his command.

**Summary: Act 3, scene 2**

Elsewhere in the castle, Lady Macbeth expresses despair and sends a servant to fetch her husband. Macbeth enters and tells his wife that he too is discontented, saying that his mind is “full of scorpions” (3.2.37). He feels that the business that they began by killing Duncan is not yet complete because there are still threats to the throne that must be eliminated. Macbeth tells his wife that he has planned “a deed of dreadful note” for Banquo and Fleance and urges her to be jovial and kind to Banquo during the evening’s feast, in order to lure their next victim into a false sense of security (3.2.45)

**Summary: Act 3, scene 3**

It is dusk, and the two murderers, now joined by a third, linger in a wooded park outside the palace. Banquo and Fleance approach on their horses and dismount. They light a torch, and the murderers set upon them. The murderers kill Banquo, who dies urging his son to flee and to avenge his death. One of the murderers extinguishes the torch, and in the darkness Fleance escapes. The murderers leave with Banquo’s body to find Macbeth and tell him what has happened.

#### Summary: Act 3, scene 4

Onstage stands a table heaped with a feast. [Macbeth](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/character/macbeth/) and [Lady Macbeth](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/character/lady-macbeth/) enter as king and queen, followed by their court, whom they bid welcome. As Macbeth walks among the company, the first murderer appears at the doorway. Macbeth speaks to him for a moment, learning that Banquo is dead and that Fleance has escaped. The news of Fleance’s escape angers Macbeth—if only Fleance had died, he muses, his throne would have been secure. Instead, “the worm that’s fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed” (3.4.28–29).

Returning to his guests, Macbeth goes to sit at the head of the royal table but finds Banquo’s ghost sitting in his chair. Horror-struck, Macbeth speaks to the ghost, which is invisible to the rest of the company. Lady Macbeth makes excuses for her husband, saying that he occasionally has such “visions” and that the guests should simply ignore his behavior. Then she speaks to Macbeth, questioning his manhood and urging him to snap out of his trance. The ghost disappears, and Macbeth recovers, telling his company: “I have a strange infirmity which is nothing / To those that know me” (3.4.85–86). As he offers a toast to company, however, Banquo’s specter reappears and shocks Macbeth into further reckless outbursts. Continuing to make excuses for her husband, Lady Macbeth sends the alarmed guests out of the room as the ghost vanishes again.

Macbeth mutters that “blood will have blood” and tells Lady Macbeth that he has heard from a servant-spy that Macduff intends to keep away from court, behavior that verges on treason (3.4.121). He says that he will visit the witches again tomorrow in the hopes of learning more about the future and about who may be plotting against him. He resolves to do whatever is necessary to keep his throne, declaring: “I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.135–137). Lady Macbeth says that he needs sleep, and they retire to their bed.

#### Summary: Act 3, scene 5

Upon the stormy heath, the witches meet with Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Hecate scolds them for meddling in the business of Macbeth without consulting her but declares that she will take over as supervisor of the mischief. She says that when Macbeth comes the next day, as they know he will, they must summon visions and spirits whose messages will fill him with a false sense of security and “draw him on to his confusion” (3.5.29). Hecate vanishes, and the witches go to prepare their charms.

#### Summary: Act 3, scene 6

That night, somewhere in Scotland, Lennox walks with another lord, discussing what has happened to the kingdom. Banquo’s murder has been officially blamed on Fleance, who has fled. Nevertheless, both men suspect Macbeth, whom they call a “tyrant,” in the murders of Duncan and Banquo. The lord tells Lennox that Macduff has gone to England, where he will join Malcolm in pleading with England’s King Edward for aid. News of these plots has prompted Macbeth to prepare for war. Lennox and the lord express their hope that Malcolm and Macduff will be successful and that their actions can save Scotland from Macbeth.