

# Macbeth

*The extract below is from Murder at Dunsinane, a short story contained in the book The Enchanted Island by Ian Serraillier. Murder at Dunsinane is a retelling of Shakespeare's tragic play Macbeth.*

It was a day of mingled storm and sunshine, with dark scudding clouds and torrential bursts of rain. Two Scottish generals, Macbeth and Banquo, were riding home from battle to report a great victory. They had just defeated a rebel army that had risen up against King Duncan of Scotland, whose kingdom in those ancient times was separate from England. Macbeth in particular had shown amazing courage. Brandishing his sword, he had carved his way through the enemy ranks till he stood face to face with their leader. Then with one tremendous blow he had cut his body in two.

As the two generals were galloping over a wind-lashed desolate moor, suddenly there was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. Three weird and ragged figures – like creatures from another world – sprang in front of the horses. They had withered skins, wild glittering eyes, and except for their beards were more like women than men.

‘Who are you and what do you want with us?’ cried Banquo, reining in his horse.

While the rain streamed down their faces, they pressed their choppy forefingers against their skinny lips, to show that they would answer no questions. They were witches.

‘Speak if you can. What are you?’ cried Macbeth, as his horse champed and snorted, its hot flanks streaming.

‘All hail Macbeth, Thane of Glamis!’ cried the first witch.

‘All hail Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor!’ cried the second witch.

Macbeth was startled. How could he hold that title when the Thane of Cawdor was still alive?

‘All hail Macbeth!’ cried the third witch. ‘Soon you will be King of Scotland.’

Stirred to his very soul, Macbeth lifted his hand to hide his eyes. Strange thoughts that he did not wholly understand had begun to stir in his brain. Who were these creatures and what did they intend? Were they bringing him some message from the powers beyond life? If so, was it good or evil?