Macbeth: Act I, Scene IV

**The Scene**

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| *Forres. The palace.       Flourish. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, and Attendants*   **DUNCAN**      Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not                          Those in commission yet return'd?   **MALCOLM**     My liege,                          They are not yet come back. But I have spoke                          With one that saw him die: who did report                          That very frankly he confess'd his treasons,                          Implored your highness' pardon and set forth                          A deep repentance: nothing in his life                          Became him like the leaving it; he died                          As one that had been studied in his death                          To throw away the dearest thing he owed,                          As 'twere a careless trifle.   **DUNCAN**          There's no art                          To find the mind's construction in the face:                          He was a gentleman on whom I built                          An absolute trust.       *Enter MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, and ANGUS*                          O worthiest cousin!                          The sin of my ingratitude even now                          Was heavy on me: thou art so far before                          That swiftest wing of recompense is slow                          To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,                          That the proportion both of thanks and payment                          Might have been mine! only I have left to say,                          More is thy due than more than all can pay.   **MACBETH**       The service and the loyalty I owe,                          In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part                          Is to receive our duties; and our duties                          Are to your throne and state children and servants,                          Which do but what they should, by doing every thing                          Safe toward your love and honour.   **DUNCAN**          Welcome hither:                          I have begun to plant thee, and will labour                          To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,                          That hast no less deserved, nor must be known                          No less to have done so, let me enfold thee                          And hold thee to my heart.   **BANQUO**         There it I grow,                         The harvest is your own.   **DUNCAN**          My plenteous joys,                          Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves                          In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,                          And you whose places are the nearest, know                          We will establish our estate upon                          Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter                          The Prince of Cumberland; which honour must                          Not unaccompanied invest him only,                          But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine                          On all deservers. From hence to Inverness,                          And bind us further to you.   **MACBETH**       The rest is labour, which is not used for you:                          I'll be myself the harbinger and make joyful                          The hearing of my wife with your approach;                          So humbly take my leave.   **DUNCAN**          My worthy Cawdor!   **MACBETH**      *[Aside]* The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step                          On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,                          For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;                          Let not light see my black and deep desires:                          The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,                          Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.       *Exit*  **DUNCAN**          True, worthy Banquo; he is full so valiant,                          And in his commendations I am fed;                          It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,                          Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:                          It is a peerless kinsman.   *Flourish. Exeunt* |

**Plot Developments**

Duncan is told about the death of the Thane of Cawdor by Malcolm.  
            Duncan thanks Macbeth for his services to kind and country, stating that he wishes Macbeth hadn’t done so much for him, because now he feels that he will never be able to pay him back for his services. Macbeth says that by helping the king to win the war, he was only doing his duty, and that Duncan need not repay him. Despite this, Duncan does his best to show just how grateful he is to the two men. He states that Banquo is no less deserving than Macbeth, yet still treats him as Macbeth's inferior. Duncan also takes this moment as an opportunity to announce Malcolm's future kingship. This suggests that he is somewhat insensitive, stealing the limelight from his two most valued soldiers and passing it on to his own son.   
            Macbeth responds negatively to this insensitivity, as it has implications on the witches’ prophecies. As Duncan invites himself to stay at Macbeth’s castle at Inverness, Macbeth reveals his dark plans of murder and deception in an aside. He is considering taking action to ensure that the prophecies come true.

**Character Developments**

Duncan

In this scene, Duncan is yet again shown to be a flawed king and a poor judge of character. He had full trust in the previous Thane of Cawdor, never expecting him to rebel, and still calls him a gentleman. The Thane then rebelled against him, demolishing his trust. This reflects Duncan’s poor judge of character for having put his trust in the rebel in the first place, and on his poor kingship, having given the Thane reason to rebel against him.

**“***There’s no art*

*To find the mind’s construction in the face:*

*He was a gentleman on whom I built*

*An absolute trust.***”**

We also see that Duncan can be insensitive at times: he greatly praises the services of Macbeth and Banquo, stating that he will forever be in their debt. Despite saying that Banquo is no less deserving than Macbeth, he still treats Banquo differently, as though he is inferior. Macbeth is honoured as Thane of Cawdor, while all Banquo receives is empty praise.

**“***Noble Banquo,*

*Thou hast no less deserved, nor must be known*

*No less to have done so, let me infold thee*

*And hold thee to my heart.***”**

Duncan again shows his insensitivity when, in the middle of praising his two most honoured soldiers, he suddenly steals their limelight and formally makes his son Malcolm successor to the throne. This poorly-timed announcement could have been made at any time, yet Duncan foolishly chooses to make it at an important moment which should have honoured Macbeth.

**“***Sons, Kinsmen, Thanes,*

*And you whose places are nearest, know*

*We will establish our estate upon*

*Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter*

*The Prince of Cumberland: which honour must*

*Not unaccompanied invest him only,*

*But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine*

*On all deservers.***”**

Finally, Duncan appears to be an overly trusting character. His previous Thane of Cawdor has just been killed for rebelling, and already he is putting absolute trust in his new Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth. Only time will tell how worthy this new Thane will be.

**“***My worthy Cawdor!***”**

Macbeth

A darker side of Macbeth is revealed to us in this scene. When Duncan announces that Malcolm is to become king, Macbeth realises that this will affect the witches’ prophecies of his kingship. He has to decide between giving up on his aim of becoming king and doing something which will ensure his future kingship. We may presume that he chose the second option, as he then starts talking about practising the art of deception. The loyal Macbeth shown to us in earlier scenes is all but dead.

**“***The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step*

*On which I must fall down, or else o’er-leap,*

*For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!*

*Let not light see my black and deep desires:*

*The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be*

*Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.***”**

**Thematic Development**

False Appearance

False appearance and deception play a major role in this scene. Duncan had absolute trust in the previous Thane of Cawdor, and seemed to have no reason to doubt his loyalty. However, despite the Thane’s loyal exterior, the Thane rebelled against the king and was killed.

**“***There’s no art*

*To find the mind’s construction in the face:***”**

Macbeth is showing himself to the king as his loyal, trustworthy captain. However, like the previous Thane of Cawdor, his loyalty to the king is an act. It seems that Macbeth plans to steal Malcolm’s future kingship from him. However, he still acts loyal and honest, so the king foolishly trusts him enough to stay at his castle without fear of danger.

**“***The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be*

*Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see,***”**

Ambition

Macbeth exhibits unhealthy ambition in this scene. Because of the witches’ prophecies and Duncan’s announcement of Malcolm’s future kingship, he is more determined than ever to satisfy his dark desire for kingship. He talks about practicing the art of deception and turning a blind eye to what his hand is doing. Time will tell where this dangerous, unhealthy ambition gets him.

**“***Stars, hide your fires!*

*Let not light see my black and deep desires:***”**

Kingship

Duncan is a flawed king. He puts his trust in people too easily and carelessly, and is somewhat naïve in this respect. We cannot help but wonder if there is a good reason for the rebellions in the country at that time.

**“***He was a gentleman on whom I built*

*An absolute trust.***”**

It is announced in this scene that Malcolm is to become the next King of Scotland after his father. This insensitively-timed announcement highlights the theme in this scene.

**“***We will establish our estate upon*

*Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter*

*The Prince of Cumberland;***”**