**Macbeth Act 1 Scene 1 Summary**

Duncan, King of Scotland, was conferring with his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, at a fortress near Forres. Matters could not be worse. The rebels, led by the northern Thane, Macdonwald, had made an alliance with the Norwegian king and the two forces were preparing to roll across Scotland like a tidal wave.

Two sentries brought a limping, bleeding soldier to the King. The man clutched his torn side, resisting an overwhelming desire to pass into unconsciousness. It was clear that he had something important to tell the King.

‘What bloody man is this?’ said Duncan. ‘I can see he’s just come from the battlefield so he’ll be able to give us the latest news.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Malcolm. ‘This is the sergeant who struggled so valiantly to save me from captivity. Hello, brave friend. Tell the King how things stand.’

The man winced. His breathing was laboured but his eyes shone. ‘It was on a knife-edge,’ he said. ‘The armies were like two spent swimmers clinging together to prevent themselves from drowning. Then the merciless Macdonwald’ – the sergeant spat with disgust – ‘that most vile of men! – brought in some reinforcements from the western isles. After that fortune began smiling on him.’

Duncan and his sons exchanged glances. Lennox, a close ally of the King, was there too. Their faces expressed the seriousness of the situation.

‘But it was all in vain,’ continued the sergeant. He tried a smile and winced again. ‘Because brave Macbeth – how well he deserves that name! – disregarding his own safety, brandishing his sword, which smoked with hot blood, carved his way through the troops until he faced the cursed rebel. He didn’t stop – no handshakes or farewells – until he had unseamed him from the navel to the jaw and fixed his head on our battlements.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Duncan. ‘Valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!’

‘But it wasn’t over yet,’ said the sergeant. ‘Can you believe this, King of Scotland? No sooner had the western islanders taken to their heels than the Norwegian tried again. Armed with reinforcements he began a fresh assault.’

‘Didn’t that dismay our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?’ said the King.

The sergeant attempted a laugh. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘As much as sparrows dismay eagles or hares lions. If I’m completely honest I’d say they were like overworked guns, their barrels exploding, as they lay into the enemy.’ He slipped to the ground. ‘I’m weak, I need help.’

‘You’ve done well,’ said Duncan. He turned to an attendant. ‘Go, get him to a doctor.’

As the sentries carried the sergeant out another newcomer, even fresher from the battlefield, arrived.

‘It’s the worthy Thane of Ross!’ said Malcolm.

‘And in a hurry,’ said Lennox. ‘Bursting to tell us something.’

‘God save the King!’ said Ross.

‘Where have you come from, worthy Thane?’ said Duncan.

‘From Fife, great King,’ said Ross. ‘Where Norwegian banners have been flying freely. Norway himself, with the help of that most disloyal of traitors, the Thane of Cawdor, began a terrible assault. Until Macbeth, absolutely fearless, confronted him head on and, matching him point for point, blow for blow, ground him down and, to conclude -’ Ross grinned. ‘The victory fell on us.’

Duncan spun round and beamed at his council. ‘Great happiness!’ he said and clapped his hands.

‘So now,’ said Ross, ‘Sweno’s in disarray. ‘And we didn’t even allow him to bury his men until he had paid us ten thousand dollars.’

‘That Thane of Cawdor won’t have a chance of deceiving us again,’ said Duncan. He placed his hand on Ross’ shoulder. ‘Go and see to his immediate execution and with his former title greet Macbeth.’

‘I’ll take care of it,’ said Ross.

‘What he has lost the noble Macbeth has won,’ said Duncan.