

Hurly Burly

by Paul Mason

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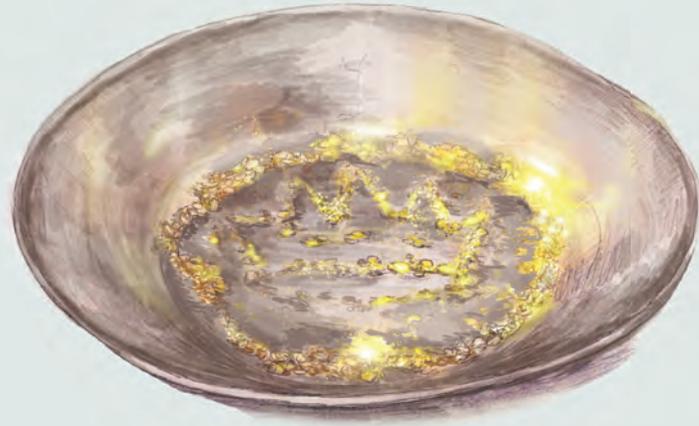
"As breath into the wind," gasps Macbeth. He swivels round, searching the trees, thinking for a moment that he has lost his reason.



No sooner does Macbeth stumble into the tiny camp – a miserable collection of canvas and wood, clinging to the bank of the creek – than Duncan rushes up, slipping and sliding in the mud. There is no hiding the nervous light in his eyes. “It’s finally happened, John. Come!”

Duncan leads him to the tent as if he is a schoolboy. He points a shaking finger at the pan resting on the table inside. A circle of yellow lines the bottom. A golden round.

“Colour,” Macbeth whispers. He stares at the pan, then back at Duncan. His heart knocks at his ribs.



“Months by this blasted creek,” says his brother. “Finally she pays out.”

Duncan continues to blather, but Macbeth isn’t paying attention. The creatures’ voices fill his head. *Proclaimer of gold. As rich as a king.* But Duncan was the one to find the gold. The claim is his. How then is he, John Macbeth, to become rich?

He feels Duncan shake his arm. “You’re not listening, brother. You must go into town and register my claim.”

“Me?” says Macbeth.

Duncan spits. “I’m not letting this place out of my sight.”

“All right, Duncan,” Macbeth says.

“As soon as you’re ready,” his brother coaxes. “It’s well it were done quickly.”

Macbeth realises he’s still carrying his load. He drops his shovel and removes his sodden hat. Duncan is right. If he travels light, he can reach town by nightfall. Macbeth turns and heads back into the pouring rain.

“Meet the warden and bring the certificate,” says Duncan. “Don’t worry – I’ll see you right,” he adds.

“I’ll be with you by midday,” says Macbeth.

“Absolute trust, brother.”



Macbeth pushes through the bush. Wind lashes the trees, branches creak and groan, but the tempest spurs him on. He wants to feel a roof over his head.

As he stumbles downhill toward the road, silhouettes once again pass among the trees and hover in the air – quicker than Macbeth can catch. Is it the creatures come again, or nothing at all? Macbeth calls into the murk. “Speak, I charge you!”

Through the rushing wind comes a whisper. *Be bloody, bold, and resolute.*

A black thought finds its way into Macbeth’s mind – a horrible, horrible imagining. *Bloody, bold, resolute.*

Duncan.

“What is it you do?” Macbeth demands. “Tell me, you unknown power!” But there is nothing. Macbeth blunders on and finds he has somehow reached the road.

Night has fallen when he makes it to town. At the warden's rooms, Macbeth is greeted by a locked door that rattles under his hand. The claim will have to wait till morning.

Finally he reaches his cottage. Sarah opens the door and throws her arms around her husband. "You come with news?" she asks.

"Great news," says Macbeth.

After a wash with hot water and a change of clothes, Macbeth tells it all again – more leisurely this time. The strange creatures in the bush. The prophetic greeting. How they spoke of gold. The talk of riches, and finally the golden round in Duncan's pan.

"I wanted to question them further, but they made themselves air into which they vanished," Macbeth finishes. "They promised greatness, Sarah."

Sarah covers her mouth as she listens. "The instruments of darkness tell us truths," she murmurs at last. In her eyes, Macbeth sees the stirring of black and deep desires.

"They spoke two truths," Macbeth admits.

"And what of the third?" asks Sarah. "As rich as a king."

Macbeth sops up the last of his dinner with his bread. "But the find is Duncan's."

Sarah pauses, then takes his hand. "Then Duncan is a step on which you must either fall down or leap over."

"Sarah!"

But Macbeth knows his wife says what he already imagines – a golden round, a king. Duncan alone stands in their way. He hears the dreadful mutter from the bush. *Bloody, bold, resolute*. Macbeth shakes it from his head. "Duncan said he'd do right by us."

"You're too full of the milk of human kindness."

"But I dare not, Sarah."

"Don't say 'I dare not', say 'I will'."

Macbeth closes his eyes. Duncan, his own brother! "Absolute trust," he hears him say. Macbeth wishes the awful hurly burly in his head would go away. Won't it leave him in peace? He is tired, so tired. Macbeth turns to his wife. His voice breaks as he speaks. "If we should fail?"

"We fail," says Sarah. She reaches over and rubs a smooth hand across his cheek. "But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail."

"Greatness was promised," Macbeth says weakly.

Sarah nods. "In the morning, I'll go to the warden and make the claim in your name. And you ... " Her voice drops away. She gets to her feet and begins to clear her husband's plate and cutlery from the table. She pauses for a moment, then leaves the bread knife behind. "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it, John."

"Oh, Sarah," he whispers, "so foul and fair a day I have not seen."



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Macbeth by William Shakespeare was written and first performed around 1606. The story follows the rise and downfall of Macbeth, a Scottish general in the army. Soon after the play begins, Macbeth returns from a victorious battle and meets three witches on the heath. They share with him three prophecies of the future. When their first prophecy comes true, Macbeth starts to believe the witches speak the truth. They have started him on a dangerous path towards their third prophecy: that he will be king. Blinded by a thirst for power and pushed on by his wife – the ambitious,

ruthless Lady Macbeth – Macbeth plots to kill King Duncan and take his crown.

Macbeth is a true tragedy: a dark tale of conspiracy, murder, and the supernatural. It serves as a warning of what can happen when people stop at nothing to get what they want. My story is inspired by *Macbeth* and its themes of greed and ambition. Although only loosely based on Shakespeare's play, I have borrowed some of its lines, images, and plot. The phrase "hurly burly" means confusion or chaos. It is both the storm in the bush and the hunger for gold filling John Macbeth's head.

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