

## The Downfall of Lady Macbeth

Macbeth is a play full of magic, mystery, and murder. The variety of plots, as well as the interesting characters, force the reader to pay full attention at all times. Unfortunately, one of these characters is a victim of her own imagination. Although Lady Macbeth adds much positive flavour to the play, her character is revealed through her aggressive attitude with her husband, her inhumane disregard for life, and her guilty conscience.

Lady Macbeth is very assertive when dealing with her husband's hesitations about murdering Duncan:

<sup>3</sup>O never shall sun that morrow see!  
Your face... is as a book where men  
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,  
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,  
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower  
But be the serpent under<sup>1</sup>t.<sup>2</sup>

This urging causes Macbeth to possess a black and deep desires<sup>1</sup>, which lead him to murder the king. She takes it upon herself to pressure him and therefore, her bold character is revealed. Macbeth's intentions would have been less serious if his wife was not more anxious than he was. She, more than her husband, is to blame for the death of King Duncan, due to her relentless pursuit of power and authority.

Lady Macbeth is a heartless fiend with an savage disregard for life. This is evident in the manner in which she downplays the murder of Duncan to her husband:

<sup>3</sup>A little water clears us of this deed;  
How easy is it, then! Your constancy  
Hath left you unattended...  
Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us,  
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost  
So poorly in your thoughts.<sup>2</sup>

She tries to make Macbeth believe that committing the murder was not a vicious deed and that washing their hands will wash away all the guilt. Macbeth exclaims that <sup>3</sup>all Neptune's ocean<sup>2</sup> will not wash the blood from his hands. Lady Macbeth appears at this point to be a ruthless killer working on behalf of the prince of darkness, which solidifies her character and gives the audience new insights to her psychological state.

The audience is lead to believe that Lady Macbeth will never feel any guilt concerning the murder, but her guilty conscience is displayed near the end of the play. She begins to sleepwalk and relive the murder in her mind:

<sup>3</sup>Out, damned spot! out, I say! One; two; why, then  
'Tis time to do<sup>1</sup>t. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord--fie!  
a soldier, and afeard?<sup>2</sup>

Lady Macbeth's character seems somewhat stable until this scene and is it now that we learn that she is mentally ill. The doctor and the Gentlewoman witness her exploits and they are the first people to discover that the murder of King Duncan was committed by Macbeth with the help of his wife. The guilt of the murder has become unbearable for her, to the point of taking her own life <sup>3</sup>by self and violent hands<sup>2</sup>. The characteristics of her personality become obvious with her death, leaving the audience free to form various opinions about her.

During the course of the play, we see the disintegration of Lady Macbeth's solid character, through her actions with her husband, her own opinions of first-degree murder, and finally watching her try to cope with obvious guilt. Her downfall is complete when she kills herself, appearing to be a case of severe mental anguish. Her tragedy is now one that is shared around the world by millions

of Shakespeare's faithful followers.