





THE KING AND THE MAGICAL FORTUNE-TELLERS

Three women have claimed they are the masterminds behind the murder of King Duncan, police said yesterday.

This comes as Scotland is still shaking from the death of its King a few months ago and the shock that he was killed by one of his most trusted generals, who then seized the throne.

The trio, who ran a fortune-telling business out of their herbal medicine shop, told police they had brewed a potion — with unusual ingredients such as toe of frog and eye of newt — to cast a spell on Macbeth, a decorated general.

They told him he would get a promotion, and eventually become the King.

Almost immediately, the first prediction came true: Macbeth was promoted to a higher rank in the army.

That's when he started believing he could become king, as did his wife, Lady Macbeth, who persuaded him to murder Duncan when he came to stay with them at their castle.

Interviews with castle staff, together with forensic evidence from autopsies and the crime scene, suggest that one of the pair, probably the wife, fed a sleeping potion to the King's guards. She told her husband: "Don't be such a coward. We will not fail."

As the King lay sleeping, Macbeth stabbed him. But he lost his cool after doing it, so Lady Macbeth took over, planting the knives on the guards' bodies to make it appear as though they had done it.

The next day, when the King was found dead, the Macbeths pretended to have been asleep the whole time. Macbeth said he had killed the guards before they could wake up to avenge the King's murder.

The King's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, fled the country, sensing their lives were in danger too. Because they ran away, it looked like they had plotted the murder. True to the fortune-tellers' predictions, Macbeth was named King.

But guilt started to eat away at the couple, and some people began to suspect their role in Duncan's death. Malcolm, Duncan's son, and Macduff, another general, began to plot to overthrow Macbeth. An army was gathered to fight him.

The three women say they then whispered more prophecies into the new King's ear, assuring him that he could not be defeated.

"Don't be afraid, Macbeth. You will not be defeated until the forest moves, and no man whom a woman gave birth to will ever have power over you," they told him.

What Macbeth did not know was that the army surrounding the castle had decided to camouflage itself using tree branches.

So as it closed in, the forest really did move. While his enemies stormed the palace, Macbeth was told that his wife had killed herself — the guilt from Duncan's murder had finally driven her mad.

Then, Macbeth was confronted by General Macduff. Macbeth still thought he could not be defeated and, according to witnesses, told the general: "I live a charmed life."

Unfortunately, Macduff revealed that he was special too: he had not been born in the usual way, but had been "cut from the womb" instead. He drove his sword into Macbeth's chest and killed him.

Malcolm has since been named the new King of Scotland, while the three women are still being interviewed by police psychologists, who believe they are mentally unstable. Legal experts say their confession, along with the evidence they have offered police — dried animal parts and handwritten "spells" — will not stand up in court.

BACKGROUND

Macbeth is a famous play by William Shakespeare, the great English playwright.

It is based on a real historical figure, King Macbeth, who reigned over Scotland during the 11th century. According to historians, he was a strong king, and Scotland enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity under his rule. He did not kill the previous king in his sleep, but rather defeated him in battle in AD 1040.

It is believed that Shakespeare wrote Macbeth in an effort to impress his patron, King James I of England.

At the time, the play attracted a great amount of public interest because it was about regicide (the killing of a king). This subject had been in the news because of an attempt on King James' own life — the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Conspirators had planned to blow up the parliament house with the king and his advisers inside.

Macbeth is a type of play known as a tragedy, which means it is a serious story with an unhappy ending, often involving the downfall of the main character.

FAB VOCAB

MASTERMINDS

People who plan and direct a complicated scheme

SEIZED THE THRONE

Took over the position of king

DECORATED GENERAL

A general who has won many commendations and awards

FORENSIC EVIDENCE

Proof of or clues to a crime, gathered using scientific techniques

AUTOPSIES

Medical examinations of dead bodies to find out how they died

LOST HIS COOL

Became nervous or upset

PROPHECIES

Predictions about the future

CAMOUFLAGE

To hide something by making it look like its surroundings

PSYCHOLOGISTS

People who study human thought and behaviour

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