Development

Becoming queen has not brought Lady Macbeth peace. Macbeth starts planning violence without her, while the banquet exposes the limits of her power to manage his public behaviour.

Journey through the act or stave

3.2: Privately admits that gaining their desire has brought no contentment.

3.2: Urges Macbeth to stop brooding and look cheerful before their guests.

3.2: Macbeth withholds the plan to murder Banquo.

3.4: Attempts to explain away his visions, attacks his manhood, then dismisses the guests.

1. “Naught’s had, all’s spent”

Lady Macbeth, 3.2

Method: Antithesis and compressed phrasing

They have gained the crown but lost peace. The balanced opposites make ambition’s reward seem empty rather than triumphant.

2. “What’s done is done”

Lady Macbeth, 3.2

Method: Repetition and apparent finality

She tries to close off the past. Her private dissatisfaction makes this spoken advice less secure than its firm wording suggests.

3. “Be bright and jovial”

Lady Macbeth, 3.2

Method: Imperatives and performance

She directs Macbeth’s outward appearance. Royal hospitality becomes an act they must maintain despite inner fear.

4. “What’s to be done?”

Lady Macbeth, 3.2

Method: Interrogative and changed power balance

The former planner now asks for information. Macbeth’s refusal to explain Banquo’s murder makes her exclusion visible.

5. “Are you a man?”

Lady Macbeth, 3.4

Method: Rhetorical question and gendered pressure

She repeats the earlier tactic of equating courage with masculinity, but it cannot control the fear made visible at the banquet.

6. “Stand not upon the order of your going”

Lady Macbeth, 3.4

Method: Negative imperative and disrupted ceremony

She abandons formal rank to end the gathering quickly. The collapse of the feast exposes disorder beneath the royal performance.

Connections to other characters

Macbeth: “Be innocent of the knowledge” (3.2) reverses their earlier planning partnership.

Banquo’s ghost: Macbeth reacts to a figure she cannot see; her explanations cannot repair the spectacle.

Themes: ambition’s failure, isolation, gender, guilt and appearance versus reality.

Develop your interpretation

Basic: she cannot make Macbeth behave normally.

Further: the contrast between private discontent and public ceremony reveals unstable power.

Advanced: her exclusion reduces her control without absolving her of responsibility for the original regicide.

Pair the evidence

“Leave all the rest to me” (1.5) ↔ “What’s to be done?” (3.2): confident direction gives way to a request for knowledge.

Context

A royal banquet should display unity and ordered hospitality. Its disruption makes private fear politically visible. She does not organise Banquo’s murder: Macbeth has already acted without confiding the plan.

Recall questions

Which quotation best shows the shift from planner to excluded partner?

Why does the failed banquet matter beyond the marriage?

Writing task

How does Shakespeare show the limits of Lady Macbeth’s authority in Act 3?