

Lady Macbeth



INTRODUCTION

- **Antagonist:** King Malcolm, Duncan, Malcolm mac Duncan
- **Point of View:** First person, from Gruadh's perspective

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUSAN KING

Susan Fraser King, born Susan Longhi and sometimes known as Susan King, was born in New York City where she spent her childhood and adolescence. She received a B.A. in art from the University of Maryland, as well as a M.A. in art history. Additionally, she began a Ph.D. in art history and medieval studies, which she did not complete. She published her first novel, *The Black Thorne's Rose*, in 1994 as Susan King, and has gone on to publish over twenty additional historical novels and historical romances.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lady Macbeth is based on the lives of the real historical figures of Macbeth (or Mac Bethad mac Findláich) and his wife, Lady Macbeth (or Gruoch). Macbeth was born around 1005, was the son of the mormaer of Moray, and became king in 1040 after defeating the sitting king, Duncan, in battle. He reigned for seventeen years, before he was killed by Malcolm Canmore (also Malcolm III, also Malcolm mac Duncan) in battle. Lady Macbeth was born between 1015 and 1018, and had at least one surviving son with her first husband, Gilcomgan, who she named Lulach.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Lady Macbeth's most obvious literary antecedent is William Shakespeare's famous play [Macbeth](#). Although the novel deals with the historical figures that the play is based on, and is not a reinvention of the play itself, it nonetheless uses quotes from the play as epigraphs, and often references specific famous lines. *Lady Macbeth* exists in a tradition of fictionalizations of the historical figures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, including Nigel Tranter's *Macbeth the King* and Dorothy Dunn's *King Hereafter*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Lady Macbeth
- **When Written:** 2000s
- **Where Written:** Maryland, USA
- **When Published:** 2008
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Fiction
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Medieval Scotland
- **Climax:** Macbeth's battle with Duncan

EXTRA CREDIT

Alter Ego. Susan Fraser King has published her almost two-dozen novels under a variety of names, including Susan King and Sara Gabriel.

Creating History. There is only a single mention of Lady Macbeth in the historical record, and so Susan Fraser King made it her task to flesh out the life of this extraordinary woman based only on fragments of extant history.



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel opens in 1058, when Gruadh, or Lady Macbeth, is forty-two years old. She lives in a fortress with her close childhood friends Bethoc, a healer, and Drostan, a monk. Twice a widow, Gruadh misses her second husband, Macbeth. She reflects upon their life together, and her childhood before she met him. She begins to reminisce on her life, and the rest of the novel takes the form of her recollections.

Gruadh was raised by her father, Bodhe, the mormaer of Fife. Her mother, Ailsa, died when she was young, although she remains connected to her mother through Celtic magic and divination, which Ailsa practiced but died before she could pass on to her daughter.

Gruadh spent most of her childhood in the fortress Dun Elgin, learning how to read and write, how to run a household, and how to wield a sword. Although reading, writing, and domestic service are all standard lessons for young noblewomen, Gruadh convinces Bodhe to allow her to learn to defend herself after she is the victim of two kidnapping attempts, the first by a man named Crinan (although he denies it), and the second by Thorfin Sigurdsson. Both men try to kidnap her to marry her themselves or to marry her off to one of their relatives, since Gruadh comes from an important royal lineage. To protect her from future abductions, Bodhe marries her to Gilcomgan mac Crinan, the mormaer of Moray, a neighboring province.

Gruadh is initially unhappy about this match. Gilcomgan is older than she is, and he famously became mormaer of Moray only after killing his uncle, Finlach. However, she warms to him after their marriage, and eventually becomes pregnant with his child. However, before she gives birth, she receives word that Macbeth, a nobleman from Moray whose father, Finlach, Gilcomgan killed, has killed Gilcomgan as revenge. Macbeth, who Gruadh has met a few times previously but disliked (but

also kissed once), arrives at her home and forcibly marries her the day after she is widowed.

Gruadh resents Macbeth and refuses to accept him as her husband or as the rightful mormaer of Moray, even as her household and the people of Moray quickly warm to him. However, with time, she begins to see the good in Macbeth. They become a strong team, whose ambitions are matched, and whose combined bloodlines give Macbeth a strong claim to the Scottish crown. Macbeth is out for revenge, for he resents the family line currently in power, who allowed his father to be murdered. Gruadh, too, sees taking the throne as revenge after her father, Bodhe, is killed by King Malcolm or one of his agents. The couple feel that it is their blood right to be king and queen of Scotland, and their duty to their prestigious family heritage and murdered relatives to install themselves on the Scottish throne.

King Malcolm eventually dies, and his grandson Duncan, takes over. Duncan asks Macbeth to serve as his general, and he consents. After years of ill-advised wars, which Macbeth had cautioned against, and a poisoning attempt by Duncan, Macbeth rises up against the king. The two meet on the battlefield with extensive armies, but fight for the crown in one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat. Macbeth wins, and wins the throne.

Macbeth and Gruadh rule Scotland for almost two decades. Although neither their reign nor their marriage is perfect—Macbeth has to deal with frequent threats from Duncan's young, vengeful son Malcolm mac Duncan, and Macbeth and Gruadh are unable to conceive healthy children—Gruadh reports that Macbeth is a peaceful, wise, beloved ruler who does his best to prepare Scotland for the future.

Macbeth is eventually murdered by Malcolm mac Duncan. He and Gruadh crown Gruadh's only living child, her son from her first marriage, Lulach, in the minutes before Macbeth dies. Lulach reigns as King of Scotland, but Malcolm mac Duncan also claims the throne, and the two engage in constant warfare.

The novel ends as Lulach prepares for battle, and Gruadh, tired of fighting and politics, prepares to retire to a cabin in northern Scotland, where she will live as a widow and study divination and magic.

and learns how to handle a sword, both to protect herself and to protect the ones she holds dear. After surviving two attempted kidnappings and one attempted rape, Gruadh is married to Gilcomgan, ostensibly for her own protection. Although she initially dislikes her husband, she warms to him, and the two conceive a child, Lulach. Macbeth murders Gilcomgan before Lulach is born, and immediately marries Gruadh, both to cement his claim as the new mormaer of Moray and to protect her from King Malcolm, who would like to cut off her bloodline. Gruadh comes to love Macbeth, and the two become a fierce, ambitious pair, who want to honor their bloodlines by ruling Scotland. When Macbeth becomes king, Gruadh becomes his queen, a title only given to women with Gaelic ancestry and the proper heritage. She feels this is her blood right, and happily rules over Scotland, with her husband, for seventeen years. After Malcolm mac Duncan kills her husband, Gruadh is left fending off marriage offers even as her son, Lulach, crowned king after Macbeth, fights Malcolm for the throne. The novel ends as Gruadh decides to recuse herself from the political turmoil and live in solitude in the Scottish countryside.

Macbeth – Macbeth, also Mac Bethad mac Finlach, is the son of Finlach and the second husband of Gruadh. Born in Moray, his life is disrupted when Gilcomgan and Gilcomgan's brother murder his father and claim his inheritance, naming themselves the mormaers of Moray. Macbeth lives as a landless noble for much of his early adulthood, until he murders Gilcomgan as revenge for his father and claims Moray for himself. Macbeth then marries Gruadh, Gilcomgan's widow. Although she sees this as a way for him to more stably install himself at Elgin, he also weds her to protect her from King Malcolm and to lend legitimacy to his own hard-won position. Macbeth and Gruadh eventually grow close, and although they have no surviving children, he adopts her son, Lulach, as his own. Macbeth is ambitious and a fierce fighter, but he is also family-oriented and committed to honoring his heritage. His desire for power comes as much from his own personal drive as it does from a desire to fulfill the potential of his bloodline. Macbeth eventually becomes king when he fatally wounds the sitting king, Duncan, in hand-to-hand combat. He rules over Scotland for seventeen years, until Malcolm mac Duncan, who believes he is the rightful king, fatally wounds him in his home. Before he dies, he makes sure Lulach is crowned king, so that his heir, even if they are not blood-related, will continue his lineage.

Bodhe – Father to Gruadh and Farquhar, mormaer of Fife, and husband of Dolina and Ailsa, who dies during childbirth. Bodhe is a respected and powerful warrior. He believes in certain traditions, such as the non-linear Celtic style of succession, but is willing to compromise on others—for example, he allows Gruadh to learn sword craft and even gifts her a helmet and ceremonial armour, even though women are rarely taught to fight. Bodhe cares about his family and his lineage more than



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, daughter of Bodhe and Ailsa, wife of Macbeth and Gilcomgan, mother of Lulach and Farquhar mac Macbeth. Gruadh is headstrong and loyal. She loves her family and will do anything to protect those close to her, even if it means violating cultural norms or traditional gender roles. She practices magic

anything else. He marries Gruadh to Gilcomgan when she is only fifteen because he knows she will be safer with a husband to protect her and she will no longer be vulnerable to kidnapping attempts and forced marriages. He also sees this marriage as a way to further his family line, and is pleased that, when Gruadh marries Macbeth, she has an even stronger claim to the throne than before. Bodhe understands and accepts that he will never be king, but takes steps to ensure that those who share his bloodline will be. He is killed by agents of King Malcolm, along with his grandson Malcolm mac Farquhar.

Gilcomgan – Gruadh’s first husband, the father of her son, Lulach, and mormaer of Moray. Gilcomgan gains his position through murder—he killed his uncle, Finlach, father of Macbeth and former mormaer of Moray. Although Gruadh does not want to marry him initially, as she finds him old, rough, and boorish, she comes to like and even love him. Although he has a violent side—the same impulses that led him to murder a member of his family—he is good storyteller and welcome company during the year that he and his young wife spend together. Gilcomgan is eventually murdered by Macbeth, who traps him and his men in a tower and burns it down.

Lulach – Gruadh’s son with her first husband, Gilcomgan. Lulach never meets his father, who is killed by Macbeth, his stepfather, months before his birth. Lulach is always interested in war and fighting, and Macbeth begins to train him early. Lulach is the only one of Gruadh’s children to survive into adulthood, so she is protective of him but knows there is only so much he can do, especially since he wants to be a warrior. He marries Ingebjorg, with whom he has two children. After his stepfather, Macbeth, is murdered, Lulach is crowned king. Although Malcolm mac Duncan, who is the one to murder Macbeth, refuses to accept Lulach’s authority, he is, for a few months at least, the King of Scotland.

Catriona of Kinlossie – A healer and widow who is also Macbeth’s childhood friend and mistress. Catriona helps Gruadh give birth to her son, Lulach, and then becomes her friend and confidant. However, when Gruadh discovers Macbeth has been sleeping with Catriona, their friendship falls apart. Although the two women never become close again, once Macbeth promises to break off the affair, they eventually reconcile their differences.

Ailsa – Gruadh’s mother, and Bodhe’s first wife. She practices ancient Celtic traditions, such as tattooing Gruadh with the **triskele** as a baby, and divination. Like her daughter, Ailsa possesses Da Shealladh, or second sight—the ability to see the future. Ailsa dies from complications of childbirth, and her infant daughter, Brigid, dies with her. Before Ailsa dies, she tells Gruadh to be strong, advice Gruadh holds on to for the rest of her life.

Duncan mac Crinan – Son of Crinan, grandson of King Malcolm, husband of Lady Sybilla, and father to Malcolm mac

Duncan and Donald Bán. Duncan becomes king after the death of his grandfather. He is an unpopular ruler, obsessed with gaining land for Scotland through costly, deadly wars. Eventually Macbeth, who has served as his general, turns against him, and kills him in hand-to-hand combat, thus claiming the crown.

Malcolm mac Duncan – The son of Duncan, grandson of Crinan, and great-grandson of King Malcolm. After Macbeth kills Duncan he banishes young Malcolm and his brother, Donald Bán. Although Macbeth’s allies want him to kill the children, Gruadh convinces her husband to spare their lives. Unfortunately, this means Malcolm grows up with a grudge against Macbeth, and when he becomes an adult he begins to wage a war on the man who orphaned him and took the throne that he feels rightly belongs to him. He eventually kills Macbeth, and claims the Scottish crown.

Thorfin Sigurdsson – The jarl of Caithness and the Orkeny Islands, and grandson of Mother Enya. Thorfin has an enchanted raven banner and is able to use magic himself. Gruadh sees him use it to stop a fight, and suspects he has used it to win naval battles. Thorfin kidnaps Gruadh when she is a child, after Bodhe refuses to let him marry her. However, later in life he, Gruadh, and Macbeth become allies, united first against Duncan and then against his son Malcolm mac Duncan. Although Thorfin primarily looks out for himself and the interests of his people, he is a loyal ally if he believes an allegiance will strengthen his own agenda.

King Malcolm – The long-reigning Scottish king in power at the beginning of the novel. His son is Crinan and his grandson is Duncan, who is next in line to the throne. Although Scottish succession typically follows the Celtic tradition, which has the next king come from a different family line, Malcolm favors the Saxon tradition of linear succession, which ensures his children and grandchildren hold on to the throne.

Crinan – King Malcolm’s son, and father of Duncan. Crinan is never king himself, but he does his best to protect his family and his legacy, sending his warriors out on missions to kidnap, intimidate, and murder when necessary as long as it ensures the longevity of his royal bloodline. Although never confirmed, Crinan is likely responsible for Gruadh’s first kidnapping, and perhaps for Bodhe’s murder.

Lady Sybilla – Duncan’s wife, mother of Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán. Although their husbands become enemies, Lady Sybilla and Gruadh are close friends. Lady Sybilla asks Gruadh to promise to care for her children if anything happens to her. Lady Sybilla dies in childbirth not long before Macbeth kills Duncan, orphaning their two sons. Gruadh never mentions her promise to her husband, but after Duncan dies Gruadh passionately defends his and Lady Sybilla’s children, and convinces Macbeth to let them live.

Drostan – Gruadh’s childhood friend, and a monk. During their

adolescence and early twenties, he moves away to train at a monastery, but is invited to live with Gruadh and Macbeth as their royal cleric after Macbeth is crowned King of Scotland. He is loyal to Gruadh and gives her thoughtful advice based on his extensive knowledge of history and current events.

Bethoc – One of Gruadh’s cousins. A healing woman who comes to live with Gruadh after the birth of her son, Lulach. Bethoc is one of Gruadh’s oldest and most trusted friends, and is with her even in the book’s final chapters as Gruadh enters middle age. Although a talented healer, Bethoc struggles in emergency situations, like when Maeve and Macbeth are poisoned, in these cases deferring to more practiced healers like Catriona.

Maeve – Gruadh’s nursemaid. The two women remain close through much of Gruadh’s life. Maeve, however, often gives unhelpful advice when Gruadh is trying to conceive, as she believes that Gruadh’s interest in more traditionally “masculine” tasks, like sword fighting and politics, have poisoned her body and made her infertile. Maeve dies by accidental poisoning, drinking mead from a poisoned cup sent by Duncan to Macbeth and Gruadh.

Ketill Bruisson – A Viking, and nephew of Thorfin. Gruadh first meets him after Thorfin kidnaps her, when Ketill stands guard to protect her from assault. Although one of her captors, Gruadh has a soft spot in her heart for him, and is happy to see him when they meet again and again as enemies and allies over the course of the lives.

Enya – Sometimes referred to as Mother Enya, Enya is an Irish princess and Thorfin Sigurdsson’s grandmother. In her old age she lives alone in northern Moray, where Gruadh is able to visit her and learn both small spells and how to better see the future. Enya, like Gruadh, possesses Da Shealladh, and helps Gruadh refine and strengthen her own natural ability. Enya is also responsible for enchanting Thorfin’s raven banner, which is said to protect him in battles.

Dolina – Bodhe’s wife and mistress, who he marries after the death of his first wife, Ailsa. Dolina is a fairly traditional woman, who manages the household and complies with her husband’s requests, and therefore expects Gruadh, her stepdaughter, to be a similar model of medieval womanhood. Her relationship with Gruadh is occasionally antagonistic, as Gruadh is not satisfied with being confined to the home, and wants to learn Celtic magic, which the devoutly Christian Dolina disapproves of, as well as sword craft. Still, she loves Gruadh and helps prepare her for special events like her betrothal and wedding, and sends her gifts once she has moved away. After Bodhe’s death Dolina leaves Abernethy, where she had spent most of her time, and lives on one of Gruadh’s remaining holdings in Fife.

Father Anselm – A priest at Abernethy. Although he and Bodhe get along, he and Gruadh do not. Father Anselm is a

conservative Catholic priest, and doesn’t believe women need an extensive education, even as he is tasked with educating Gruadh. Similarly, he disapproves of her learning how to use a sword, as, in his eyes, it is unladylike and goes against the church.

Donald Bán – The young son of Duncan and Lady Sybilla, and brother to Malcolm mac Duncan. Donald Bán is orphaned as a child after his mother dies in childbirth and his father is slain by Macbeth. Both Donald Bán and Malcolm are banished from Scotland, and grow up resentful of Macbeth, the man who stole their lives and father from them. Unlike his brother, Donald Bán does not rise up against Macbeth in adulthood, and disappears from the novel after his banishment.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Finlach – Macbeth’s father, who is murdered by Gilcomgan and Gilcomgan’s brother when Macbeth is just a child. Although Finlach never appears in the novel, he is said to be an impressive warrior and warlord, who taught his son how to fight and rule early on.

Malcolm mac Farquhar – Farquhar’s young orphaned son, Gruadh’s nephew, and Bodhe’s grandson. He is killed by agents of King Malcolm in the same ambush that kills Bodhe and Fergus.

Aella – Gruadh’s maidservant and one of her childhood friends. Aella is Saxon by birth, but was raised in Scotland.

Mairi – One of Gruadh’s cousins, and mother of Bethoc. She is a healing woman who has some knowledge of divination, and helps Gruadh untangle some of her earliest visions.

Ingebjorg – Lulach’s wife, and the daughter of Thorfin Sigurdsson. A gentle and pious woman.

Nechtan – His full name is Malsnechtan. The son of Ingebjorg and Lulach, and grandson of Gruadh.

Farquhar mac Bodhe – Gruadh’s older brother, and the son of Bodhe. He is murdered by warriors representing Crinan when Gruadh is a child. He has one son, Malcolm mac Farquhar, who is murdered a decade later.

Farquhar mac Macbeth – One of Gruadh’s two sons with Macbeth. He dies at only two years old. In Gaelic his name is Ferchar, meaning “very dear one.”

Fergus mac Donal – One of Bodhe’s warriors. Father of Ruari, Angus, and others. He is one of the first men tasked with training Gruadh how to fight. He dies with Bodhe when King Malcolm’s agents ambush them.

Finn mac Nevin – Bodhe’s foster son. A blacksmith. As teens, he and Gruadh carry on a brief but intense affair, which he cuts off. Later in life, they become close friends, and he even secretly forges her armor.

Ruari – Son of Fergus. He serves as a warrior for Bodhe, and

then for Macbeth.

Angus mac Fergus – Son of Fergus. He serves as a warrior for Bodhe, and then for Macbeth.

Constantine mac Artair (also Banchorrie) – Macbeth's uncle and the thane of Banchorrie. He becomes close to Gruadh when he sends her a messenger alerting her to her husband Gilcomgan's death, before Macbeth arrives at Elgin to forcibly wed her. Constantine is a lifelong ally of the couple, often providing advice and support.

Dermot mac Conall – Macbeth's household bard. Dermot is also an astrologer, and is able to tell the future based on maps he makes of the stars. He tells Lulach's future for Gruadh and Macbeth after the young boy's birth.

Luag – Bodhe's personal bard.

Harald Silkhair – The Viking who attempts to rape Gruadh during her time as Thorfin Sigurdsson's captive. Thorfin kills him as punishment, and as a peace offering to Gruadh.

Scathach of Skye – A warrior woman from Gaelic legend, who was said to have defended the Isle of Skye against invaders. She is often invoked by Gruadh, who uses her as a historical precedent to justify learning how to use a sword herself.

The Goddess Brigid – The Gaelic goddess of healing, childbirth, and poetry.

Brigid – Gruadh's little sister, and Bodhe and Ailsa's daughter. Both Brigid and Ailsa die soon after her birth.

Black Duff – Also known by his formal name of Dubh mac Dubh, Duff is Gruadh's cousin, although she does not trust him and has no fondness for him. An ally of King Malcolm and later Duncan, Malcolm installs Duff as mormaer of Fife after Bodhe's murder.

Kind Edward – The Saxon King in the latter half of the novel. He forms an alliance with Malcolm mac Duncan.

Una An old woman who gives Gruadh prophecies about her own and Macbeth's life.

King Cnut A Saxon king with whom King Malcolm meets in order to has out Scotland's southern border.

Malcolm mac Malbríd A cousin of Macbeth's, who along with Gilcomgan murders Macbeth's father Finlach in order to gain power.

Eva Gruadh's aunt, who gives Gruadh pagan charms to leave with the bodies of Gruadh's mother and baby sister after her mother and sister die in childbirth.

TERMS

Gael/Gaelic – A group of people from ancient Ireland and Scotland. Used interchangeably with Celt. Also refers to the culture and language of said group.

Celt/Celtic – A group of people from ancient Ireland and Scotland. Also refers to the culture and language of said group. Used interchangeably with Gael.

Da Shealladh – Translates to “second sight”—the ability to see the future and read omens.

Encomium – A book of praise.

Mormaer – A Gaelic word for the ruler of a Scottish province.

Picts – A group of ancient people who historically lived in northern Scotland. They famously decorated their bodies with intricate tattoos.

Scotti – Another term for the ancient Gaels. The ancient inhabitants of present-day Scotland.

Sian – A spell of protection. The verb form is “sained.”

Caithness – A Northern province in Scotland commanded by **Thorfin Sigurdsson**.

Fife – The province in Scotland overseen by **Bodhe** and later **Gruadh**.

Moray – A large province in Scotland overseen first by **Gilcomgan** and later by **Macbeth** and **Gruadh**.

Orkney Islands – The northernmost territory of Scotland. Overseen by **Thorfin Sigurdsson**.

Abernethy – Sometimes called Dun (or fortress) Abernethy. A fortress in Fife where **Gruadh** spends much of her childhood and where **Bodhe** and **Dolina** live.

Elgin – Sometimes called Dun (or fortress) Elgin. A fortress in Moray where **Gruadh** spends much of her adulthood.

Fathach – A prophet.

Thane – A high-ranking Scottish nobleman.

Iona – An island off the western coast of Scotland where Scottish kings are buried.

Scone – A village in central Scotland where the nation's kings are crowned.

Dunsinnan – A fort in Scotland. The location of a battle between **Macbeth** and **Malcolm mac Duncan**.

Atholl – A Scottish province to the west of Fife and to the south of Moray.

Tír na n' Óg – Paradise, in Irish mythology.

Hauberk – An armored tunic, traditionally made of chainmail but sometimes made of leather.

Lothian – The southernmost territory of Scotland.

Saxon – People in England of German descent. Often used in contrast to the inhabitants of Scotland, who are ethnically Celtic.

Birthing Chair – A seat made of the arms of men or women on which a pregnant woman sits. It allows her to deliver the baby with the help of gravity.

Saxon Northumbria – England’s northernmost territory.

Craig Phadraig – A fortress in northern Moray.

Bana-Ghaisgeach – A warrior woman in Gaelic mythology.

Ross – A large northern Scottish province.

Retainers – Servants or personal assistants.

Annals – The historical record.

Kincardine – A Scottish fortress in the eastern part of the country.

Jarl – A chieftain or ruler in Norse or Danish tradition.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



HISTORY, MEMORY, AND STORYTELLING

Lady Macbeth is a novel concerned with how storytelling and personal memory can affect greater historical narratives. Basing the story on real events, historical accounts, and religious archives surrounding one of history’s most infamous queens, author Susan Fraser King has done her best to reconstruct Lady Macbeth’s life, imbuing her with motivations, emotions, and depth that have been erased by the passage of time. This interest in the narrative of history exists within the world of the novel as well. Having been taught about the past through songs and stories, King’s characters are specifically concerned with how history is recorded—something they understand will influence how they are remembered by future generations. History is often written by the victors, the novel suggests, or else manipulated for different intended audiences. In both cases, *Lady Macbeth* ultimately argues that there is no single truth when it comes to how events and people are remembered, and that *storytelling* determines history as much as does history itself.

Throughout the novel, characters are preoccupied with how history will remember them. Gruadh (that is, Lady Macbeth) has one child with her first husband, Gilcomgan, but she and Macbeth are unable to conceive children who live past one or two years old. Gruadh is aware that “no doubt history will say the *mulier bona Macbeth*, the good wife of Macbeth, was barren” because of this, even though Macbeth will adopt her son, Lulach, as his heir. Later in the novel Gruadh notes, “here is what the annals will say of Macbeth’s kingship: very little.” Because his reign was primarily peaceful, with few wars or scandals to record, Gruadh is aware it will be barely recorded

at all. Although she understands that she has little control over how she or Macbeth is remembered, especially considering the sitting king at the end of the novel, Malcolm mac Duncan—Macbeth’s enemy and murderer—will control how this legacy is seen, and will “ill seek to ruin [Macbeth’s] deeds” in the annals of history.

The bards and historians that appear throughout the novel further reflect the importance of history and storytelling. Bards’ songs, as well as myths and legends, give characters strength to carry on and teach lessons of the past to apply to the future. Bards act as living libraries of sorts, offering knowledge of politics, history, and geography that would otherwise be inaccessible. Apart from the monks who maintain written records of political and religious events, bards are the nation’s primary record keepers and reference books. That’s why, before her marriage to her first husband, Gilcomgan, Gruadh asks her father Bodhe’s personal bard, Luag, about her new home in the region of Moray. Later, after her second marriage to Macbeth, when Gruadh attends her father’s funeral, Luag ceremonially recites “the lists of names that stretched from the Pictish kings down to Bodhe and his son and two grandsons.” Bodhe was murdered because he and his family represented a threat to King Malcolm, so hearing her own heritage read back to her reminds Gruadh of the danger her bloodline is in, and how essential it is for her to protect her son and their precious, powerful lineage.

Bards also have an important ceremonial role in this culture. They are present for battles and unify the army through song. Additionally, Macbeth’s bard, Dermot, is present at his coronation and recites “an invocation of power,” an essential component of the ceremony that adds legitimacy and brings people together. That bards are held in such esteem reflects this society’s respect for the importance of history, yet that such facts also rely on inherently fallible human memory underscores the subjectivity of that history.

The potential—and consequences—of such storytelling for its subjects is clear throughout the book. For example, old Celtic stories passed down by bards of warrior women like the bana-ghaisgeach, “the great Irish queen, Macha, and Princess Scathach of Skye” inspire Gruadh’s own decision to learn how to handle a sword and march into battle; she observes, “Celtic women have fought beside men since before the names of kings were remembered.” In addition to shaping the reception of the past, flattering depictions in songs and tales improve public opinion of the story’s subjects in the present. Gruadh is won over by her first husband Gilcomgan’s talent for storytelling. Because Gilcomgan is so charismatic, Gruadh relates she “half forgot my husband had taken part in the murder of his own uncle.” Later, while Gruadh is visiting one of King Malcolm’s thanes, the bard present sings a song flattering the men and women gathered that day. Gruadh is described as a “swan-necked beauty” whose eyes are “like stars” and whose

voice is “like a lark.” It’s the novel’s first indication that Gruadh is beautiful, and Macbeth, who is also present, although still married, likely takes note of her beauty in this moment.

Gruadh and Macbeth were real historical figures, and *Lady Macbeth* often assumes readers are aware of the famous play documenting some of the same events—William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Yet these two works tell markedly different stories, and within *Lady Macbeth* King often makes allusion to the famous tragedy, either to push back against unflattering or simplistic depictions of its characters, or else to provide more detailed historical nuance. Readers who know Shakespeare’s [Macbeth](#) will recognize subtle allusions to it throughout. Often, however, these allusions are twisted, and scenes are made new; indeed, the ways in which *Lady Macbeth* interacts with [Macbeth](#) emphasizes that there is no single, empirical version of history, and that every story has an agenda. Gruadh, as narrator, is aware of this, and the entire book is her attempt to relay her own version of history. A well-told story has power—to change the present and to change others’ perceptions of the past.



GENDER ROLES

Gruadh (Lady Macbeth) lives in a world strictly segregated by gender. Women in the eleventh-century Scotland of the novel are expected to be

quiet and domestic, to either be wives and mothers or to pursue some female-dominated occupation like midwifery. Their lives are dedicated to running a household and to producing and raising babies. Everything outside of the walls of the home, meanwhile, is the domain of men. Gruadh, too, is burdened by expectations that she will act like a “lady”—that is, that she will be docile and subservient, content to do little more than sew and rear children. However, Gruadh is not satisfied with being boxed in, and in the end, this trait serves her well. As a queen, she is required to be both traditionally masculine and feminine, soft and maternal yet unsentimental and brave. Gender roles are more flexible than they appear, and it is only by incorporating aspects of masculinity and femininity into her identity is Gruadh able to be a successful ruler and equal partner to second husband, and eventual king, Macbeth.

Gruadh is constantly pressured to be more lady-like and stick to women’s work. Early in the novel, her father, Bodhe, rejects her request to learn sword craft. He points out that she knows how to read and run a household, and suggests this, and the knowledge she will once day have a powerful husband, is enough. He sees being a woman, even a powerful woman, as antithetical to being a warrior. Gruadh learns how to run a household (a woman’s traditional job) from Dolina, her stepmother, and runs the households of both her first husband, Gilcomgan, and her second. Although sometimes when Gilcomgan is gone she is able to practice sword fighting, he discourages her, saying, “I want sons of you [...] not wounds.” He only wants her in one role—that of a wife and mother.

Catriona, a medicine woman, argues that men “understand life and death differently than women. Ours it to give birth, life, and comfort. We cannot bring ourselves to take life, knowing its struggle and value.” Gruadh resents this “saintly show of opinion,” and, indeed, the novel ultimately presents such expectations of femininity to be dangerously restrictive. Gruadh argues that she would kill if she had to, and later makes good on that promise, killing a soldier who attacks her and Lulach.

Gruadh is aware of how a woman should comport herself but finds it difficult to act in the way expected of her and often directly chooses not to. Maeve, Gruadh’s nursemaid and friend, tells Gruadh that she is infertile because “willfulness and old grief” are “poisoning your womb. You want to be a warrior, and you want to be a mother.” Her suggestion is that not only are Gruadh’s masculine attitudes unladylike, they’re literally changing her body so she cannot perform the duties expect of a contemporary wife.

After her husband is killed by Macbeth, who then comes to her castle to forcibly wed her, Gruadh does her best to show him that she is not frightened and refuses to run. Instead, although many months pregnant, she chooses to confront Macbeth herself. Maeve warns that “a woman will not dissuade men intent on mayhem,” but Gruadh is not deterred, grabbing a sword to defend herself and her home, reasoning that she could “let the edge of my blade turn them away.” Upon seeing her, Macbeth similarly notes, “It is not seemly for a woman to be warlike, especially one in your state,” but Gruadh doesn’t care what is seemly when she is protecting her family. Although Gruadh understands how a woman “should” act, when it goes against her priorities or principles she ignores societal pressure to be feminine.

In the end, Gruadh’s refusal to follow strict guidelines of femininity serves her well. As Macbeth’s wife, Gruadh understands that she must maintain the domestic sphere but also that she must learn more about traditionally “masculine” areas of politics and the military. She notes, “I knew that a mormaer’s wife must be aware of such issues, and the wider scope of the world beyond her household.” When Macbeth prepares to meet Duncan in battle, Gruadh insists on coming with him. She tells her husband “I will not wait in the hall with my needlework to hear word of your fate,” explaining, “You are Moray, and I am the lady here. Our region, and your very life are threatened this day. If the people see both of us riding at the head of our army, I believe they will rally behind Macbeth with greater loyalty than before.” Although he tries to resist Gruadh will not be dissuaded and the pair march together.

Gruadh’s estimation proves correct: Macbeth observes, “Your presence is attracting more to our army, just as you thought,” and Gruadh even inspires other women to take up arms and join the attack. Although not quite yet a queen, she demonstrates that she has the intelligence, strategy, and

bravery required.

As a mormaer's wife and as queen of Scotland, Gruadh is required to be both hard and soft, to understand motherhood and the creation of life as well as war and the destruction of it. Although the binary of masculinity and femininity is reductive (men can and should be interested in domestic affairs and parenthood, women can and should be interested in politics), Gruadh manages to inhabit the best characteristics of both halves of this binary, and this helps her become a successful and powerful queen. What she understands, and what few others manage to grasp, is that the role of a queen requires strength and independence generally not expected from women. After Maeve argues that a woman "tends to matters inside the home" while a man "tends to matters outside," Gruadh thinks to herself, "*A queen tends to both.*"



MAGIC, TRADITION, AND RELIGION

In *Lady Macbeth* Scotland is torn between Celtic tradition and the rise of Christianity. Although the Church eventually wins out, for years the two practices coexist, and Gruadh and others, although ostensibly Christian, also rely upon pagan magic—including divination, incantations, and prayer—to heal and protect themselves and to plan for the future. Each tradition serves its own purpose, the novel suggests, and the blending of Catholicism and paganism makes Scotland and its people powerful, flexible, and able to preserve their identity in the face of widespread cultural change.

Celtic traditions are broad and include many types of prayer, fortunetelling, and magic. For many, paganism is integrated into daily life and often invoked to cast spells, tell the future, or give protection. For instance, after the birth of his stepson, Lulach, Macbeth has a star maps made to tell his future. On Halloween, Una, a prophetess, cracks eggs into water to determine if curious young women will find husbands. Gruadh has the ability to see the future, as do a handful of other characters, most notably Enya (an old Irish princess and Thorfin's grandmother), Mairi, Ailsa (Gruadh's mother), Una, and Macbeth's bard, Dermot. Some of these people, plus Thorfin, can even practice magic, weaving spells of protection and enchanting jewelry and amulets.

Although all of these practices are frowned upon by the church—Father Anselm frequently criticizes Gruadh's use of spells and trinkets—they offer insights and protections unavailable under pure Christianity. Gruadh herself wears a protective pagan tattoo of a **triskele**. She realizes that it is "a barbaric custom in some eyes," but believes her tattoo connects her both to her mother, who gave it to her, and her background. She draws upon the triskele inked into her shoulder, explaining, "When I feel the need for additional strength, I draw the sign in earth, water, frost, or air: three spirals, just so. The eloquent design holds blessings near, while keeping harm at bay." The

novel thus presents pagan symbols as valid sources of strength for characters because they draw upon ancient knowledge and power and connect them to their shared Celtic past.

Catholicism, however, also provides useful structure and comfort to the residents of Scotland. Gruadh, Macbeth, and others often go to church. In most formal affairs—births, marriages, and deaths—the church is consulted as the primary authority. Seeing Macbeth praying in the chapel at Elgin begins to warm Gruadh's heart towards him. Although she initially hates her second husband after he forces her to marry him, seeing Macbeth prostrate himself like "a suffering pilgrim" convinces her there is a seed of goodness within him: "I felt a stir of sympathy for a man who felt such anguish within himself," she says, and his piety paves the way for tolerance and eventually love—an emotional journey that would be impossible without the church and Macbeth's devotion to it.

Despite her faith, Gruadh sees the value in preserving Celtic spiritual traditions. She misses the wildness and freedom of ancient, Celtic times, while Macbeth believes the Christianization of Scotland has been for the best, and that, "When the Celts were taken under the wing of the Church, they left many of their heathen ways behind, gaining wisdom from faith, and learning the ways of the larger world." Gruadh concedes this is "good, so long as we stay Celts [...] and do not become Roman, or English, or Viking instead." She knows there is "much that is good and beautiful" in the old wild ways. For Macbeth, Christianity represents progress forward. Because he is so invested in the future of Scotland, he sees the church as a useful tool to modernize the nation he loves. Still, Gruadh recognizes that Scotland's Celtic traditions are integral to its character and should not be discarded.

Although the traditions may appear at odds, Christianity and paganism are often combined in the novel to lend ceremonies like births, deaths, and coronations additional power. When speaking to Macbeth about their beliefs in divination and astrology, for example, Gruadh explains she gained her knowledge of such traditions from her mother, who "saw no conflict between Celtic traditions and her Christian faith, though Rome disagrees. She had an independent spirit and made her own decisions." Although specifically describing Ailsa, Gruadh could easily be describing Scotland as a whole, which remains a fiercely independent nation and manages to balance new religion and old.

Additionally, Gruadh argues, "The eyes of the church cannot easily see beyond the mountains of the Gaels." She uses this to argue specifically that Scotland's physical distance from the Catholic church more easily leads to "warlike behavior in women," which would be frowned upon by the church but which "is not sinful heresy, and is sometimes even necessary." The implication is also that, out of sight of the church, Scottish people need other types of protection to fill the gaps left by this newer religious institution. This is likely why they turn to magic

and Celtic tradition—it makes them feel safe when the church feels too far away.

Even the ceremony that gives power to Scottish kings is a mixture of new and old—as she watches various men be crowned, first Duncan and then her husband, Gruadh explains the appointment of a new king “is a crowning, where a warrior is declared leader through ancient, mystical rite,” as opposed to “a coronation, or an anointing with oils and prayers with a crown bestowed by holy right of a priest’s hands.” The crowning, then is a blending of paganism and Catholicism, both traditions that lend authority to the proceedings and give legitimacy to the new king.

Although he dies before he can succeed, as King, Macbeth is concerned with blending “honored Celtic traditions with the ways of the Church and even the Saxons.” Although Gruadh is concerned with Scotland losing “its very soul” to changes in culture, Macbeth explains that as a Celtic king he must protect Scotland, to keep it “true to its Celtic nature always, but to keep pace with Britain and all the trading countries.” In his mind, the best way to do this is marry Celtic traditions, which makeup Scotland’s cultural core, with Catholicism and Saxon practices, which will bring it into the next century and beyond.



FATE, FAMILY, AND AMBITION

In *Lady Macbeth*, a person’s family history determines their future. For Gruadh and Macbeth especially, their quest for power is motivated by the

deep-seated belief that they *deserve* to be king and queen of Scotland because of their heritage. Their personal ambition is framed as the conclusion to a multigenerational journey in which they will unite their ancient, respected lineages and come together as the rightful monarchs of Scotland. Gruadh relates this ascent as nationally important and necessary—that is, they become king and queen not simply because they deserve to be, but also because they are the best options for Scotland.

Gruadh’s future, then, is the future of the nation, and this is never more explicit than in the visions and prophecies that occur throughout her life. Although these have personal importance for her—showing the fate of her children and husbands—they are also of national importance, given that these men will become rulers; the future of Gruadh’s family is the future of Scotland. Such awareness creates a sense of obligation in the current generation, which must constantly think not of themselves but of what they owe their family in terms of who they marry, the children they bear, and who they kill on behalf of their beloved Scotland.

Not long before her first marriage Gruadh has a vision that her cousin, Mairi, helps her interpret. Mairi explains to Gruadh “the signs you saw speak of Scotland’s future even more than your own,” demonstrating how Gruadh’s fate is closely linked to that

of her country. As a child, Gruadh wishes she had more free will, but with time she comes to realize what is best for her family is also what is best for her politically, if not necessarily personally. She does not want to marry her first husband, Gilcomgan, understanding that the marriage is not the best match for her, but instead the best match for her family. As her father, Bodhe, explains more of his long-term political plans, Gruadh sees that marrying Gilcomgan would put her in line to be queen even if she does not love him.

Gruadh continues to feel the weight of obligations to her family throughout her life—when she cannot have children with Macbeth, for instance, she feels she is letting him and her family down. She feels this so strongly she admits she would understand if Macbeth set her aside for a more fertile wife. As she grows older, Gruadh learns to place duty to her family and her country above her personal desires, while also converting her personal desires into desires for her family and country. Indeed, later in life, Gruadh becomes less invested in personal ambition and so wrapped up in Scotland’s fate that her personal interests *become* Scotland’s interests. The same can be said of her second husband, Macbeth, who almost always believes that what is best for himself is also best for Scotland.

Although initially Gruadh believes “Macbeth had overtaken my future, and my child’s, out of his own ambition and desire for revenge,” their ambitions align later in their marriage, when they have grown close and become co-conspirators. As they discuss their claim to the crown, Gruadh reasons, “If we were to gain rod and crown [...] we could satisfy our heritage and avenge our two fathers, all at once.” In this moment she also realizes that this has been Macbeth’s plan from the beginning. He explains, “I knew the worth in your blood, and saw the worth of your nature.” The recent death of Gruadh’s father has further “twinned [their] motives,” driving them towards the same desire for revenge. Still, revenge is never purely personal. Macbeth says, “Our branches, Gabhran and Lorne, deserve this.” Gruadh adds, “And the ancient blood of the whole of Scotland—it, too, needs this.” They see the avenging of personal family grudges to be what is best for their individual families, but also best for the nation they love.

As their marriage strengthens, Macbeth and Gruadh have frank conversations about their desires and future. Macbeth relates, “My ambition was always for Scotland as much as myself,” and believes the present king “Duncan is hastening the end of the Gaels.” As such, Macbeth feels it is his duty to challenge the sitting king’s right to the throne. Gruadh agrees that Macbeth is making the right choice, adding, “You can honor that heritage and vindicate your kin, and mine [...] Duncan cannot be permitted to remain king longer.”

Prophecies further help characters determine their futures, the futures of their loved ones, and the future of Scotland. Gruadh inherits the ability to see the future—Da Shealladh, or “the gift of two sights”—from her mother, Ailsa, and from her great-

grandmother on her father's side. Fate is directly related to a person's heritage—not just because that heritage determines what doors are open to a person and what claim she has to land or titles, but also because foresight is hereditary; the ability to see the future is passed along from parent to child. Although prophecies rarely give characters the opportunity to change the future, they provide Gruadh, especially, the opportunity to prepare herself (and Scotland) for it.

Gruadh's first vision of the future occurs when she is fifteen or sixteen, in the months before her first marriage. She sees, "two swords lay crossed and ready [...] nearby, horses stood, gleaming and grand [...] while overhead two eagles winged towards the mountains, and a raven settled on a gatepost. Moon and stars were still visible in the sky, and the sunrise flowed over the hilltops like a spill of blood..." Gruadh knows she has seen an omen: "ravens were death and warning, eagles pride and pairing, horses freedom; the swords might be conflict or war." Although vague, her vision proves correct. There is death in her future, as well as love, as well as war. This vision is as relevant to her personal life as it is to Scotland's future, as the two are forever linked.

Gruadh's visions are complicated—they can be violent and disturbing, but she must embrace and examine them in order to do what is best for her family and her country. Gruadh and Macbeth's fates are determined almost from birth—Gruadh's ability to see the future is itself heredity, and her and her husband's royal blood substantiates their claims to the throne, which they feel they must ascend to in order to fulfill the obligation they have to the men and women who came before them. Additionally, knowing that there is the possibility of king and queenship in their future only fuels their ambition and makes their crowning even more likely.



VIOLENCE, JUSTICE, AND REVENGE

Gruadh and Macbeth, the married couple at the center of *Lady Macbeth*, are motivated by revenge. Both have had family members killed and titles

taken from them. Because of this, they decide to dedicate their lives to avenging their families, reclaiming their titles, and punishing the men who took so much from them. Sometimes revenge calls for violence, but occasionally it requires patience and political scheming. Although Macbeth enters the novel fully versed in politics and practiced at waiting for the best opportunity to strike, Gruadh, a full decade younger, must first learn the value of violence, and then how to control her own violent urges. The novel argues that both violence and revenge are sometimes justified, but that revenge doesn't always have to look like "an eye for an eye"—the greatest revenge Macbeth and Gruadh enact is ascending to the Scottish throne, thereby proving to their detractors and enemies that plots against them have failed.

Gruadh, a woman who would normally be removed from the

more violent physical aspects of contemporary life, is taught the necessity of occasional violence from a young age. She stabs the cheek of a kidnapper at just nine years old, for instance, and understands that violence is a part of life she cannot avoid. After Bodhe has allowed her to learn how to use a sword, she practices with wooden sticks with Finn. She accidentally hits him in the face, giving him a black eye. Embarrassed, Gruadh instinctually wants to apologize, but reminds herself, "warriors do not coddle each other." In the same lesson, Finn teaches Gruadh how to trip a horse to better access its rider. Although Gruadh does not want to hurt an animal, Finn wonders how she would respond if the horse was carrying Thorfin, one of her kidnappers, or Harald Silkhair, her attempted rapist. Considering this context, Gruadh can easily imagine unseating a man from a horse, even if doing so would injure the horse.

Gruadh has a fiery, combative personality, which often means she has a difficult time learning to let go of grudges. As such, after learning how and why to use violence, she is left with violent impulses and no true outlets for them. It is then useful for her to learn the value of patience, and the way in which nonviolent resolutions can be found to ostensibly violent problems. When she reencounters Thorfin in her father's home in Fife, she is understandably unhappy to see him and rude. Yet Bodhe explains the two of them "have made our peace" and Thorfin is now an ally. Thorfin adds that he killed Harald as a kind of peace offering. Gruadh thus holds on to her grudge at her own peril—indeed, Thorfin eventually becomes a close ally, and even uses his ships to rescue Macbeth from enemy ships decades later.

Gruadh also holds a grudge against Macbeth after he murders Gilcomgan and forcibly marries her. She describes how she felt a "craving" for "vengeance," and that "a wild urge" in her blood demanded "justice at any cost." She hopes her father will avenge her and is disappointed when he doesn't. She hopes King Malcolm will "come to mow down" her second husband, but again, is upset to find the two have conspired together and that Macbeth will be safe. Although Maeve, her childhood nurse, initially agrees with Gruadh that Macbeth should be distrusted and resented, even she eventually warms to him, encouraging Gruadh to accept her husband into her bed and forgive him for Gilcomgan's murder. The novel thus suggests that apologies should be accepted, and violent deeds committed for a meaningful reason (Macbeth murdered Gilcomgan to avenge his father) can be absolved. Gruadh, who holds grudges even after amends have been made or attempted, is shown to be in the wrong, and one of the most important lessons she must learn is that holding such grudges is not always necessary or smart.

Gruadh craves violent revenge, and similarly respects violence enacted in strategic ways. Indeed, Gruadh is likely so good at holding grudges because she has an innately violent

personality. When, as a child, Gruadh stabs her kidnapper with his own **brooch**, she describes how, although she “had no idea how to handle the thing” she felt “a fierce urge insisted upon” her taking action. When she first begins to respect and forgive Macbeth, it is because she respects his use of violence against one of Thorfin’s warriors. She feels “a stirring admiration for him as a capable warlord [...] he had demonstrated uncompromising will” and physical strength, qualities she sees as necessary for a strong ruler and potential future king.

Still, this love of violence and revenge can backfire; after Bodhe is murdered Gruadh is consumed by desire for revenge “like the start of a fever.” Although Macbeth promises her, “Justice will be brought,” Gruadh can only ask, “when?” Macbeth explains “revenge is best done when the matter is clear, but this is not,” which Gruadh understands at one level but dismisses—she wants an eye for an eye, not justice but equal violence against those who hurt her. This is not good political strategy, nor does it allow her to live a happy life.

Gruadh and Macbeth finally get revenge when they ascend to the throne. As the couple plots together, Macbeth notes he believes “revenge is not yet satisfied for Finlach of Moray,” and Gruadh completes his thought, adding, “If we were to gain rod and crown [...] we could satisfy our heritage and avenge our tow fathers, all at once.” Macbeth leads her to this conclusion, helping her to tame her desire for revenge into a desire for justice—a restoration of the balance of power disrupted by the murders of their fathers. In the world of *Lady Macbeth* violence is understandable when used for justice, and revenge, as long as it is righting a wrong, has a place in life and politics.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE TRISKELE

The triskele is a design made of three symmetrical spirals joined at the center. It is often associated with the goddess Brigid. Gruadh has a tattoo of the triskele on her shoulder, which her mother Ailsa gave to her when she was a small child. The concept of a protective tattoo, and the symbol itself, are both ancient Gaelic traditions. Together, they are meant to “holds blessings near, while keeping harm at bay.” For Gruadh especially, the triskele symbolizes strength drawn from her connection to her mother, her connection to her Gaelic heritage, and her connection to ancient pagan magic. Additionally, Brigid, with whom the symbol is associated, is a powerful female goddess, from whom Gruadh can draw inspiration and power as she fashions herself as a contemporary warrior woman.



THE BROOCH

When Gruadh is a young girl she is almost kidnapped by men representing Crinan. One of the men who grabs her and carries her off is wearing a jet and bronze brooch. She pulls it from his cloak and stabs him in the cheek with it, which startles him and causes him to let her go. Gruadh holds on to this brooch for the rest of her life. Although she never wears it, it reminds her “to stay strong and wary.” In a world where women are encouraged to be meek, gentle, and subservient, the brooch is a symbol of Gruadh’s fighting spirit, and the great lengths to which she will go to protect herself and her family, even if it means enacting violence on others.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Three Rivers Press edition of *Lady Macbeth* published in 2008.

Prologue Quotes

☞ Drostan, who has long known me, has a fine hand with a pen and hopes to write a chronicle about me. This would be an encomium, a book of praise, for his queen. I told him it was a silly notion. [...] From what my advisors say, Malcolm Canmore—*ceann mór* in Gaelic, or big head, two words that suit him—will order his clerics to record Macbeth’s life. Within those pages, they will seek to ruin his deeds and his name. My husband cannot fight for his reputation now. But I am here, and I know what is true.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Malcolm mac Duncan, Macbeth, Drostan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In her author’s note and historical note, King explains that Gruadh was an “elusive young queen,” who is only mentioned once in the historical record. Therefore, readers can then assume that the encomium she considers having Drostan write is never completed, and perhaps never begun. This is the way in which the creation of history shapes other’s visions of the past—if a woman is not fleshed out in the historical record, it becomes the job of historians and writers to imagine what their lives look like, as King has done with Gruadh, her family, and her friends.

In the prologue to her story, Gruadh herself reveals that she understands how history is created. Although she has led an exceptional life she believes that her husband’s life is

worthier of memorialization, and wants to fight back against the false narratives she is sure Malcolm mac Duncan will create. History is written by the victors, and in murdering and usurping Macbeth, Malcolm therefore won the right to tell his story for him. The novel is Gruadh's fictionalized attempt to tell the truth about her husband's life, pushing against Malcolm's account of Macbeth that would seek to destroy his name and legacy.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☛☛ Because I am descended in a direct line from Celtic kings, the purest royal blood courses through me and blushes my skin. I could prick a finger and it would be gold to some.

I am Gruadh inghean Bodhe mac Cineadh mhic Dubh [...] My lineage combines the ancient royal branches of Scotland [...] Because a man could claim the throne of Scotland by marrying me, I was not safe. Nor were my kinsmen, come to that: if they were killed, one after another, our line would be eliminated at its heart, making room for others' ambitions. Such is the way of things when one's heritage is ancient, pure, and royal.

Little good did the blood of ancients do me. I was like a lark spiraling upward, unaware of the hawks above judging time and distance to the prize.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Macbeth, Gilcomgan , Bodhe

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the novel Gruadh emphasizes the strength of her bloodline and the power of her heritage. Her name itself signals her pedigree—the names of her father, grandfather, and great grandfather are incorporated into it, a constant reminder both of her powerful right to the throne and of the obligation she faces to protect her family line.

Gruadh's royal blood means that marrying her would give any man a strong claim to the throne. Therefore, many men have fought, and continue to fight, to marry Gruadh, because she provides a kind of golden ticket, boosting their social status and adding legitimacy to their political causes. It is for this reason that Gruadh is kidnapped twice as a child, both times by men who want to marry her or punish her father for refusing to arrange a marriage. In each case, her heritage, which will eventually allow her to become queen and secure great power for herself, also places her in great danger and makes her powerless against those who

would hurt her.

Gruadh's heritage is thus an obligation as much as it is a blessing—because she has such high-ranking ancestors, Bodhe expects her to do her part to continue the legacy of their family, specifically by marrying whomever he chooses to make the best political alliance. Gruadh begrudgingly marries her first husband, Gilcomgan, for this very reason, but it is only with time that she sees the power she wields by right of her blood and understands the ways she can take control of her own destiny, using her heritage to attain things *she* wants.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ “A princess of Scotland has no use of those skills.” “Scathach was also a princess,” I pointed out. “Scathach of the old legends, who had a school for fighting on the Isle of Skye and taught the heroes of the Fianna their skills—”

“I know the tale,” he said curtly. “Those were older days. It is not your place to fight, but ours to defend you, if need be.” [...]

“I am your direct heir now,” I reminded Bodhe. “I must be prepared, since you say I could be a queen one day, and my husband a king. So men will always argue over me, and more deaths will occur on my account.” [...]

“You have a warrior spirit,” he admitted, “for a gently raised daughter.”

“Scathach of Skye,” I reminded. “No one would have stolen her away.”

Related Characters: Bodhe , Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Farquhar mac Bodhe , Ailsa , Thorfin Sigurdsson, Scathach of Skye

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh uses the legend of Scathach of Skye to prove a point to Bodhe. She wants to learn how to fight and protect herself, and although her father argues that women in their society don't learn to fight, she shows him there is a historical (or at least mythological) precedent for women warriors. Here, history, and oral histories especially, do more than educate about the past; they provide a template for potential futures. Gruadh has already begun to learn that violence is “part and parcel of our world,” and so, unable to recuse herself, she decides she must more actively participate.

Bodhe does not want Gruadh to learn to fight. He argues that Gruadh is inherently powerful because of her heritage and does not need to augment her birthright with swordcraft. However, Gruadh argues that her pedigree is exactly why she needs to learn to fight. Because she comes from such a powerful family, and because any man who marries her will become more powerful by association, and because she has already been kidnapped twice, she wants to be able to protect herself.

In the end, Bodhe relents. He acknowledges her allusions to Scathach, and sees her point that, if she could protect herself, perhaps other lives that would potentially be lost defending her could be spared. In the end, his concern is for his daughter, his only direct living heir, and he will do whatever he can to keep her alive.

☛☛ Our priest baptized the child to protect her soul, and the midwives bathed her in warm milk and lifted her in their hands as they spoke charms against all manner of ills: fire, drowning, illness and injury, fairies, bewitchings, elf bolts, all conceivable harms. Bodhe named his new daughter Brigid to further protect her. Yet within days, Ailsa and tiny Brigid were buried together on a hill overlooking the sea, and I, who heard equally the catechism and the Celtic tales, wondered if their souls would travel to heaven or Tír na n'Óg, the paradise beyond Ireland in the misty realm, which our bard spoke about. [...]

"Ailsa of Argyll is dead," [Father Anselm] said bluntly, stopping, "and her soul needs our prayers, not trinkets, so that she may be forgiven by the grace of God. Perhaps she need only spend a little time in purgatory before her soul is purified of sin."

"My mother will go straight to heaven on the strength of her character," I said. "Though she might prefer Tír na n'Óg, where she would not be judged."

Related Characters: Father Anselm , Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Bodhe , Brigid , Ailsa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Ailsa's death and the ceremony surrounding it exemplify the blending of Christianity and Celtic paganism. In order to protect baby Brigid, a priest baptizes her, which is in keeping with Catholic practices. However, then midwives cast spells and charms, practices generally frowned upon by the church, but here serving as additional precautions.

Even in her conception of the afterlife, Gruadh shows the way multiple religious traditions have mixed in her life and her mind—she wonders if her mother and little sister will go to a Christian heaven, or to Tír na n'Óg, the paradise of the Celtic afterlife. Here, multiple religious traditions simply provide more options for beliefs and rituals. Although Father Anselm, a Catholic priest, looks down upon pagan practices, insultingly calling their enchanted objects "trinkets," most others are easily able to assimilate the two traditions and use them together.

Gruadh, for her part, is more interested in traditional Celtic religion than in Catholicism, likely because she sees the latter as restrictive—requiring her to only practice Catholic rituals and frown upon Celtic tradition, whereas Celtic tradition can easily expand to accommodate other religious practices. Similarly, Gruadh often feels judged and disrespected by Father Anselm, a feeling that likely informs her view of the entire religion.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ Them men formed a circle around me, friends and enemies both. Ahead, on the earth of the practice yard, two swords lay crossed and ready, shining blades reflecting the glow of the sunrise. Nearby, horses stood, gleaming and grand, ready to be ridden, while overhead, two eagles winged toward the mountains, and a raven settled on a gatepost. Moon and stars were still visible in the sky, and the sunrise flowed over the hilltops like a spill of blood, the sun in its midst like a golden wafer. [...] I knew some of the elements—ravens were death and warning, eagles pride and pairing, horses freedom; the swords might be conflict or war, and the circle of warriors around me could have been a sign of protection, or the men in my future. [...] My mother had been gifted with the Sight that brings spontaneous visions, so common among the Gaels that we call it *Da Shealladh*, the gift of two sighs. A great-grandmother on Bodhe's side had been a *taibhsear*, a seer, from whom others sought advice.

Until that moment, I had not known that I, too, had a hint of that talent.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Bethoc, Mairi, Ailsa , Ketill Bruisson , Thorfin Sigurdsson, Macbeth

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh will continue to have visions of the future for the rest of her life, but this is the first. Her visions connect the past, present and future—Da Shealladh is hereditary, and so links her to her late mother and great grandmother, while giving her insight into what is to come. Gruadh's visions are both of her personal future, and the futures of people she knows, and of Scotland as a whole. Because she plays such an important role in Scottish politics, her future and the future of the nation are deeply intertwined.

Later, Gruadh will visit her cousins Mairi and Bethoc who will help explain her vision to her, comforting her that “the signs you saw speak of Scotland's future more than your own.” Together the women reason that some of the men represent Gruadh's future husbands. Her initial interpretations of the symbols will also prove correct—she will be prideful in her second marriage to Macbeth, but they will eventually become a powerful pair. She will have freedom both as a mormaer's wife and later as queen. She will live through many battles and wars, and even fight in some herself. She will often be surrounded by men who love and protect her.

“The truth is in what Moray offers,” [Bodhe] said. “Every mormaer of that region has an ancient right to be called *Rí a Moreb*, king of Moray. His wife can be called *ban-rí*, queen. Just now, Gilcomgan and King Malcolm support one another. But if the *Rí a Moreb* ever summoned men to revolt, the strength of that army would be such that the mormaer of Moray could himself be king over all Scotland.”

“And marriage to me could ensure that for Gilcomgan. Or for our son,” I added. [...] He looked hard at me. “Even carrying the blood of Celtic kings, you cannot rule alone. You need a strong and ambitious husband.

“Our blood needs one,” I corrected bitterly.

Related Characters: Bodhe , Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Thorfin Sigurdsson, King Malcolm, Gilcomgan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh begins to understand the depth of her obligation to her family and her heritage. Although he does not want to marry Gilcomgan, she understands how it is necessary for her family for her to go through with the wedding. She also understands the sacrifices Bodhe has made in order to advance his bloodline. He is content never taking the throne

himself, as long as he can help install one of his heirs. Both Gruadh and Bodhe work for the greater good of their family—a victory for one is a victory for all.

Bodhe also recognizes the old-fashioned sexism of Medieval Scotland. Although Gruadh has the pedigree to make a bid for the throne, she cannot rule without a husband.

Therefore, he has done his best to set her up with a husband who will help her claim her blood right, which she cannot do alone. Bodhe understands that Moray is the most powerful region in Scotland, and that as the wife of the mormaer of Moray Gruadh will be in essence a minor queen. He sees this as an important stepping-stone on the way to the Scottish throne. Although later in the novel Gruadh will begin to crave power for herself, now, she only goes through with her father's plan to please him, not because she has any desire for titles or for revenge.

Chapter 8 Quotes

“Often the meaning of the omens we see it not clear until later. If we knew too much about the future, we might be afraid to step from our houses. Do not fret—the signs you saw speak of Scotland's future even more than your own.”

“Scotland?” I blinked. “Because of the warriors and symbols of warfare?”

“Perhaps they will be Rue's husbands in future,” Bethoc said. “Well, not all of them,” she amended when I gaped at her.

Mairi took my hands in hers and closed her eyes. “Two husbands,” she said. “Three, if you so choose. Like most women you will have a share of happiness and measures of sorrow. Unlike most, you will have... power.” She let go of my fingers. “You can draw strength from within yourself, like water from a well. Your mother gave you the sign of the good Brigid on your shoulder,” she went on, touching my upper sleeve, which covered the symbol. “Call upon that protection whenever you need it.”

Related Characters: Bethoc, Mairi, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Bodhe , The Goddess Brigid , Macbeth, Gilcomgan , Ailsa

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bethoc, Mairi, and Gruadh discuss Gruadh's vision from Chapter 7. Although Gruadh had asked for a vision of

her own future, instead she was granted a vision of Scotland's military and political future. However, because Gruadh is a powerful woman, and will marry two powerful men, her future becomes entwined with that of her nation. Her personal struggles—the eventual murder of her father, the future of his son—are Scotland's struggles. Bodhe's death motivates her to seek revenge, while her marriage to Macbeth gives both of them the drive they need to ascend to the throne.

Mairi reminds Gruadh to draw strength from her triskele tattoo, a gift from her mother. Ailsa gave Gruadh this symbol of protection intentionally, and Gruadh's ability to see the future incidentally. Both of these inheritances will serve Gruadh well; she can protect herself in the present by drawing upon the triskele, and then prepare for the future by investigating her visions.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ In the afternoon I looked up toward the ridge of a hill and saw a stand of tall pikes thrusting up like slender trees. The point of each carried a decapitated head, black and gruesome, pitch-soaked to preserve them a long while, until they decayed to skulls [...] Aella gasped, near to retching, and hid her eyes with her hand. Bethoc looked away. But I stared, horrified and transfixed, even when Ruari and Conn drew their horses alongside to urge us onward. I remembered that my guard and my only brother had been beheaded but [...] never piked.

I would not shrink from the grim display. Someday I might have to show toughness for such things, even if I quailed within. As wife to Scotland's most powerful mormaer, it was in my interest to understand the ways of men and warfare. My own life might turn on that knowledge one day.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Gilcomgan, Farquhar mac Bodhe, Ruari, Bethoc, Aella

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

On a trip to witness a meeting of kings, Gruadh's envoy passes this grisly scene. Gruadh has been exposed to a lot of violence at a young age. Barely a teenager, she has been kidnapped twice, survived an attempted rape, and watched her brother murdered in front of her. However, instead of shrinking from violence, Gruadh has decided that she must

strengthen herself in order to face it. Although women traditionally spend their lives inside the house, and are not expected to know about politics, warfare, or the deaths incurred by both, Gruadh knows that as Gilcomgan's wife she will likely have a role in ruling Moray, as well as in running her household. As a political leader, Gruadh knows she must have a strong stomach. This will serve her well as Gilcomgan's wife, and serve her better as Macbeth's bride and later Queen.

☞ At one point, King Malcolm himself carried his great-grandson and held him out to King Cnut. The prince, at two years old a sturdy handful, set up a lusty caterwauling, so that both men looked annoyed. Still, the message was clear: young Malcolm mac Duncan of Scotland had made a symbolic homage to the ruler of England.

And it was clear to those watching that in making his great-grandson pledge to England, old Malcolm was declaring that his line, grandson to son, would be kings hereafter. [...]

The child's mother, Lady Sybilla, stepped forward to take her boy from her father-by-law. I was among the retinue of women who walked with her, and she turned to give the squalling child to me. He struggled to get down, and I set him on his feet, taking his hand. He pulled me along rather like a ram dragging its shepherd. Others were amused, but I felt a strange sense, like a weight on my shoulders, on my soul.

And then, with a shudder, I knew it for an omen of the future—myself, and all of us gathered that day were linked to this moment as if by the tug of a heavy chain.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Donald Bán, King Cnut, Crinan, Duncan mac Crinan, Malcolm mac Duncan, King Malcolm, Macbeth, Bodhe, Lady Sybilla

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh has a vision of the future, as she watches King Malcolm construct his own vision for the next several ruling generations of Scotland. Although Gruadh's vision is supernatural, it only reaffirms what she has already seen that morning. Although traditionally, Scottish succession followed the Celtic model, in which the next king came from a different branch of the family tree than the sitting king (meaning the crown did not pass from father to son, but from uncle to nephew or cousin to cousin), King Malcolm

wants to instate linear succession, which would mean his sons, grandsons, or great grandsons would be king after him. By presenting his great grandson to the king of England, then, King Malcolm signals to everyone present that he intends for his bloodline to rule indefinitely.

Gruadh's vision, in which she is dragged forward by Malcolm mac Duncan, gestures to the future, when Lady Sybilla will ask her to care for her children if anything is to happen to her. Gruadh's obligation to Lady Sybilla will mean that she has to act against her own best interest. Later in the novel, Lady Sybilla will die and Duncan will be murdered by Macbeth. Though their two children will inevitably try to avenge their father's death when they grow up, Gruadh remembers her promise to Lady Sybilla and saves the lives of the two boys—one of whom, she knows from another prophecy, will ultimately kill Macbeth. The weight Gruadh feels in this moment, is the weight of the many decision she will have to make regarding this child in the future, and her responsibility for his life, and the lives he will touch.

Also notable is that the line "kings hereafter" comes directly from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In that play, Macbeth receives a prophecy from three witches, who declare that *he*, not Malcolm and his children, will be king hereafter. This literary allusion points to the subjective and fallible nature of history, as the same story can be reconstructed in such vastly different ways.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☛ Together they had conspired to kill Gilcomgan and wrest Moray from him. Macbeth had overtaken my future, and my child's, out of his own ambition and desire for revenge. My fingers let go the clutched yarn, red strands unraveling like blood to pool on the floor. I turned to leave, to suppress my anger, as Bodhe might have done. But I was not my father.

Swords sparked bright against the wall, where a few of them leaned, unused. One of them was my own. I snatched it up and turned back to face the men. "Upon this sword, which Bodhe gave to me," I said, "I swear to protect my child from all your cold scheming. Listen to me," I said through my teeth when Macbeth stepped forward. "No more of Bodhe's blood shall suffer for your ambitions!"

They stood still, king, husband, and housecarls. An oath made on a blade was a fierce thing and never taken lightly. I wanted them to understand that I was not helpless, no pawn to stand by while their plans destroyed by father's proud line. Wild Celtic blood ran strong in me, a legacy of warriors, warrior queens, and sword oaths. It was not the wisest thing I have done; it was something foolish, something brave.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, King Malcolm (speaker), Finlach , Gilcomgan , Farquhar mac Bodhe , Bodhe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh's first husband, Gilcomgan, was murdered by Macbeth, who then immediately married her. Gruadh understood this was a way for Macbeth to reclaim Moray, which was stolen from him when Gilcomgan murdered Macbeth's father, Finlach. Still, although Gruadh understands the way in which Macbeth was driven to avenge his family and take back what he believes is his; she is also still loyal to Gilcomgan, and hates that her life has been disrupted in a way she feels was unjust.

Gruadh had understood the basic contours of Macbeth's motivation, but in this moment is distressed to learn that he and King Malcolm had, in fact, conspired together to install Macbeth as mormaer of one of Scotland's most powerful regions. Macbeth had been making a political play, but for Gruadh, the cost of his grab for power was her life, marriage, and family. She resents that her own future and desires have become secondary to his.

Always volatile and prone to violence, Gruadh is inspired to make a blood oath against Macbeth and King Malcolm. She promises that she will protect her family against their schemes, referring to the deaths both of her first husband and her brother, Farquhar, who was killed by King Malcolm's son's men. Although threats and swords are unwomanly, Gruadh doesn't care. She cares about the future of herself and the ones she loves, which she thinks are under attack by King Malcolm and her new husband.

☛☛ Peace and acceptance were not pretty threads in my wool basket that winter. I realized that I was alone in my resentment and anger. Others readily accepted Macbeth as the new mormaer, soon calling him Moray when they addressed him. [...]

One day Maeve pulled me aside. “Find some peace for yourself,” she said. “This grief and torment will poison your babe.”

That night I sought out Elgin’s little wooden chapel, intending to pray for serenity and forgiveness. When I pushed open the door, I saw that Macbeth was already there, on his knees before the alter. He wore only a simple long shirt and treads, and for a moment I did not know him. His head was bowed, glinting dark gold in the light of candles. I saw him cover his face, and then he prostrated himself on the worn planks of the floor like a suffering pilgrim.

Faith is a private thing to my thinking, and here I witnessed an intimate side of the man. He appeared contrite, even tormented. I guessed at his sin, the murder of his first cousin Gilcomgan. By the teaching of the Church, it could blacken his soul and affect him for all eternity come judgment Day, if not expunged.

Backing away, I closed the door. I felt a stir of sympathy for a man who felt such clear anguish within himself. When I wanted to hate him most, I could not. By inches and breaths, my resentments faded, much as I strived to stoke them.

Related Characters: Maeve, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Macbeth, Gilcomgan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Although Gruadh’s household quickly accepts Macbeth as its new head, Gruadh herself has difficulty moving on after the murder of her first husband, Gilcomgan. She refuses to forgive Macbeth, although it would make her life easier and is what is expected of her as a wife and a woman; women are expected to be soft and amicable, but as Gruadh notes, her wool basket (a traditionally feminine item) does not contain peace and acceptance (traditionally feminine tools).

Aside from making Gruadh’s life unpleasant, Maeve, her nurse, worries that her negative emotions will somehow damage her child. In Maeve’s eyes, it is a woman’s job to do whatever she can to be a good wife and mother, even if that means putting her own heartbreak and anger aside. Gruadh doesn’t necessarily agree, but doesn’t want to risk hurting her child, and so turns to the church. Although often Gruadh turns to Celtic traditional magic and religion in times of stress, Catholicism offers a strong framework

through which to find forgiveness for oneself or others, which is likely why she turns to it.

Gruadh finds peace and forgiveness in the chapel, but in an unexpected way. Seeing Macbeth look for penance for what Gruadh perceives to be his sins makes her feel sympathy for him. She understands that he did not act selfishly or callously with no thought for those he had hurt. Instead, she sees that he did what he felt he had to do to avenge his family, but still is disturbed by the violence he must use as a political tool.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☛☛ “I hear,” Macbeth said, “that wives of other mormaers, even kings, stay at home where they are safe, and keep mute about steel-games unless asked for their opinion.”

“I am none of that cloth.” [...]

Walking through dry sand to meet my friends, having witnessed by husband do cold murder, I yet felt a stirring admiration for him as a capable warlord. That day, as at other times, he had demonstrated uncompromising will, as well as physical ability and courage. He revealed a strong sense of what was right and what was not, and what was possible between those points—and he took steps to achieve it.

Whether or not he knew it, I considered myself his capable equal, not a subservient wife. Raised by a warlord in a nest of warriors, I would not be regarded as significant in my small household circle, only to be dismissed beyond its boundaries.

Related Characters: Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Angus mac Fergus, Thorfin Sigurdsson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Macbeth assumes that Gruadh will be like other mormaer’s wives—that she will remain at home and concern herself only with domestic affairs. He further assumes she will have no opinions on politics, and if she does, that she will keep them to herself like the “wives of other mormaers.” However, Gruadh is not like many of her contemporaries. From a young age she has learned about warfare and politics. By marrying her, Macbeth did not marry a meek woman who would be subservient to him. Instead, as he will soon learn, he married his equal—both in ambition and intellect. Gruadh will not let her desires come second, and she wants an equal partnership.

It is specifically because Gruadh is so interested in politics that she is impressed by Macbeth's steely resolve and ambition. After holding a grudge against him for many months, what finally warms her to him is an understanding of their shared desire for power. Once Gruadh can respect Macbeth as a mormaer and warrior, she can begin to respect him as her husband.

more than just talk—she's brandished swords on more than one occasion to defend her self and her son, Lulach. What Gruadh also understands is that, to be a good wife to Macbeth, and an equal partner and ruler, she must understand violence. Ruling over a region, and one day ruling Scotland, will require a balance of diplomacy and war, and she knows she must be comfortable with violence when necessary.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☪ “Men,” Catriona said, “understand life and death differently than women. Ours is to give birth, life, and comfort. We cannot bring ourselves to take life, knowing its struggle and value.”

Somehow this saintly show of opinion irritated me. “If I had to kill to save a life, mine or my son's,” I said, “I would do it.”

“Rue is trained at arms,” Bethoc said proudly.

“Lady Gruadh has a stiffer backbone than I do,” Catriona said. “It is my work to bring life into this world. My heart is far too tender to destroy it.”

“That is not my intent,” I defended. “The lady of a powerful region must have a martial spirit as well as a virtuous one. I would not hesitate to put on armor and take up a sword, if such was needed for the good of all.”

Related Characters: Bethoc, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth, Catriona of Kinlossie (speaker), Lulach, Macbeth

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Catriona is a foil to Gruadh. Whereas Gruadh is a complicated woman uninterested in performing femininity, Catriona is almost infuriatingly feminine, constructing her entire identity around being a peaceful healer and mother, so far removed from the war and violence of men that that even hypothetically she could not imagine taking a life. Catriona is, unbeknownst to Gruadh at this point, also having an affair with her husband, Macbeth. Therefore, it is likely that Catriona is trying to set herself up as the perfect wife and woman, in contrast to Gruadh, whose more violent impulses and interest in politics compromises her ability to sit peacefully in the domestic sphere.

Gruadh understands that being a woman doesn't mean she cannot take a life. She values her family and protecting those she loves more than she cares about projecting an image of dainty, nonviolent femininity. Moreover, Gruadh is

☪ Yet I had to master my temper, as he had done, and stay. Obligation to my kin group demanded that I remain with Moray's new mormaer, who had no equal among other warlords. Fate had set me in this situation, after all. I frowned, for he left something unsaid. “What purpose do you see in this union?”

One hand on the door, he turned back. “Together we can tap the power of your legacy and mine,” he said quietly, “and take Scotland under our rule.”

There. He said outright what I, and others, suspected. I straightened my shoulders. This, then, was what Bodhe wanted, and what generations of my kin deserved in their honor. “A thing like that turns on loyalty,” I said, “or falters for lack of it.” He nodded. “It does.”

“Well enough,” I said, watching him. An agreement of sorts.

Related Characters: Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Catriona of Kinlossie, Bodhe

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

This moment comes after Gruadh and Macbeth have had a fight. Gruadh, having discovered Macbeth was having an affair with Catriona, feels betrayed. Macbeth promises to break it off, but Gruadh wonders how they can go on. She knows that she cannot leave him and has an obligation to family to remain in Moray and make the most of her marriage to her respected and powerful husband. She understands that, with him, she can become powerful too, and therefore fulfill her duty to her family. But she also knows the marriage will only work if they trust and respect each other.

This is the first moment when Macbeth acknowledges that he married Gruadh for her pedigree, but that he wants to work with her, to take Scotland together. They will rule as partners, with Gruadh's legacy and power acknowledged as

equal to Macbeth's. Their partnership continues to be important throughout the novel but is truly born here, when Gruadh and Macbeth reach a truce for the first time.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☞☞ "There must be some kind of justice and recompense for these deaths!"

"Justice will be brought," Macbeth said low.

"When?" I asked, splaying my hands, slim fingered and beringed, on the table. Such feminine hands for such hard masculine thoughts. The urge sprang in me like a dark wolf within. I did not like it, but fed it nonetheless. *It is the way of things*, Bodhe would have said. "When will you avenge my kinsmen? Tomorrow? A year from now?" [...]

"If one of Bodhe's bloodline held the throne someday," my husband then said, "it would be far more lasting revenge than bloodshed now."

Related Characters: Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Lulach, Duncan mac Crinan, Crinan, King Malcolm, Bodhe, Ruari, Angus mac Fergus

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

After Bodhe is murdered, likely by King Malcolm, Crinan, or Duncan's men, Gruadh wants revenge for her shrinking family tree. Macbeth and others caution a more diplomatic approach.

This passage, in which Gruadh feels her feminine hands are mismatched with her violent masculine thoughts, mirrors a similar passage in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In that play, Lady Macbeth asks the gods to "unsex me here," to fill her with "direst cruelty" and take away her feminine remorse. Unable to carry out the revenge she so desperately craves as a woman, Gruadh understands that, were she a man, she could carry out her will herself. However, she must instead wait for a man to avenge her father for her.

Ironically, given that in the novel masculinity and violence are often equated, whereas femininity is linked to peace, Macbeth is the one to suggest a more peaceful solution. He suggests that, were he and Gruadh able to ascend to the Scottish throne, their newfound power would be greater revenge than violence enacted on one of their enemies. Gruadh understands the genius of this plan, but nonetheless itches to inflict the pain inflicted upon her after the murder of her father.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☞☞ "The old legends are filled with such women—the great Irish queen, Macha, and Princess Scathach of Skye, who trained warriors in her fighting school, and also her sister Aoife, who bested Cu Chulainn and bore his son [...] Celtic women have fought beside their men since before the names of kings were remembered. And even though Rome forbids Gaelic women to fight, it is rightful enough according to our customs."

"They forbid with good reason," Maeve said, bouncing Lulach on her lap. "Women have enough to do and should not have to go out and fight men's battles, too." [...]

"The eyes of the Church cannot easily see beyond the mountains of the Gaels," I said, "where warlike behavior in a woman is not sinful heresy, and is sometimes even necessary." And I remembered my early vows—as a girl taking up a sword to defend herself, as a woman swearing on a sword to defend her own. Another facet of my obligation to my long legacy came clear: if others were so set on eliminating my line, and I and Lulach the last of it, then I would be steadfast as any warrior.

Related Characters: Maeve, Aella, Bethoc, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Dolina, Bodhe, Lulach, Scathach of Skye

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

After a dinner during which a bard tells an old legend involving the bana-ghaisgeach, or Celtic warrior women of lore, Bethoc turns to Gruadh and tells her friend that she is like one of these women. When Gruadh first convinced Bodhe to allow her to learn to fight, she invoked ancient legends of warrior women, including that of Scathach of Skye, who defended her homeland with her own sword and who Gruadh again brings up now. While the younger women are more supportive of a woman taking up arms and following in this ancient tradition Maeve, who is older and more set in her ways, is less enthusiastic about it.

Maeve often chastises Gruadh for not being feminine enough, and in this moment argues that women have enough to do at home without invading the masculine sphere by taking up arms. In the past, she has warned Gruadh that playing with swords will make her infertile, or else disrupt her pregnancy. This kind of advice has no scientific basis and is instead based on the idea that acting like man will somehow affect Gruadh's ability to reproduce like a woman.

Gruadh references the Catholic church, which forbids

women from fighting. Earlier in her life, Dolina's love of the church caused her to stop her stepdaughter's sword lessons. However, Gruadh, who is less religious than Dolina, appreciates that the center of the church, in Rome, is too far away to easily enforce its doctrines, allowing Scottish and Irish women to fight if they so choose. And Gruadh wants to—she sees her swordcraft as a way to protect herself and her family when necessary, and as such is in a way an extension of her motherly and wifely duties.

“Your weapons practice and your desire for vengeance,” Maeve told me one day, “are hardening you, dulling the bed of your womb. How can you expect to conceive a child when you feed yourself on spite and anger? Those are poisons for the body.”

She made me think, I admit, and she made me wonder. But I did not stop, not then. [...]

“Your wish for vengeance is sinful,” [Father Osgar] told me one day after confession, when we walked a little. “But it is understandable. Let prayer and faith heal you.”

“I cannot give it up,” I said. “I am not yet done with this.”

“Give it up or keep it close,” he answered, “but know that until you find some peace in your heart, I will pray on your behalf. Grief is sometimes like a sharp-toothed demon that gets hold of our hearts. But its grip weakens with time, and one day you will be free of it.”

Related Characters: Maeve, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Macbeth, Bodhe

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

After the death of her father, Bodhe, Gruadh becomes almost single-mindedly focused on revenge. Maeve argues that Gruadh needs to let go, a complaint she often makes when she feels Gruadh is displaying unfeminine feelings. Maeve believes that vengeance and swordcraft are masculine pursuits that will somehow upset Gruadh's pregnancy. Gruadh is less concerned about her pregnancy and more about being unable to live a happy life, because she is so obsessed with avenging her family.

Elgin's priest provides her with some guidance. In the past, Gruadh, who often turns to Celtic traditional religion for help, has turned to the church. When she had difficulty getting over her resentment of Macbeth she turned towards the chapel, and again she looks to a priest to help

her. Gruadh's desire for revenge is sinful, according to Father Osgar, but more immediately problematic, as it is ruining her life and not actually helping her on her way to avenging Bodhe.

Chapter 20 Quotes

“If we were to gain rod and crown,” I said low, so that none should hear but he, “we could satisfy our heritage and avenge our two fathers, all at once.”

“Just so.” He cast me a look that was sharp and clear.

I felt a chill. “You led me deliberately to share your plan, from the first.”

“In part,” he admitted, “for I knew the worth in your blood, and saw the worth of your nature. But I could never have planed as well as fate has done. It has twinned our motives now. Your father and mine are gone, and they deserve this. Our branches, Gabhran and Lorne, deserve this.”

“And the ancient Celtic blood of the whole of Scotland—it, too, needs this.”

“It does.” He smiled, and we rode on in silence.

Related Characters: Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Bodhe, Finlach

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between Gruadh and Macbeth mirrors an earlier conversation they had in Chapter 17. In that scene, Gruadh and Macbeth had a fight, and Gruadh asked Macbeth why he married her. Macbeth had explained, “Together we can tap the power of your legacy and mine [...] and take Scotland under our rule.” Now, their plan is developing. They have a strong partnership, built both on love and trust, and on a mutual desire to ascend to the Scottish throne. Here, Macbeth is finally revealing to Gruadh that he had planned for her to be his queen all along. He had known the strength of her royal bloodline, but was pleasantly surprised that her personality, and not just her pedigree, matched his. Additionally, both of their fathers have been murdered at this point, which Macbeth could not have planned or accounted for; this means that their desire for revenge is “twinned,” and that they are on the same page regarding revenge.

Also notable is that Macbeth frames his quest for power as person ambition, familial ambition, and patriotic ambition all

at once. He believes his kingship is as much for Scotland's wellbeing as it is for his own. Like Gruadh, who often has visions of both her future and Scotland's future at once, he sees his life as deeply entwined with that of his nation.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ “Your husband Macbeth will be remembered among the greatest of his ilk, the kings of Scotland,” she said. “One of your sons will be a warrior. Not the others.”

“Others,” I repeated, pleased. “Monks, then, or abbots? Bards, perhaps.”

“They will not be,” she murmured slowly, eyes very dark, “warriors.”

A shiver slipped down my spine. [...]

“Carry this warning to your husband. I have told him the same, but tell him again from me. Beware the son of the warrior whose spilled blood will make him a king.”

I stared. Her cloak, when she turned, was a swirl of utter blackness, so that I stepped back for fear the portal to the other side, open that night, might overtake me.

I did not repeat her message to Macbeth.

Related Characters: Una, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Donald Bán, Malcolm mac Duncan, Duncan mac Crinan, Lulach, Macbeth

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

On All Saint's Eve, the equivalent of modern-day Halloween, Gruadh and her friends and handmaidens go out into the local village. Una, the coal-burner's wife, is telling fortunes by cracking eggs in water and making predictions about whether or not young women will marry, but she makes sure to pull Gruadh aside to tell her a special prophecy.

Una tells Gruadh some information she already knows or suspects—Gruadh expects Macbeth will become king, and she has heard before (from Mairi and Bethoc after her very first vision) that she will have two or three husbands in her lifetime. However, Una also gives Gruadh some new insight into her future: Gruadh's sons, with the exception of one, will not be warriors. Gruadh hopes this means they will just have other occupations, but Una's foreboding tone implies they will not live long enough to have a vocation at all.

Una further warns Gruadh that “the son of the warrior whose spilled blood” will make Macbeth a king will also be a

danger to Macbeth. Gruadh ignores this warning, not even telling her husband about it, and continues to ignore it throughout the novel, even as it threatens to come true. Eventually, Macbeth will kill Duncan, and his children Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán will grow up to be threats to Macbeth—thus fulfilling the prophecy.

Years before this happens, however, when presented with the opportunity to kill the children and prevent them from rising up against Macbeth, Gruadh actively encourages her husband to let them live, weighing the sin of killing children against the risk of prophecy coming true. Although when the time comes Gruadh will have the information available to save her husband's life down the line, simply knowing the future is not enough to sway a person's behavior, especially if they are acting according to their conscience or moral code.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ Although I had a place on his war council, lately he had not included me, claiming I needed rest. I did not. I needed something more to do, for my household was smoothly run, and my son was finding his way in the world more and more without his mother. With no other little ones to fill my arms, as I should have had by then, I lacked enough to do. [...] I watched carefully as I could over Macbeth's Moray in his absence, and the responsibly was no chore. Later I realized that in small and large ways, I had begun to prepare myself for what might come. Queenship in its many aspects was not a teachable thing, yet instinctively I tutored myself with charitable works and sword training. Inch by ell, I became the small queen of Moray in more than name alone.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Bethoc, Aella

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

Practicing queenship serves several purposes. Gruadh, who has been unable to conceive any healthy children with Macbeth wants to be distracted from their mutual infertility. Additionally, though excluded from Macbeth's war council, she feels the need to make a political impact. She thus devotes herself to helping her husband in his absence, after he rides with Finn and Ruari without telling her where they are going.

By preparing to be queen, and by acting as “the small queen of Moray,” Gruadh also begins her revenge against those who killed her father. Although initially she had wanted to fight back or kill one of the men involved in her father’s death, she now understands revenge doesn’t have to be violent. Instead, it can be rising to a position of power even when people tried to cut her down and prevent her from getting there.

☛ I brought my dilemma to Macbeth, too. “What if God is punishing me for grievances and ambitions, for sometimes wanting you to be king, no matter the cost?”

“Be patient,” he said, as he often did. “What will we give our children without the kingdom that is our lineage, and theirs? All will come to us in time, including sons.”

Maeve, who wanted me to produce another babe so that she could knee-nurse again before she was too old, said she knew what was wrong. “It is willfulness and old grief, poisoning your womb. You want to be a warrior, and you want to be a mother. A woman keeps to home and family, and tends to matters inside the home. A man keeps to war games and tends to matters outside.”

A queen tends to both, I wanted to say, but did not. She would not understand.

Related Characters: Maeve , Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Unable to have healthy baby, Gruadh turns to her husband wondering what is wrong. Maeve has often chastised Gruadh for being too masculine, and blamed her sword fighting and grudge-holding on her infertility. Now, Gruadh wonders if her ambitions and sinful desire for revenge have poisoned her uterus, or else cursed her with divine retribution. In reality, infertility is not a moral issue, but a biological one; still, Gruadh cannot help but link her femininity to her fertility and wonder if unwomanly thoughts make her less able to carry a baby.

Macbeth does not share Gruadh’s fears, arguing that he doesn’t mind that they’ve been unable to have children. He wants to be able to give his children something as inheritance, and so reasons that, until he and Gruadh are king and queen they have no true legacy to pass on to their children.

In the second part of this quote Gruadh begins to reconcile the masculine and feminine parts of her personality. While Maeve argues that a woman’s place is in the home, Gruadh understands that, if she wants to be a leader in her domain, or better yet a queen, she must venture outside as well. A queen requires aspects of both the traditionally masculine and feminine, and so by bucking traditional gender roles, Gruadh is merely preparing for her role as ruler of Scotland.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☛ “My ambition was always for Scotland as much as myself. We must be careful to preserve the heart of what is called Gaelic, the honor, the power in it, when the outer world—the Church, our enemies, the trade, all the rest—stands to change us. Duncan is hastening the end of the Gaels, if he even knows it.”

“You can honor that heritage and vindicate your kin and mine,” I reminded him.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth, Macbeth (speaker), Gilcomgan , Farquhar mac Bodhe , Finlach , Bodhe , Duncan mac Crinan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

As Macbeth and Gruadh discuss their political future, Macbeth, as he often does, claims that his political ambition is not selfish. Instead, he believes that he is the best king for Scotland and that his actions are thus for the sake of the country he loves—not simply for boosting his own personal power. Macbeth sees Duncan as a bad king because he is destroying his country. Both Macbeth and Gruadh understand the importance of maintaining Gaelic traditions, even as Scotland yields to some outside influence. However, they feel Duncan is destroying the core of the country and must be stopped.

Additionally, Macbeth and Gruadh feel they are avenging their families by taking the throne. Macbeth’s father, Finlach was murdered, in an attempt to cut off his bloodline, as was Gruadh’s father, Bodhe, as well as her brother, Farquhar. Although Macbeth has killed in the past to avenge his father (murdering Gruadh’s first husband, Gilcomgan), now they agree that the best revenge is claiming the throne and ascending to power despite attempts to keep them down and to destroy their legacies.

Chapter 26 Quotes

“I made a sword vow years ago to protect my own, and I will keep it. I have a home and a son to protect, and I have a husband to support as best I can. All my life I have lived a female among Celtic warriors. My sword arm is trained, my bow and arrow are swift, and I have already bloodied the blade. Know this—my determination is in place. I will go with you.”

Macbeth took my horse’s bridle. “Each one who rides with me contributes to the whole. Your skill I will not argue, but your fortitude is little tested. You would require guards to protect you, and that detracts from the whole.”

“Have you not made it your purpose to uphold the old ways, the ancient ways, of the Gaels and the Celts?” The horse shifted under me, and I pulled the reins. Macbeth still held the bridle. “Celtic women have always fought beside their men.”

Related Characters: Macbeth, Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), King Malcolm, Finn mac Nevin, Duncan mac Crinan, Lulach

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

As Macbeth prepares to march with his army against Duncan, in order to wrestle the crown from the sitting king, Gruadh insists she be allowed to come too. Macbeth initially dismisses her, because although he respects her strength he does not believe women should be on the battlefield and worries she will be both a distraction and a liability. However, Gruadh wears him down; she has been preparing for this moment her whole life, and recently had Finn make her some practical armor in case she ever needed to go to war.

Gruadh sees going into battle as an extension of her duties as Macbeth’s wife, Lulach’s mother, and the ruler of Moray. She knows that being a woman doesn’t limit her to the domestic sphere. Instead, she feels it obligates her to go out and defend and support her family when necessary. She references a vow she made early in her relationship to Macbeth, when King Malcolm came to visit. She picked up a sword and swore to protect her family. Now, she is making good on that promise.

Later in the chapter, Gruadh’s gamble is proved correct. As their army marches through Moray, Macbeth notes, “your presence is attracting more to our army”—including other women taking up arms to fight with their sons and husbands.

Chapter 31 Quotes

Watching the prow of the boat surge through lapping waves, I knew that I had protected Malcolm from retaliation. By honoring my promise to his mother and following my own heart as a mother, I had prevented his murder as a boy. And he had returned, just as the mormaers had warned. I had brought this tragedy about.

But if that chance came again, I could not order the deaths of children. A devil’s bargain, that, to choose sin or grief. Closing my eyes, I rested my face in my hands and struggled, overcame a weeping urge. What I had done had been most rightful, though it came with a hard price. It was the way of things.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Una, Thorfin Sigurdsson, Donald Bán , Malcolm mac Duncan, Lady Sybilla , Macbeth, Duncan mac Crinan

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

More than a decade and a half into her reign as queen, Macbeth leaves Scotland to make a pilgrimage to meet the pope. In his absence, Gruadh runs the country and protects it to the best of her ability. As Macbeth returns aboard a merchant vessel, Thorfin warns Gruadh that Malcolm mac Duncan (Duncan’s son) is planning to attack Macbeth and sink his ship in order to claim the title of King of Scotland. Gruadh refuses to allow this to happen, and negotiates with Thorfin—he will use his ships to look out for Macbeth on the sea, and Gruadh will gather troops to defend the land in case Malcolm tries to dock his ships.

Watching the ships, Gruadh reflects on how she is, in a way, responsible for the threat Malcolm now poses. Years earlier Una, a prophetess, had warned her to beware of the son of the man who Macbeth would kill to be king. When Macbeth later killed Duncan and became king, Duncan left behind two young sons—Donald Bán and Malcolm mac Duncan. Gruadh knew these boys would grow up to be threats to her husband, but she could not forget a promise she had made to the boy’s mother, Lady Sybilla, that she would take care of them if anything happened to her. Gruadh decided that, even if the prophecy came to be, she did not want the death of two children on her hands.

Now, even though Malcolm has grown up and become a threat, she does not regret letting him live. Although she knew the future and could have changed it, she would rather live with her conscience clean, where her husband would be under threat years in the future, than live knowing

that she had killed two innocent children to save her husband's life down the line.

Here is what the annals will say of Macbeth's kingship: very little.

Seventeen years of plenty and peace for Scotland, give or take some strife. We suffered few battles and fewer enemies compared to other reigns. Scotland was brimful: fat cattle on the hillsides, fish in the streams, sheep thick with wool, the bellies of trading ships heavy with goods. Grain crops were golden and larders and byres filled; treasures accumulated, and all prospered, from shepherd to mormaer. Contentment is a thing not often recorded in the annals.

For much of Macbeth's reign, the strength of his reputation and presence and the loyal nature of his alliances protected Scotland as never before. We had respite from decades of wars and conflict. Given more time, he would have attained what he sought of Scotland: more fair-minded laws, and the blending of honored Celtic traditions with the ways of the Church and even the Saxons.

Related Characters: Gruadh / Rue / Lady Macbeth (speaker), Malcolm mac Duncan, Macbeth

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

Gruadh begins and ends the novel with meditations on history and memory. She knows that Macbeth will not be remembered in the annals of history because his reign was largely peaceful and uneventful, and what is often remembered in the history books is war, scandal, or children—none of which Macbeth and Gruadh produced.

In the book's opening Gruadh worries that Malcolm mac Duncan will ruin Macbeth's legacy, slandering him because they were political enemies and because Macbeth killed his father, but here she clarifies that even were Macbeth's history to remain untouched, historians would have little to say.

In his reign, Macbeth practiced many of the principles he had practiced as mormaer, and here it becomes clear that conversations he had with Gruadh influenced his ruling style. Most notably, throughout the novel Gruadh and Macbeth discussed the value of Celtic tradition versus western Christian culture. Although Macbeth believed that Scotland needed to incorporate aspects of the outside world into itself in order to survive and thrive, he wanted to be careful to preserve the inherently Scottish core of the nation.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

It is the middle of winter, 1058. The recently-widowed Gruadh has been rejecting the repeated marriage proposals of Malcolm mac Duncan, the man who murdered her husband Macbeth, and now claims the Scottish crown. Although Malcolm has sent her expensive gifts, she is uninterested in the power he offers her. She explains, “I am a Celt and value honor more” than power offered by a man she doesn’t respect and whose authority she does not acknowledge.

If Gruadh will not marry Malcolm mac Duncan he would like her to go to a convent, but she sends a letter refusing both demands, and remains in her Scottish fortress. Still, although she has no need of a husband, Gruadh is lonely. She has her childhood friends Bethoc and Drostan to keep her company but misses her late husband Macbeth and her sons.

Drostan wants to write an encomium for Gruadh. Although she told him his idea was “silly,” she secretly wants an account of her life to be written down. She has a royal pedigree and has had an extraordinary life — learning “embroidery and hawks and kingship, and more magic than I should admit.” Still, Gruadh believes that her late husband, Macbeth, is more deserving of a chronicle. She knows Malcolm mac Duncan will write Macbeth’s history, and “ruin his deeds and his name,” although as long as Gruadh remains alive she will know the truth.

Until her life is truly over, Gruadh thinks it is too early to memorialize her. Still, “some truths there are which must be said.”

CHAPTER 1

Gruadh begins her life story at age nine, when she is briefly kidnapped while riding a horse with her father, Bodhe, and older brother, Farquhar. Violently resisting capture, she grabs the man’s dagger—which he snatches back—and then his **brooch**, which she stabs through his cheek, causing him to release her.

Gruadh’s husband has been killed, and she is living essentially in exile, but remains proud and strong. Although she knows remaining a widow leaves her vulnerable, and Malcolm could offer her power and protection, she respects her family legacy, and the Celtic legacy of Scotland, too much to marry someone who she worries will corrupt it.



So much of Gruadh’s life has been consumed by family—both in raising her son, Lulach, and supporting and ruling with her second husband, Macbeth. Now, widowed with her son grown, for the first time in her life she has nothing to take up her time.



Gruadh knows she will likely not be included in the historical record because she is a woman. She also is aware that, because Macbeth died just as Malcolm came to power, Malcolm will do his best to ruin Macbeth’s legacy and elevate his own. This is a sort of meta-commentary as historically Gruadh was left out of the record and Macbeth’s legacy was permanently corrupted by Shakespeare’s tragedy, [Macbeth](#).



This passage implies that the rest of the novel is Gruadh’s recollection of her life, which is recounted for the sake of the reader.



Throughout her life Gruadh will have to protect herself and the ones she loves, and will have to use violence to defend herself. This is the very first instance in which she realizes that she does have agency and can use violence against those trying to hurt her.



Gruadh falls to the ground and watches Bodhe and Farquhar fight off her attackers. This is the first fight she's ever seen, and the first time she's ever watched men die. Her memory of the day is spotty, but she remembers seeing Farquhar die, and her and Bodhe's grief.

Gruadh realizes how she can use violence to her advantage, but also how it can tear families apart. Early in life, she must reckon with the death of her brother, who died defending her, reaffirming the importance of family.



Gruadh keeps the **brooch** she used to stab her attacker, although she doesn't wear it. She explains that it "reminds me to stay strong and wary."

Gruadh's strength and suspicion stay with her throughout her life and serve her well. This also recalls her mother's dying words, when Ailsa urged Gruadh to be strong at all times.



The attacking men belonged to Crinan, mormaer of Atholl. In King Malcolm's judgment court, Bodhe accuses Crinan of killing Farquhar and kidnapping Gruadh to marry his own son, but the king rules in Crinan's favor, and Bodhe must pay Crinan for the men Bodhe killed in self-defense. Bodhe will remember this injustice, as will Gruadh.

Throughout her life Gruadh will be confronted with injustices—this is her first experience ending up on the wrong side of a legal judgment, and the sting of the unjust ruling, added to the sting of the death of her brother, will stay with her for life.



After Farquhar's death, Gruadh becomes Bodhe's only heir. As a result, her life and blood right becomes even more important. She is descended from generations of kings, and can trace her ancestors back to the Picts and Scotti. She understands that by marrying her, any man could claim the Scottish throne, which puts her in danger.

Gruadh understands that she is more than a woman—she is the result of generations of nobility, and has an obligation to those previous generations. Though she cannot ascend to the throne alone as a woman, proximity to her gives men power and influence. She understands that this places her and her family in danger, both because her heritage encourages others to kidnap her, and because her murder or the murder of her family members would end their bloodline, allowing others to vie for the crown.



Gruadh is abducted again four years later, at thirteen. She goes out with Bethoc and Aella to look for herbs, but does not have anyone give a sian, or protective oath, for them that day. A group of Norsemen kill her guard and carry her away (leaving her friends behind). After a day of travel, she is brought to a long great hall, where men and women are sleeping and eating. Gruadh is tied up and left on a bed in a curtained room to the side of the hall.

Gruadh places faith in Celtic protection spells, blaming this abduction partly on her lapse. Once again, Gruadh's heritage places her in danger—these men kidnap her because she is Bodhe's daughter and because she is so valuable to him and to his bloodline.



An old woman comes to give Gruadh food and ale and a bucket to pee in. When she hears footsteps again Gruadh assumes the old woman has returned, but instead she is confronted by a large man who tries to rape her. She cries out, but no one comes to help her. She manages to grab the large man's dagger and stab him through the stomach. Finally, other men come in and wrestle the assailant away. Gruadh is left alone with another man, Thorfin Sigurdsson, the jarl of the Orkney Islands and Caithness. She asks him what he wants from her, but he does not answer. She criticizes him for leaving her unprotected. He does not respond, but leaves and sends in Ketill Brusisson, a young warrior who will serve as her guard.

Ketill tells Gruadh that the man who tried to rape her was Harald Silkhair, a widower who was “overwhelmed” by “the temptation of getting a son by a princess.” Ketill also explains that Thorfin kidnapped her after he asked Bodhe for Gruadh's hand in marriage, and was rejected. He has kidnapped her to teach Bodhe a lesson and to use her to bargain for land or power. However, later that night, before Thorfin can complete his plan, Bodhe and his men invade the compound, steal Gruadh back, and slaughter many of the Norsemen.

Back in Fife, Bodhe has hired an Anglo-Saxon priest, Father Anselm. Gruadh suspects that Bodhe has begun to think “more closely about souls and their fates, and perhaps about my education.” Father Anselm has difficulty saying Gruadh's name, and so calls her Hreowe, which sounds like rue, meaning sorrow. Soon everyone knows Gruadh as “Rue of the Sorrows.”

Bodhe rushes to arrange a marriage for Gruadh. He seeks “both a protector” and an “unbreakable alliance” for his lineage. Gruadh is unimpressed by the warriors he presents to her, most of whom are older widowers. Bodhe explains that most younger men are already married and not powerful enough to defend Gruadh and protect her heritage. Gruadh decides she will have to find a way to “ensure my own safety.”

CHAPTER 2

Gruadh confronts Bodhe and tells him she wants to learn how to fight. He resists, but she points out there's a historical precedent for Scottish warrior princesses, including Scathach of Skye, a noblewoman and a fighter. When Bodhe remains unconvinced, Gruadh threatens to use the spellcrafts her mother, Ailsa, taught her.

For the second time in her life, Gruadh must use physical violence to protect herself. Although later Gruadh will be criticized for learning how to handle a sword formally, which is seen as unwomanly, here, she proves the necessity of being able to defend herself; she knows, even though she is a woman, she will often be in dangerous situations because of her family background and the value of her bloodline.



Once again, Gruadh is reminded of how the richness of her bloodline puts her in danger. Thorfin only wanted to marry her because of her pedigree, and Harald wanted to rape her because she would bear him half-royal children. Ironically, later in the novel Thorfin will chastise Gruadh for holding a grudge against him, however her grudge was born from this situation—which was caused by a grudge he himself held.



Many characters turn to Catholicism in times of trouble. The Christian idea of redemption and the afterlife helps Bodhe, and later Macbeth and Gruadh deal with the deaths of those they love, as well as crimes they themselves have committed.



Because Gruadh is a woman, no one expects her to be able to defend herself. They assume she will need a man to protect her. Additionally, although she has a prestigious heritage, she cannot rule alone, and so Bodhe wants to set up a marriage with a husband whose lineage will match hers.



Having been kidnapped twice, and facing a marriage arranged partially to keep her safe, Gruadh wants to take her wellbeing into her own hands. Although women are not usually trained to fight, she points towards the long Celtic history of women warriors, passed down through oral tradition.



In Bodhe’s mind, Gruadh’s “most important role” is being the direct descendant of several Picts and Irish kings. She is important because she “can make a future husband into a king.” He does not want her to risk her life on the battlefield.

Gruadh continues to insist. She argues that “men will always argue over me, and more deaths will occur on my account.” Bodhe eventually gives in, admitting that his daughter has a “warrior spirit.” He arranges for her to practice fighting with Fergus.

Gruadh’s mother, Ailsa, died from complications of childbirth when Gruadh was eleven. Gruadh’s little sister, Brigid, was baptized by the priest, blessed by the midwives, and given the name Brigid as protection, but she, like her mother, died within a few days. Gruadh wonders if the pair went to heaven or Tír na n’ Óg, “the paradise beyond Ireland in the misty realm, which our bard spoke about.”

In the days after Ailsa’s death, Gruadh’s aunt, Eva, gives her a bag of charms—crystals, Ailsa’s needles and embroidery, and a small doll for Brigid—to leave with the bodies. Father Anselm disapproves, and suggests that Ailsa may not go to heaven because “she practiced pagan arts and taught her daughter that same insolence against God.” However, Gruadh is not discouraged, and leaves the bag with her mother and sister, reciting an old chant over their bodies. Before she died, Ailsa told Gruadh to be strong, but the young woman cannot hold back tears as she says goodbye.

When her daughter was a baby, Ailsa gave Gruadh a Celtic tattoo, the **triskele**, or symbol of the goddess Brigid. It is a symbol of protection, which “holds blessings near, while keeping harm at bay.” Although such markings were banned by the church centuries earlier, Gruadh occasionally reworks the design herself with a needle and thread.

CHAPTER 3

Gruadh begins to practice fighting. Most of her father’s warriors don’t want to train her, and she has to endure comments about her weakness as a woman, but she practices with Fergus, and other men Bodhe has pressured into sparring with her.

Although Bodhe loves his daughter, he sees her less as a person and more as the culmination of generations of kings, whose potential comes from marrying someone of equal status.



Gruadh has already seen violence and knows she will see more. She wants to do what she can to protect herself, so her friends and family do not have to die for her. Bodhe finally recognizes this. However, her struggle getting people to accept her interest in sword craft will be lifelong.



Christianity and Celtic tradition coexist in medieval Scotland and are often used together. In this case, both practices are used in order to give Ailsa and Brigid the greatest chance of survival. Gruadh, even as a child, straddles both traditions, wondering if her mother and sister will travel to a Christian, or pagan heaven, both of which seem equally likely to her.



Although Father Anselm and other agents of the Catholic Church disapprove of pagan traditions they see as undermining their authority, for the majority of people Celtic traditions simply offer supplemental comforts and charms. These “pagan arts” make Gruadh feel close to her mother, who taught them to her. There is a special personal connection to Celtic traditions that links her to her family and history.



The church dislikes Celtic traditions, which it sees as undermining its authority, if not actively devilish. However, Gruadh practices both and feels no conflict. Her triskele tattoo connects her to a lineage of strong women—both the goddess Brigid and her own mother.



Learning to use weapons is an uphill battle—most men do not think women should learn to fight, and no one wants to accidentally hurt the daughter of their boss, Bodhe.



Gruadh begins to practice with Finn, her foster brother. She's offended when he wants her to use a wooden staff, but he explains that using other weapons will help her handle a sword. She learns during their lesson, and even gives him an accidental black eye. She feels "remorseful," but is "aware warriors do not coddle each other."

Over the next year Gruadh improves—she upgrades to blunt metal swords from her wooden sticks and daggers. Still, she is expected to tend to domestic duties as well. She learns from Dolina, Bodhe's mistress, how to run a household. She and her friend Drostan learn reading, numbers, and history from Father Anselm. Father Anselm doesn't think girls need a through education, but Bodhe insists it is "Scottish custom to educate freely, including females."

For her fifteenth birthday, Bodhe gives Gruadh a sword with a **triskele** engraved upon it. She is aware of the significance of this gift, although does not say what she believes that significance to be.

Learning to fight teaches Gruadh how to defend herself, but it also teaches her more about violence. She must learn that sometimes violence is necessary or unavoidable, and she cannot waste time feeling remorseful when someone's life is truly on the line.



For the rest of her life, Gruadh will split her time between more traditionally masculine and feminine pursuits. This is the earliest example of the way she balances the domestic, and the military sphere. Celtic tradition is filled with women warriors, but Christian tradition is not, and therefore Father Anselm is one of the most vocal sources of opposition.



By giving Gruadh this sword, Bodhe is further endorsing her fighting lessons. The gift further serves to connect her to her mother, who gave her a triskele tattoo when she was a baby. It also is a nod to Celtic tradition, which has room for women warriors (unlike Christianity, which does not).



CHAPTER 4

One morning in March, Gruadh helps Drostan muck out the stables. As they work, Bodhe returns from a journey with several strangers. The group carries two banners. One is yellow with a black raven, the design of the Orkney Vikings. The other is blue with silver stars, and belongs to Gilcomgan mac Malbríd, mormaer of Moray. Drostan explains that Gilcomgan became mormaer only after killing the previous mormaer, Finlach, the father of his cousin Macbeth. Gruadh hopes she will not be wed to any of the men present.

Gruadh continues to muck the stables even after Aella comes out to fetch her on Bodhe's behalf. Another group of men arrive, led by Macbeth. He does not recognize Gruadh as noble and has her take care of his horse. She passes the window of the great hall and sees from the beeswax candles that the guests are important. She finally goes inside and makes herself presentable with the help of her nurse, Maeve. As she arrives in the great hall a fight has just broken out—Macbeth and Gilcomgan have drawn their swords.

Gruadh understands that she must marry whomever her father tells her to, but still hopes she can find love in her match. She dislikes the Vikings who kidnapped her as a child, and does not think she could forgive a man like Gilcomgan, who was guilty of murder.



Beeswax candles were the best and most expensive, and Dolina only uses them when entertaining special guests. Although Gruadh doesn't want to go inside and meet a man who might be her husband, she knows she must do her duty as Bodhe's daughter. The fight between Macbeth and Gilcomgan has decade-old roots—Gilcomgan killed Macbeth's father, and stole his land and title.



CHAPTER 5

Gruadh remembers the first time she saw Macbeth. She was just four years old in 1020, and Macbeth was fourteen. King Malcolm was holding a royal judicial hearing, and Macbeth had come to accuse his cousins, Gilcomgan and Malcolm mac Malbríd, of killing his father, Finlach, mormaer of Moray.

Gilcomgan and Malcolm mac Malbríd join Macbeth in front of King Malcolm. They do not deny murdering Finlach but explain that they worried Finlach was grooming Macbeth as his heir, when inheritance should have passed to them. They claim Finlach attacked them when he and his soldiers happened to encounter them and their soldiers.

Macbeth refutes this; he says his father was brave and strong. He adds “if Finlach had intended to kill his nephews [...] they would be dead now.” He argues that “treachery killed Finlach,” not his father’s own ambition.

King Malcolm allows Malcolm mac Malbríd to keep his new title as mormaer of Moray, but he will have to pay 150 cows or 33 ounces of gold to be split between Macbeth and the crown. He will also have to give Macbeth certain properties. This is the highest possible fine, but Ailsa, who is watching the proceedings with Gruadh, argues, “this is not justice,” and believes Macbeth deserves more. Maeve, who has also come to watch the trial, explains that King Malcolm needs a strong warlord to rule Moray, and now the mormaer of Moray is indebted to him. Macbeth is too young to rule anyway, and so Malcolm’s ruling was intended only to increase his own power.

As Macbeth leaves the hill where judgment was passed, men in the crowd begin to beat their shields. This is a gesture of respect “reserved for great men and kings,” and a show of support for Macbeth’s rightful desire for revenge, and rightful claim of Moray.

CHAPTER 6

Back in the great hall at Fife, Macbeth and Gilcomgan face off. Fergus urges Gruadh to watch the fight, especially Macbeth, to learn more about swordsmanship.

Much of Macbeth’s life is defined by his search for justice for the death of his father. In this moment, he seeks it through courts; later, he will find justice through violence, and then through the acquisition of power.



The Celtic line of succession is complicated, with succession acknowledging the mother’s heritage as well as the father’s and the throne passing between branches of the family tree. Therefore, Gilcomgan and his brother feel that the land should have been theirs but worried it would be passed linearly to Macbeth.



Macbeth wants to honor his father’s legacy and defend him against slander. He knows his cousins killed his father for power and land, not because his father was the aggressor.



From a young age, Gruadh’s family involved her in politics, which were not an area typically open to women. This knowledge will help her as a wife and queen later in life. King Malcolm’s ruling is not in the interest of justice, but instead in the interest of keeping himself powerful. He knows that the mormaer of Moray is like a second king because of the strength of the region, and therefore wants to install someone already powerful and trustworthy.



As Macbeth will explain to Gruadh later in life, sometimes the best revenge requires patience, and it often doesn’t require violence. Here, although King Malcolm took Macbeth’s lands from him, Macbeth gained the respect of the assembled men, which he will cash in on later in life.



Some people do support Gruadh’s fighting lessons and have become more comfortable with the idea of her fighting and studying violence.



Gruadh considers the argument between the two men. She realizes that even if Gilcomgan hadn't killed Macbeth's father, Finlach, there would still be "cause enough for a blood feud" because of the complicated way that sovereignty is passed down, which opens up the claim to the throne to many prospective warlords.

Gilcomgan slices Macbeth across the jaw, but the fight continues. Macbeth hits Gilcomgan's arm, splitting the chainmail and cutting into the skin, but still the fight continues. Next to Gruadh, a man catches her attention, and she is surprised to see Ketill, who she had assumed had been killed or injured when Bodhe recaptured her from Thorfin. Ketill says only that any wounds have healed and "peace and restitution have been made."

The fight finally ends when Gilcomgan stumbles into Gruadh and Bodhe forces the men to stop. Dolina takes Gilcomgan to treat his wound, and Gruadh tells Bodhe that she will not marry him, because he is old and a murderer. Bodhe points out that Gruadh's consent is not necessary for her to marry. Macbeth overhears, and asks Bodhe if it is true that Gruadh and Gilcomgan will wed.

Gruadh tells Macbeth that not only will she not marry Gilcomgan, she would not marry him either. Macbeth warns her again against an alliance with Gilcomgan, but Bodhe says the betrothal will happen soon nonetheless. Macbeth calls the pair of them fools and leaves the hall.

Bodhe explains to Gruadh that she must get married and this is the best match for her. She counters that it is only the best match for *him*.

Thorfin Sigurdsson interrupts them. Bodhe explains they have made their peace with him, but Gruadh still holds a grudge. Thorfin tells her he beheaded Harald, the man who assaulted her. Then Thorfin turns away and continues his conversation with Bodhe.

The feud between Gilcomgan and Macbeth has two layers. The first is that Gilcomgan murdered Finlach, and the second is that Gilcomgan might genuinely believe Macbeth's father was trying to groom him to take over Moray, which would go against Celtic, nonlinear succession.



Ironically, although Gruadh has not yet forgiven Thorfin for kidnapping her, Ketill has forgiven her and her family for their retaliatory attack, which left him injured. Although Gruadh will hold on to her grudge for decades, she will eventually learn to accept agreements of "peace and restitution."



Although Bodhe tolerated the violence in his house, he will not allow Gruadh to be injured—both because she is a woman and because she is so important to their family line. This is also why he wants her to marry Gilcomgan: he believes this will help situate her safely in a position of relative power.



Gruadh acts as though she has a choice in who she marries, and can reject men who seem too violent or set on revenge; in reality she has no choice, and will marry whoever Bodhe tells her to.



With time, Gruadh will come to realize that the choices she must make aren't always what are best for her personally. This marriage, for example, will not necessarily bring her love and joy, but it will help her family, and help elevate the status of her children.



Gruadh holds onto grudges for decades, not yet understanding or agreeing with the politics of dropping them when an alliance is made. However, Thorfin has done his best to curry her favor—killing the man who tried to rape her in order to show her there need be no bad blood between them.



CHAPTER 7

The night before Gruadh's official betrothal she sneaks out of the castle to perform a ritual. She brings with her a stone with a hole in the middle (one of her Ailsa's trinkets), a bowl of water, candles, and feathers. She walks around the stone and recites a chant to "invoke help and protection." She looks into the bowl of water and hopes to see her future, asking "before dawn is done this day [...] before the sun rises full, I ask that my future reveal itself to me."

Before Gruadh can see anything in the water, Ruari, Finn, and Drostan interrupt her. They followed her into the woods in case she had planned to run away, although Drostan comments, "better she runs or fights, rather than casts spells."

Gruadh's friends return her to the castle. As she enters the fortress and the sun begins to rise, Gruadh suddenly has a vision. Instead of seeing the future, she sees the present with a special kind of clarity: Macbeth is riding by and she sees their paths crossing as the sunlight "halo[s] his head with gold." Above her fly two eagles, and a raven sits nearby. She sees two swords crossed in the practice yard. The sun rises and the sky around it is "like a spill of blood." Gruadh sees that "the signs had appeared as a dazzling weave made of ordinary threads." She understands some of the omens, and as a Celt, and the daughter and granddaughter of women with Da Shealladh, or second sight, has been taught to look for signs all around her. In this moment she realizes that she, like her mother and maternal grandmother, is able to see the future.

After breakfast, Aella and Maeve help dress Gruadh. She wears a green dress, even though it is an unlucky color, because it belonged to Ailsa. Gruadh feels as though she is being dressed for a beheading but participates in the betrothal ceremony anyway.

That night, Gruadh has difficulty sleeping, and gets up to wander the fortress. She runs into Bodhe in the great hall, and the two of them discuss her future. He tells her Moray will be a good home for her, and that it is powerful enough that the rulers of Moray are called king and queen of their land. Additionally, Moray holds enough power that its leader could potentially revolt and become king of Scotland.

In times of trouble, Gruadh turns to religion and ceremony. Although she is not sure her spells will work, magic connects her to her mother, whose memory helps her feel strong and safe. She wants assurance that she is making the right decision by listening to Bodhe and marrying Gilcomgan, although in truth, she does not have another choice.



Although Gruadh sees Celtic tradition and magic as nothing to be ashamed of, others in medieval Scotland are skeptical, if not outright frightened of it.



For the first time, but not the last, Gruadh has a vision of the future. Her mother, too, had Da Shealladh, and so she feels connected to her past and heritage even as she looks ahead. Gruadh is not able to decipher all the symbols, but some stand out: her path crossing with Macbeth's suggests they will be important in each other's lives. The sun like a "spill of blood" signals war and violence, as do the swords. Ravens symbolize death. The sunlight haloing Macbeth's head, like a crown, suggests he might be king.



Gruadh continues to be unhappy about her betrothal, but knows as Bodhe's only daughter, she has no choice. She does what she can to draw strength.



Each time Gruadh discusses her future with Bodhe she receives a little clarity on why he has matched her with Gilcomgan. Bodhe knows that Gruadh will be powerful as the wife of the mormaer of Moray, and that she will essentially be a queen whose position makes it likely she could one day be Scotland's queen.



Gruadh understands that her marriage to Gilcomgan will make him even more powerful, will give Bodhe better access to King Malcolm, and will ensure his powerful lineage. She wonders why her father has never claimed the kingship himself, and why he uses her instead. Bodhe explains that he is happy having his heirs be kings and queens, even if he never himself ascends to the throne.

Gruadh wonders why, if Macbeth has a better claim to Moray, she isn't marrying him. Bodhe explains that Macbeth is married, and although he has a strong claim, he does not officially hold the land. However, he adds that Macbeth and Gruadh could still marry if something were to happen to their spouses. Gruadh calls this "hateful scheming," but Bodhe insists it is "strategy." Their lineage has a claim to the throne, and since Farquhar has died it is Gruadh's duty to make a bid. Because she is a woman she cannot be king, and Bodhe understands that she "need[s] a strong and ambitious husband." Gruadh corrects him—she personally doesn't need a husband; instead "our blood needs one."

CHAPTER 8

The following spring, Gruadh spends her days embroidering and eavesdropping on Bodhe's conversations with other noblemen about politics and threats to Scotland. She knows that "a mormaer's wife must be aware of such issues, and the wider scope of the world beyond her household."

According to the Roman church, women practicing swordplay is heresy, and so Dolina forbids Gruadh from practice in advance of her wedding. Bodhe doesn't believe sword-fighting will put Gruadh out of favor with God, but does worry about their relationship with the pope, and so bans Gruadh from practicing as well.

Overwhelmed by Dolina's wedding preparations, Gruadh visits her cousin Bethoc and Bethoc's mother Mairi, who live in the hills outside of her fortress to ask them about her vision. Mairi believes that the signs Gruadh saw "speak of Scotland's future even more than [her] own." She sees that Gruadh will have two husbands, and her life will be marked by happiness, sorrow, and power. Mairi tells Gruadh she has strength within her and can draw upon the **triskele** on her shoulder for protection.

Bodhe understands what it will take Gruadh a lifetime to learn—sometimes, strategically, taking power for oneself does not make sense. Instead, Bodhe has done his best to install Gruadh in the highest possible position, so that through her political gains, his family line can be satisfied.



Bodhe continues to explain his grand plan to Gruadh. Because she is his only heir, and because she is a woman, he wants to marry her to the most powerful available man, understanding that her bloodline makes her powerful but that she cannot rule alone, and needs a partner whose position and lands will complement her. Because Macbeth is already married, he is out of the running. Gruadh understands the marriage is as much for the future of her family as it is for her own wellbeing.



Gruadh has always been reluctant to practice exclusively feminine hobbies and is interested in more traditionally masculine pursuits because she suspects she will need this knowledge later in life.



Even as Gruadh begins to eavesdrop on Scotland's political happenings, Dolina does her best to mold Gruadh into a model of femininity. Once again, the church opposes actions that Celtic tradition embraces.



Bethoc and Mairi are excited by Gruadh's second sight, in a way that Gruadh's more Christian friends and relatives would not be. They understand that Gruadh's future is tied to that of Scotland, a theme present throughout the novel and also often be applied to Macbeth, who links his own future and ambition to that of the nation he loves.



Mairi and Bethoc also advise Gruadh to participate in the tradition of kissing people on the new moon after she returns to Abernethy. This tradition is said to reveal the truth. When Gruadh returns to Abernethy a few days later she sneaks out during the full moon and finds people to kiss. She kisses Finn, her first love, for good luck, and clarifies that she wants his friendship. She also kisses Ruari, who pulls away surprised.

Gruadh then runs into Macbeth. He cautions her again against marrying Gilcomgan, warning that her future husband is “hated by many,” and that the match is unwise, both for her and for Fife. She counters that joining Fife and Moray is a good decision, but he points out that this would only be true if Moray “had a fit leader.”

Macbeth has grabbed Gruadh’s arm, and she finds herself drawn in towards him. He is drawn to her, too, and they kiss. Gruadh has never felt this way before—it tastes like “the water of life.” Macbeth eventually pulls back. He warns her that if she kisses for luck she might “open the door to fate,” and leaves her standing alone in the courtyard.

As a present, Bodhe gives Gruadh a hauberk and a brass helmet. He has begun allowing her to sit in on military and political meetings and believes that since she will soon be married to Gilcomgan, “it is time” she see “more of the world.” Although Dolina disapproves of the armor as much as she disapproves of Gruadh’s sword training, Gruadh recognizes this as a huge honor.

CHAPTER 9

Gruadh and Bodhe ride to witness a meeting of kings on the border between Lothian and Saxon Northumbria. King Malcolm of Scotland has planned to meet the Saxon King Cnut and wants other Scottish lords behind him to show his strength. Both Aella and Bethoc come with Gruadh so she is not the only woman on the trip.

Days into their trip, Gruadh’s envoy passes a series of heads on pikes. Aella is disgusted, and although Gruadh is horrified, she forces herself to look. She understands that, “as wife to Scotland’s most powerful mormaer, it was in [her] interest to understand the ways of men and warfare.”

Gruadh is always looking for charms and spells to give her strength and guidance. This relatively harmless tradition is supposed to reveal truths. With Ruari, it seems to reveal nothing, but with Finn, it cements a life-long friendship.



Macbeth’s hatred of Gilcomgan stems primarily from the man’s murder of his father, but also, perhaps, from jealousy. He’s upset that Gilcomgan has claimed the land he believes is rightfully his, and perhaps that Gilcomgan will marry Gruadh, whose heritage make her a valuable bride.



Macbeth’s name means son of life, so Gruadh is likely making a pun when she describes him as “water of life.” The truth this kiss reveals is her intense attraction to and compatibility with Macbeth, a connection that will serve her well years down the road.



Although his wife disapproves of Gruadh’s sword fighting, Bodhe’s gift shows that he supports her. By letting her sit in on his councils he is allowing her to more adequately prepare for her future as mormaer’s wife, and even as queen—roles that will require her to understand what is happening beyond her domestic sphere.



Although she is a woman, and not normally involved in politics, Bodhe has decided to train Gruadh to be a future mormaer’s wife, and maybe a future queen, who will need to understand the politics of her nation.



Gruadh understands that as the fiancé of a warlord, who will rule over his land, and as a woman who could one day be queen, she needs to inoculate herself against violence and bloodshed by becoming familiar with it.



After many days of travel, Gruadh and her party reach their destination—a meadow where the kings will meet. King Malcolm and King Cnut each ride onto the field with a retinue of lords representing various lands under their control. Bodhe rides with King Malcolm, while Gruadh watches from the sidelines. Gruadh is confused when Gilcomgan does not ride, and is angry when Macbeth appears in his place, representing Moray. Ruari, who is watching the ceremony from a hillside with Gruadh, insists it is simply for the ceremony, but Gruadh feels insulted on Gilcomgan's behalf. For the first time, Gruadh feels loyalty to Gilcomgan, and sees Macbeth as a "usurper."

Gruadh examines the beautiful land around her. She wonders why the kings will not use Hadrian's Wall—a long stone wall built hundreds of years ago by the Roman leader Hadrian, and which formerly divided Britain from Scotland—as a border, instead of meeting to define a new one. Ruari explains that men will not settle for outdated boundaries if they can potentially fight for new, more favorable ones. Gruadh comments, "does death become an ordinary price when dominion is at stake?" But Ruari advises her to "consider what is best for Scotland and its Scots" to fully understand. Gruadh begins to see how not only "kin and kin groups" are important, but how Scots must value the land itself.

That evening Gruadh, Bodhe, and their entourage stay at a nearby thane's house. They have dinner and listen to a bard who describes the events of the day and then all of the notable figures, including Bodhe, Macbeth, and Gruadh. Gruadh, who is described in flattering terms, is embarrassed but pleased.

That evening Gruadh talks to Lady Sybilla, wife of Duncan mac Crinan, who has two young sons, Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán. Gruadh likes her, and the two women embrace as friends. Bodhe then calls Gruadh over to take over a chess game he is having with Macbeth. Gruadh is confused—knowing that Bodhe is better than her at chess—but recognizes that her father is playing some sort of political game.

Gruadh and Macbeth talk as they play. Gruadh discovers that Macbeth is married, and so is confused as to why Bodhe has arranged this meeting. In the chess game, Macbeth takes Gruadh's queen, and he warns her "sometimes an unassuming warrior can move swiftly to possess a queen." The pair discuss Gruadh's name, both her given name and her nickname, Rue of the Sorrows. Macbeth that explains his name means "son of life," and he comments "life and sorrow [...] often go hand in hand." As their game ends, Macbeth again cautions Gruadh to be careful when she is Lady of Moray. Once again, she ignores his warning.

Although unhappy to be engaged to Gilcomgan, a man whose position is threatened, Gruadh instantly becomes loyal and territorial. When she marries Gilcomgan, Moray will be her territory as well, and so Macbeth, by standing in her future husband's place, is taking what she feels is hers. Additionally, she recognizes Macbeth's position as political favoritism, which could threaten Gilcomgan's position.



Throughout her life Gruadh will learn about warfare, as well as politics and revenge. This is an important lesson for her—although Gruadh has already learned to privilege her family's wellbeing above her own, now she is learning that, as a ruler of Scotland, one must privilege the wellbeing of the nation above all else.



By painting the assembled nobles and warlords in flattering terms, the bards implicitly encourage them to see each other in a warmer light. Gruadh and Macbeth especially, who have a tense relationship, benefit from hearing the other described generously.



Gruadh's friendship with Lady Sybilla will continue to be important throughout their lives. Both women are involved in politics that they cannot directly affect but will become concerned with protecting their husbands and children at all costs.



Although Macbeth has limited lands and is not a mormaer, and although she does not fully get along with him, Gruadh recognizes that Macbeth's ambition and heritage would make him a good husband, and a good match for her and her family's ambition. Macbeth's continued warnings foreshadow his own anticipated revenge against Gilcomgan, which will affect his new wife as well.



The next morning, King Malcolm and King Cnut meet a final time to conclude the ceremony. At one point, Gruadh observes King Malcolm carrying his great grandson Malcolm mac Duncan. Everyone present recognizes this as a declaration: Malcolm’s “line, grandson to son, would be kings hereafter.”

Although succession is traditionally nonlinear, King Malcolm makes it clear he wants his children to inherit his power. Notably, “kings hereafter” is lifted from Shakespeare’s [Macbeth](#).



Lady Sybilla takes her child from King Malcolm and gives young Malcolm mac Duncan to Gruadh to care for. Gruadh feels heavy as the young child drags her arm and realizes she has seen another omen—everyone present that day is linked “as if by the tug of a heavy chain.” She doesn’t understand the connection between the “fussy child and two old warrior-kings,” but knows there is great meaning there.

Gruadh’s vision shows her the connection she will have to Lady Sybilla and to young Malcolm. Although she does not know it yet, the promise she makes to Lady Sybilla to protect her children many years later will have huge repercussions on her own life and that of her second husband, Macbeth.



CHAPTER 10

Dolina polishes and scrubs the household at Abernethy in preparation for the wedding. Dolina has Gruadh purchase silk and linen to sew into bedclothes, gowns, and undergarments for her new life as Lady of Moray.

Dolina loves her stepdaughter and wants to best for her. She also wants to train Gruadh to be a good wife, which means a woman who understands the domestic sphere and is prepared to run a household.



That May, Gruadh and Gilcomgan are married. Gruadh had wanted a Celtic wedding, but instead she has a Christian one. That night, after a lively feast and celebration, Dolina and Gruadh’s women help her undress and bathe. Dolina places small trinkets of protection around the room, and Maeve gives her a drink made to lessen the pain and increase her arousal. Eventually, Gilcomgan comes into the room, drunk. He jumps into bed, as is tradition, and the two have sex. Gruadh describes him as “inconsiderate and unskilled,” and in the morning, when he tries to have sex again, she shoves him away.

Celtic traditions help connect Gruadh to her family, especially her mother, and Scotland’s ancient past. However, even though the ceremony is Christian, elements of Celtic traditions remain in the post wedding celebrations, blending together aspects of new and old religions. Gruadh has sex with Gilcomgan because she feels it is her duty as a wife—both to satisfy Gilcomgan and to continue her own family line.



The day before Gruadh leaves Abernathy for Moray, she goes to Luag, Bodhe’s bard. She asks him about Moray, and he tells her about the history of the land, the generations of men who conquered and claimed it. He assures her she will be a “contented lady” in her new home. Before Gruadh leaves, Drostan comes to tell her that he will not come with her to Moray and is instead going to become a monk. Gruadh is sad but understands his decision. The next day she and Gilcomgan leave her childhood home.

Although Gruadh does not want to leave she knows she must, in order to make her family proud, and to continue their line. Here, a bard acts as a kind of living library, helping give Gruadh the information and strength she needs to confront this new, frightening chapter of her life.



In the weeks and months after Gruadh and Gilcomgan arrive at his fortress in Moray, the couple begins to get along. She enjoys the time they spend together, and even enjoys having sex with her husband. Gilcomgan is a good storyteller and entertains her in the evenings. His easy nature helps her forget that he once murdered his uncle, Finlach.

Gilcomgan’s storytelling not only shapes his version of events, but also shapes Gruadh’s opinion of him, helping her warm to him and accept her role as his wife. Although she knows he is capable of violence, she forgives and forgets because of his easy-going nature.



Gruadh hangs rowan branches, juniper, and pine over the doorways for luck. She spends her days spinning yarn and teaching Aella to read. She does her domestic duties but is not allowed to handle swords. Gilcomgan tells her, “I want sons of you [...] not wounds.” Gruadh does not feel fully like the Lady of Moray, as Gilcomgan doesn’t like traveling, and therefore has not taken her to meet her subjects.

After almost a year of marriage, Gruadh misses her period. She has some morning sickness at the beginning of her pregnancy, but it quickly resolves itself. She is happy at the prospect of “fulfill[ing] my responsibility,” and wonders if her time as Rue of Sorrows is over and joy is in her future.

CHAPTER 11

In 1032, when she is sixteen years old and seven months into her pregnancy, Gruadh is woken up in the middle of the night by a messenger sent by Banchorrie. The man warns her that Macbeth and his men are marching on Elgin. At first, Gruadh is unconcerned, and assumes the advancing forces are harmless, but Maeve is concerned for their safety and wants to evacuate—she explains that Macbeth is marching on Elgin, and “it is a matter for warriors, not women.” Gruadh ignores her nurse. She takes up her sword—even though her pregnant belly makes it hard for her to use it—and prepares to meet the invaders.

Gilcomgan has gone on patrol with fifty men, leaving Elgin relatively undefended. Gruadh refuses to let Macbeth and his men in. She knows they will break down the door anyway but doesn’t want to make it easy. Macbeth breaks down the gate to her fortress and she greets him with sword in hand. He wonders why she has so few guards—he sees she did not heed his earlier warning to protect herself while in Moray.

Macbeth lashes out at Gruadh, knocking the sword out of her hand and throwing her to the ground. Gruadh’s men launch a counter attack, but Macbeth’s men kill or injure them all. He calls her foolish and wonders why she would risk the life of her child when all he wants to do is deliver a message from her husband—Gilcomgan is dead. He and his men burned to death in a tower. Macbeth claims that, before he died, Gilcomgan asked Macbeth to take care of Gruadh and her child. Gruadh does not believe him and instead thinks that Macbeth killed Gilcomgan in the fire. She asks him if he did this to become the normaer of Moray, and Macbeth responds, “I was always Moray.”

When Gilcomgan tells Gruadh he wants sons, not wounds, he’s probably making a double entendre; he wants her to have children, as opposed to hurting herself fighting, but he also wants male heirs, and not female ones (“wounds” could refer to female genitals). Male children could inherit his lands and titles, whereas female children could not.



Gruadh is excited to be pregnant because she sees bearing children to be her duty as wife, and as the child of Bodhe. At once she is satisfying her husband and continuing her family line.



Gruadh is happy to use violence to protect herself, her home, and her unborn child. Although evacuating would probably be safer, as would leaving intimidation to her soldiers, Gruadh is a woman who likes to be in control of the situation. Banchorrie has not yet appeared in the novel, yet his messenger will forever warm Gruadh to him, and they will become friends later on.



Gruadh is stubborn and strong-willed, character traits often criticized as unwomanly, but which prove useful now. Although she knows Macbeth will break in, she feels as though she retains some dignity by forcing him to work for it.



Although Macbeth does not announce it, Gruadh suspects he killed her husband in order to reclaim Moray. When Macbeth says, “I was always Moray,” he reveals that he had spent his whole childhood and early adulthood nursing a grudge and plotting against Gilcomgan. His cousin’s death is simply the final step in a decade long plan to reclaim the homeland he believes belongs to him.



CHAPTER 12

The next morning, guards escort an unwilling Gruadh to a nearby church where Macbeth waits to marry her. Gruadh does not want to marry him but has no agency. Instead, she complains—first that he is married already, and that the events surrounding their marriage are full of bad omens.

Gruadh further complains that she would “prefer to be wed in the old Celtic way, with charms and blessings.” Macbeth agrees, taking her in three circles around the priest “in ancient blessing tradition,” and then points to the rising sun as an “omen.” The priest then marries them in the Catholic tradition. After, the upset Gruadh returns to the fortress at Elgin.

Back in Elgin, Gruadh goes against Macbeth’s commands. She will not stay in her chamber as he has requested, and instead sees to her household. When he informs her that she will leave Elgin and needs to pack, she tells him she is staying.

Gilcomgan’s body and the bodies of his men are returned to Elgin and buried. Gruadh feels numb. She expects that soon Bodhe will avenge her husband and waits for him to send his men. Her thirst for revenge is powerful, and she attributes it to her Celtic heritage, which “demands justice at any cost.” However, the next visitors Elgin receives are a group of the king’s men.

CHAPTER 13

King Malcolm and his men arrive at Elgin, and Macbeth greets them. Gruadh hopes that the King has come to avenge her dead husband but is disappointed when Macbeth invites him inside and he peacefully consents.

Gruadh also returns inside. A man introduces himself as Banchorrie. He is Macbeth’s uncle, and sent a messenger to Gruadh the night Gilcomgan died. She appreciates this “unexpected ally.” In the great hall the men drink. Gruadh wishes she had poison on hand but notes that she would spare Banchorrie.

Macbeth wants to marry Gruadh to enforce his claim to Moray. Although he doesn't say it, he also wants to protect her now that her late husband cannot. Gruadh doesn't know the second part, but as a woman doesn't have the agency to reject him regardless.



Gruadh was unexcited about her first marriage, but even unhappier about her second. Ironically, although she had hoped for Celtic traditions in her first ceremony, it is in the second one where she has the kind of traditional wedding she'd dreamed of. Although she does not know it yet, this signals her compatibility with Macbeth.



As Macbeth's wife, Gruadh is expected to be subservient to him, but she exerts power in little ways. She blames him for the death of her husband and her imprisonment, and wants to punish him in return.



Gruadh wants her husband avenged, and assumes Bodhe, who arranged the marriage, will be on her side. Understandably, her grudge against Macbeth will endure for the next several months, as she prays someone with power will punish him for his crime.



Gruadh is disappointed to see the king's men, who have come as a diplomatic party, not a war band, which means that King Malcolm approves of the marriage and will not liberate her.



Banchorrie sent Gruadh a messenger to warn her Macbeth was coming. She appreciates this. Still, she holds her grudge against Macbeth and now against King Malcolm, who seems to be on his side.



Macbeth suggests that Gruadh leave the room while he discusses politics with King Malcolm and the others, but Gruadh refuses, insisting she is interested in their conversation. Malcolm is unhappy to find Gruadh alive and is distressed to hear that Macbeth has married her. Macbeth claims he did it to protect her, but Gruadh protests this. She confronts Malcolm and “appeal[s] to king’s justice.” Malcolm asks Macbeth to send her away.

Macbeth incorrectly assumes that Gruadh will be uninterested in politics because she is a woman. Additionally, he and Malcolm will be discussing the death of her husband, which he doubts she will want to hear. Gruadh thinks his claim that he married her to protect her is a lie, but it is actually true—he knew Malcolm would send men to try and kill her once she no longer had Gilcomgan’s protection.



King Malcolm insists that his descendants must continue to rule Scotland for the nation’s own good. Macbeth disagrees, and argues that the old Celtic way is better. Malcolm insists Macbeth pledge his loyalty, especially since he gave him Moray. Gruadh understands that the two conspired to kill Gilcomgan.

Although traditionally royal succession has transferred nonlinearly, King Malcolm claims it is better for the nation if his direct descendants become kings. He might believe this, but it also is a way for him to ensure the longevity of his bloodline.



Gruadh turns to go, but before she does she grabs her sword, which leans against the wall. She swears to protect her unborn child, and declares, “No more of Bodhe’s blood shall suffer for your ambitions.” The men stare at her, shocked, before Macbeth finally escorts her from the room.

Gruadh will stop at nothing to protect her family. Although, as a woman, she is relatively politically powerless, she wants to demonstrate that she will go to any lengths to save her son, herself, and her bloodline.



That evening, Maeve and Aella comfort Gruadh as she cries. Gruadh knows women, especially ladies, are not meant to be impulsive and vengeful. Still, she stands by her oath.

Gruadh understands that her behavior is unfeminine, but she doesn’t care—her first priority is not performing gender roles but protecting her family.



Two weeks later Gruadh is happy to see the banner of Fife and Bodhe in the yard of Elgin. She is disappointed when she finds that her father has not come to save her. Instead he has sent thirty men and horses as a wedding gift and a sign of his approval.

Gruadh assumes that her father will be as angry as she is. However, she discovers he is happy with her new husband, leaving her alone in her misery and thirst for vengeance.



As time goes on, Gruadh realizes she is the only one who has not accepted Macbeth as the new mormaer. She comes to understand that he had broad popular support even before he took power.

Gruadh understands that her grudge is only hurting her—it will not lead to the dissolution of her marriage, and it just makes her life unpleasant.



Gruadh tries to find peace in her precarious situation, and one day goes to the chapel to pray. She is surprised to see Macbeth there, already praying. For the first time, she feels sympathy for him, and begins to soften.

Although Gruadh often turns to Celtic traditions for comfort, this is a rare instance of Christianity giving her the peace she seeks. Seeing that Macbeth is remorseful for his past actions, and is actively seeking forgiveness, she begins to forgive him herself.



CHAPTER 14

One day, Gruadh looks for Macbeth and finds him in the room where they keep falcons. She wants to know about his former wife, who he explains died in childbirth. Gruadh also asks him to send men to Fife to ask for her cousins Mairi and Bethoc to come help with her birth. She explains that she only trusts her own kin to deliver her child.

Gruadh wants to protect her child both because she already loves him, but also because her child is the last of her family line and as such is incredibly valuable. After so many attempts on her life and the lives of her family members, she is rightfully protective.



Macbeth is offended by the implication that he would sabotage the birth. Gruadh clarifies that she is more worried about King Malcolm. As they leave, Macbeth offers Gruadh his hand, but she does not take it.

Although Gruadh still suspects Macbeth killed Gilcomgan with King Malcolm, she has begun to trust Macbeth, having seen that he is repentant.



Three days later, Gruadh's contractions wake her. She gets up to pace the fortress. She runs into Banchorrie, whose wife has had seven children, and so is familiar with childbirth. He offers to serve as her birthing chair. She also runs into Macbeth, who expresses concern. He wants to send for a local midwife, but Gruadh refuses his help.

Gruadh is stubborn and stands by her promise to only have her friends and family help her deliver her child. Sometimes her stubbornness helps protect her, but in this situation it puts her life, and her child's life, in danger.



Over the next day and night, Gruadh labors but cannot deliver her baby. Maeve and Aella help her as best they can. Maeve invokes the goddess Brigid but it does not help, and Gruadh goes through a second day of unfruitful contractions. Maeve unties all the knots in the room and unbraids Gruadh's hair to try and coax the baby out. She also performs various rituals to discourage fairies who might steal the child.

Unable to use her medical skills to deliver the baby, Maeve invokes Celtic religion and protection. Brigid, whose symbol is the triskele, is Gruadh's protective goddess, but is unable to help. In this situation, superstition is a last-ditch effort to save Gruadh and her baby.



Although Gruadh stubbornly waits for her cousins Bethoc and Mairi, Macbeth eventually goes for a midwife himself. She arrives hours later and introduces herself as Catriona. Like Maeve and Aella, Catriona also prays to the goddess Brigid and performs rituals, but unlike those two women she is an experienced midwife and is able to turn the child, who was facing the wrong direction in the womb. With Maeve and Aella's help, Catriona and Gruadh finally deliver a healthy baby boy. Relieved, Gruadh returns to bed. Macbeth visits his wife and stepson, and for the first time Gruadh sees him smile and warms to him.

Although Gruadh is not pregnant with his child, Macbeth sees her baby as his responsibility. He also cares about the wellbeing of his wife and does not want her to suffer and possibly die. Catriona uses Celtic magic and superstition to help speed the birth, but most importantly she has the medical expertise to safely deliver the child. Flooded with endorphins, and grateful that he helped save her life, Gruadh softens towards Macbeth even more.



Macbeth jokes that the baby looks just like Gruadh, and luckily looks nothing like Gilcomgan. Gruadh agrees that the baby is like a "small, perfect, fragile" mirror of herself.

Gruadh's son is her only direct heir, and so both physically and in his obligations to his family, he is a perfect copy of his mother.



CHAPTER 15

Gruadh names her son Lulach. It is the name of one of her ancestors. Although Maeve comments it is “a name for a milch cow,” Gruadh explains “cattle are our best wealth [...] and he is my fortune.”

Macbeth invites his personal bard, Dermot mac Conall, to Elgin. One day the bard asks to speak with both Gruadh and Macbeth in preparation for Lulach’s baptism. As they prepare to meet Dermot Macbeth asks Gruadh if she will give her son a tattoo like she has. Gruadh cannot tell whether or not Macbeth approves of Celtic practices and so is careful to explain she has not decided, and that her mother, who tattooed her “saw no conflict between Celtic traditions and her Christian faith.”

Macbeth explains Dermot is a fathach, or prophet, and has made a star map of the day Lulach was born, which can be used to divine his future. Macbeth had his own future told on the day he was born but does not reveal what the stars told him.

Dermot arrives and tells Gruadh what he has seen—Lulach will live happily until twenty. He will be a good and brave man and will be king. Gruadh is excited but concerned. She wonders what will happen to Lulach after he turns twenty.

Gruadh wonders if Dermot mapped the stars and told Macbeth the best time to ride into Moray. Macbeth denies this. Gruadh then asks if Dermot has seen that Macbeth will be king. Dermot explains Macbeth has a great destiny, so great that he does not need to rely on the stars. Gruadh asks Macbeth if he believes in divination and omens, which he says he does. Gruadh then makes Dermot promise he did not help Macbeth kill her husband and take over Moray.

Gruadh decides to reveal that she can see visions of the future. She tells Macbeth she once saw “a crownlike light about your head.” She feels that she now has power over Macbeth—knowing that he believes in omens and knowing that he believes she can see them.

Lulach is Gruadh’s only heir, and the only direct heir left in her family (aside from her nephew) and so represents the hopes, dreams, and wealth of many generations.



Gruadh is aware that although she and her mother and father all believed that Christianity and Celtic traditions could coexist, not everyone agrees. She doesn’t want to offend her new husband nor reveal personal details about her split faith that he will disapprove of.



Macbeth, like Gruadh, believes in Celtic traditions and in fortunetelling. Bards generally are used to record the past, but in this situation, he can also look towards the future.



Fortune telling is often imprecise, which helps stave off heartbreak. Gruadh does not know if Lulach will die at twenty, or simply become unhappy. The uncertainty protects her from premature tragedy.



Although she has begun to forgive Macbeth for her first husband’s death (which he has yet to admit to), she hopes he hasn’t used divination, which is so important to her, to kill Gilcomgan. She sees this as a misuse of the power of prophecy. Although Macbeth aspires to be king, his ambition is so strong he doesn’t need to look into the future.



Gruadh saw Macbeth’s crown over a year earlier. She tells him this as a kind of gift and peace-offering, but also as a way to control him, knowing that she will have power if he believes she can see their futures.



Angus, Bethoc, and an envoy from Fife arrive late in the winter. They also bring gifts from Dolina. Gruadh is happy to be reunited with friends and to be reminded of home. She even feels more warmly towards Macbeth.

Being surrounded by family makes Gruadh feel warm and loved. This, in turn, allows her to feel warmer and more generously towards her husband.



Catriona returns home to her son. She is a widow and although she has had marriage offers she has turned them down so far. As a fellow widow, Gruadh understands her reluctance to remarry, and her desire to be reunited with her son. However, Bethoc dislikes Catriona and is not upset when she leaves.

Although Gruadh is often the central grudge-holding character, Bethoc surprisingly holds a grudge. Although Catriona saved Gruadh's life and Bethoc was not even there, she perhaps feels resentful that she was not the one to deliver her friend's baby.



Lulach has his naming ceremony, which, according to custom, Gruadh is not allowed to attend. Maeve goes however, and afterwards tells Gruadh of a strange encounter on the road to the church. Una, the coal burner's wife, ambushed them and prophesized that Lulach would one day wear a crown. She also offered him protection and gave a small stone. She also told Macbeth that there was a crown in his future, and he would be remembered longer than his son. Gruadh wonders if that means she and Macbeth will have sons together.

Many of the prophecies regarding Macbeth say the same thing—that he will be king. Constantly concerned with her legacy, she worries this means that she and Macbeth will have no heirs.



Maeve notes that Macbeth has strong ambition, and that marrying Gruadh strengthened his claim to the throne and increased his power. Maeve believes that one day Gruadh will be queen.

Gruadh knows that she has a strong claim to the throne, but this is the first time she considers how her claim is strengthened by her second marriage.



CHAPTER 16

That winter, Gruadh continues to soften towards Macbeth. She still feels grief and anger, but also believes one day she might feel forgiveness. Maeve calls this a "mothering instinct," claiming "women are peace weavers by nature."

Gruadh holds grudges for a long time, but has seen first-hand that her husband is a good and penitent man. Maeve believes Gruadh will have to give up on her grudge because she's a woman and women do not naturally hold grudges, but this is not true for Gruadh.



Gruadh knows accepting Macbeth as her husband will make her life, and the lives of those around her easier, but she is not ready yet. She takes the stone Una gave her and turns it into a piece of jewelry for Lulach to wear to protect him.

Gruadh is closer to forgiving Macbeth, but still needs time to mourn her husband and adjust to a new status quo. Always concerned with protecting her family, she is happy to use Una's protective stone.



When the weather begins to warm, Macbeth and his guards begin to travel out into the countryside. Gruadh doesn't understand why he is going on war patrols, but he understands he is looking after the people in his domain, rescuing children and sharing food from Elgin's storage with his tenants. He understands that if he helps and gets to know his tenants now, they will fight for him in wartime.

Gruadh begins to feel flashes of desire for Macbeth, who has yet to visit her in her bedroom at night. Maeve, too, now considers Macbeth "a good man," and reminds Gruadh she will need to have sex with him if she ever wants a royal son.

Gruadh has the urge to leave the fortress. She has Angus, Bethoc, and Séan, one of Macbeth's warriors, accompany her. They ride towards the ocean where they spot Viking ships. Angus pulls Gruadh into a hiding spot behind a rock. Men from the Viking ships, including one Gruadh recognizes as Thorfin Sigurdsson, meet an envoy of four other men on horseback, one of whom Gruadh recognizes as her husband, Macbeth. Gruadh suspects he is trying to buy Viking loyalty if he ever makes a bid for the crown.

Macbeth and his men give Thorfin and his men a box, but there is some disagreement and Macbeth kills one of the Viking soldiers. Gruadh is horrified, but Angus chastises her and argues if she were "a true warrior, rather than a woman keen to play with swords" she would understand the necessity of bloodshed. He continues that an alliance between Moray and the Orkney will be necessary if Duncan comes to power, because the people do not trust Duncan to be a good, strong king.

Although Angus encourages her to sneak away with him, Gruadh feels her husband has been "secretive and cruel" and wants to confront. She reveals herself to Macbeth and challenges him, wondering why he killed a man and why he paid a bribe. Macbeth tries to get her to return to Elgin, but she will not leave. Finally, he explains he paid the Vikings a bribe, as men have done for years, to keep the shoreline protected. He adds the tribute he paid was once promised by Gilcomgan. Macbeth suggests that as a wife and a lady Gruadh should stay home, but she makes it clear she is uninterested in her traditional womanly role.

Although Gruadh has spent the last few years eavesdropping and learning about politics, she still has a lot to learn. Macbeth, who has simply spent more time as a ruler, understands that a good mormaer attends to his people in peacetimes as well as wartimes to instill loyalty.



Gruadh continues to soften towards her husband. Personally, this is a victory, but it also signals that she could continue her family line if she and Macbeth had sex and conceived a child.



Gruadh hates Thorfin because he kidnapped her when she was a child. Even though her father has forgiven him and Thorfin has tried to make amends, she personally has not forgiven him. Therefore, she is angry both that her husband seems to be engaging in shady political dealings and that he is consorting with her enemy. Still, she understands his strategy and that he is strengthening his claim to the crown.



Gruadh is horrified by the violence. Angus assumes it is because Gruadh is a woman, and women are less violent than men, but in reality it is likely that Gruadh has simply experienced less violence in her life than Angus has. Still, although he has insulted her, he takes the time to explain the political dealings going on before them.



Gruadh is upset by the violence and confronts her husband about it. He is upset that she has spied on him, and, like Angus before, suggests that she does not understand because she is a woman, and she should not try to understand because it is not her job as a woman to be involved in politics. However, Gruadh is interested in the sphere outside of her home and refuses to be locked out of political decisions.



As Gruadh returns home she feels “admiration” for Macbeth. She sees that he is capable, uncompromising, and ambitious, with a strong moral code. Additionally, she resolves to keep herself informed of political goings on outside of her household. She considers herself Macbeth’s equal, and is not content to limit her power to the domestic sphere.

Although initially upset by the violence she saw her husband commit, Gruadh is awed by his commitment to his cause and by his violent ambition. More than seeing him in moments of vulnerability, his strength melts her defenses.



CHAPTER 17

Gruadh continues to do her best to run her household. She observes Macbeth riding out into Moray and getting to know his tenants. She sees that the people of Moray love and respect him, and see him as their king, not as a usurper.

Seeing other people treat her husband as the rightful ruler of Moray helps her see him as her husband and not as a usurper.



One day Macbeth and Gruadh lock eyes as Macbeth plays with Lulach. Gruadh recognizes that he “yearns” for her, and that night he visits her room. He kisses her, and Gruadh feels “almost a forgiveness.” The two have sex, though it is more “courteous” than “passionate.” As Macbeth leaves he admits to her that he killed Gilcomgan. He hadn’t meant to burn him in the tower, instead anticipating that he and his men would evacuate. When Gruadh asks, Macbeth admits that he and King Malcolm planned it together. Macbeth does feel guilty, though, and explains “kin is the strongest bond [...] even when murder is done, those ties do not break. Ever afterward, we must live with our deeds.”

Macbeth admits what Gruadh has long suspected—that he killed Gilcomgan. However, he did not do it in the cowardly way she had assumed—he did not mean to burn him in the tower. Although Macbeth is used to violence he is not always comfortable with it, and is uncomfortable with how Gilcomgan died because it was not a particularly noble or honorable death. He knows that for him to have a true partnership with Gruadh he must be open and transparent with her.



Catriona returns to Elgin in May to help with the birth of another child. Bethoc remains jealous and unwelcoming. One day Gruadh asks how Macbeth knew to fetch Catriona, and the midwife reveals she and Macbeth were childhood friends. Gruadh is jealous that Catriona knows details of Macbeth’s past and family, which he has not revealed to her.

Bethoc continues to hold her Grudge against Catriona. Gruadh, too, is drawn into this dislike. Both grudges are based on jealousy—Bethoc is jealous that Gruadh and Catriona are close, and Gruadh is jealous Catriona and Macbeth know each other well.



Bethoc, Aella, Gruadh, and Catriona discuss the prospect of Macbeth becoming king. Bethoc notes he would have to fight a war first. Catriona comments that men “understand life and death differently than women,” because women give birth and therefore “cannot bring ourselves to take life, knowing its struggle and value.” Gruadh pushes back. She says if killing someone would save her life or Lulach’s, she would do it.

Catriona has a fairly reductive idea of how men and women should behave. She thinks women are naturally more peaceful. Gruadh rejects this—although she has given birth she will (and has!) used violence to protect her son and herself, because she is caring mother, not in spite of it. Her embrace of both masculine and feminine traits will also serve her well when she eventually becomes queen.



Gruadh continues to argue with Catriona, who claims she “cast no blame” when her husband died. Catriona adds that women are “coals of the hearth fire,” whose role is to “accept and support.” Once again, Gruadh pushes back, asserting she “would rather be the flame than the coal.”

Gruadh is a fiery woman who holds grudges. Others see this as unfeminine, but there’s no reason that women should be more peaceful or supportive than men, a fact Gruadh realizes.



Over the summer Gruadh and Macbeth often lock eyes and Gruadh often feels a spark of attraction and connection, but she is too prideful to ask him back into her bedroom. She worries that without her pride she would be vulnerable.

Later that summer, Macbeth considers appointing a Catholic bishop in Moray. He asks Gruadh for her input and, impressed with her answer—that a Celtic man “who will think of Moray souls before himself” should be appointed—he muses that he should add her to his council. She points out he “already did”—that by marrying her he took on the burden of her advice and opinions. Furthermore, although she does not say it, her bloodline is more powerful than his, and so she feels she deserves a seat at the table.

Macbeth rides off to visit a thane for a few days, and Gruadh goes on a hunting trip with Finn and Angus. Gruadh, who once enjoyed hunting, is now more squeamish about killing animals, and her friends joke “motherhood had softened” her.

Gruadh realizes she is close to Catriona’s home, and decides to visit to mend their friendship. However, when she arrives she sees Macbeth’s horse tied outside, and realizes the two are likely sleeping together. Furious, she shoots an arrow into the door, and Macbeth and Catriona come out, half dressed.

Gruadh returns to Elgin, furious. She plans to leave and return to Fife, but Macbeth arrives before she can and stops her. She accuses him of conspiring with her “personal enemy” Thorfin, of killing Gilcomgan, and of bringing his “mistress” and “whore” Catriona into their home under false pretenses.

Macbeth tries to explain he and Catriona have been friends their whole lives and “sometimes sought comfort in the other.” Gruadh angrily observes “you take no comfort from me,” and he counters, “you offer none.” Gruadh asks him for loyalty, and he promises to break it off from Catriona. Still, he blames Gruadh’s coldness for his infidelity. She does not accept this excuse.

Often, Gruadh’s pride and strength protect her, but in this situation they actively undermine her marriage.



Gruadh has long thought of herself as Macbeth’s equal, but this is one of the first instances where he acknowledges her power, influence, and expertise. Although he did not necessarily know it when they married, she has always expected to be an equal member of their partnership, who is able to speak on political and religious affairs.



Gruadh remains tough in many ways, and will kill to defend herself and her family, but is now less likely to indiscriminately murder animals.



Ironically, although in the previous passage Gruadh was unable to shoot animals, when enraged by Macbeth’s betrayal she is easily able to muster the strength to shoot an arrow at his door.



Although Gruadh has been warming towards him, she is now overcome with anger at Macbeth’s perceived betrayal. Fairly, she’s upset that he has conspired with a man who she hates and has now cheated on her.



Macbeth blames his affair on Gruadh’s own coldness, but she points out that this is unfair. Although she was not acting like a traditionally warm and welcoming wife, in her defense he had married her by force, totally upending her life.



Macbeth tells Gruadh she can return to Fife, but she knows she can't and won't, as "obligation to [her] kin group" demands that she stay with Macbeth. She asks him what the purpose of their marriage is, and, explicitly for the first time, he says he believes their combined legacies will make them powerful enough to rule Scotland. Gruadh comments this will require loyalty. He agrees. Later that week, Macbeth and Gruadh begin to have sex again, sleeping together frequently and eventually sharing a bed permanently. Their relationship has reached a new stage—there is now a tender bond between them.

Gruadh knows that, as angry as she is towards Macbeth, she has an obligation towards him as his wife. Furthermore, she has an obligation towards her family to stay in their marriage. She understands that they will be powerful together, if they can forgive each other. For the first time, Macbeth explicitly acknowledges her family heritage, and the political potential of their union. Aligned towards the same goal, they are finally able to bond.



In July, Gruadh watches Macbeth oversee a judgment court. Seeing men clap and stamp for him, she feels as though the crowd is willing Macbeth into power, and this small noise will soon be a roar in Scotland.

Gruadh and Macbeth are increasingly a team. She understands that he can, and will, be king if they play their cards right.



CHAPTER 18

As Gruadh and Macbeth travel for a wedding they pass three black ravens, a bad omen.

Ravens often symbolize death and violence. Later, after Macbeth is fatally wounded in battle, Gruadh will realize it was at the same spot she saw these ravens decades earlier.



At the wedding Gruadh is excited to see Bodhe, Dolina, and Malcolm mac Farquhar, her nephew. She still feels some resentment towards her father, though, and the next day when they are hunting with their falcons in relative privacy she approaches him. She wonders why he didn't protest her second marriage, and wonders if he knew of Macbeth's scheme to kill Gilcomgan and marry her all along. Bodhe denies any foreknowledge of her husband's murder but reveals that while he thought she would be safe enough with Gilcomgan, he knew she could marry Macbeth, his first choice for her husband, if Gilcomgan was murdered. Still, he notes as much as he could hope for this outcome, "fate lent a hand."

Gruadh loves her father but is upset with him. Although she is now happy with Macbeth, it took her a long time to get there, and she'd expected Bodhe to come offer support. Bodhe reveals that he'd hoped she would be able to marry Macbeth all along; Macbeth was his first choice for her husband, but because he was already married he was out of the question. Instead Bodhe tried to arrange the second-best first marriage he could for Gruadh, anticipating that it wouldn't last.



Gruadh reports that Macbeth wants to be king. Bodhe knows this already, thinks Macbeth will be a good king, and believes Scottish leaders will rally behind him. Bodhe also tells Gruadh that Macbeth saved her life on the night Gilcomgan died. He sent his uncle Banchorrie to warn her, because he worried King Malcolm would try to kill her if she was left unprotected.

Gruadh realizes part of grudge against Macbeth was unfounded. Although he did murder her first husband, his marriage was for her own protection. He knew Malcolm would try to kill her and cut off her bloodline.



The pair returns to the hunting party, and Bodhe asks Gruadh to say a prayer for "the sake of those who share your bloodline." He believes he will die soon.

Although not a prophet, Bodhe has a sense of his future. Once he is gone, he hopes his daughter will carry on as the family's only heir of age.



Back in Elgin, Gruadh has a vision of men fighting. Both Macbeth and Gilcomgan are there. To the north is a ship that is also like a monster, and to the south are hordes of men. In the dream Macbeth is suddenly beside her and points to King Malcolm and Duncan, who are approaching, and says they must be stopped. Gruadh wakes up and realizes she has had a vision of the future: Scotland in chaos after old Malcolm's death. Macbeth wakes up and she tells him everything.

Now that she and Macbeth are close, she shares all her visions with him. In this vision, the ships to the north are likely Thorfin's Vikings. King Malcolm and Duncan, his grandson and next in line to the throne, together are ruining Scotland. Macbeth is Scotland's only hope.



One day, as Gruadh stands outside, Ruari rides into Elgin and announces that Bodhe and Malcolm mac Farquhar have been killed. Although the attackers were anonymous, Ruari could see they belonged to "a man of note." Gruadh goes to her bedroom to mourn and Macbeth joins her. Gruadh recognizes her bloodline is slowly being whittled down, and suspects King Malcolm is responsible. Macbeth, like her, is upset, and this comforts her for the night. By the next morning, however, Gruadh wants revenge.

Bodhe had predicted he would die soon, and he was correct. His and Malcolm's deaths leave Gruadh and Lulach as the only living members of their bloodline. She knows she must work extra hard to protect herself and her son now, and believes one aspect of this will be proactively taking revenge against those who want her dead.



Gruadh and Macbeth travel to Fife for the funeral. They bury Bodhe, young Malcolm mac Farquhar, and Fergus, who was killed with them. Gruadh only cries in private and can feel herself "hardening within."

After a lifetime of tragedy, Gruadh becomes more and more violent and traditionally masculine. This mirrors Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#), in which Lady Macbeth prays to the gods to make her more masculine and therefore more capable of violence.



Gruadh must take care of loose ends at Abernethy. She allows Father Anselm to stay, because although she never got along with him, Bodhe did. Father Anselm is happy to remain in his home. He tells Gruadh he respected her father, and advises her to emulate him, "rather than fostering your pride and female independence."

Gruadh respects Father Anselm on behalf of her father, but understandably struggles to deal with his sexism. Although his advice, to be less prideful, isn't inherently bad, it comes from a sexist place.



Gruadh can see Bodhe's kinsmen from Fife are want revenge as much as she does. She asks Macbeth to keep her involved, but he tells her to "leave it be."

Gruadh is fixated on revenge, but Macbeth realizes it will take time, and fixating will only hurt her.



Black Duff, a cousin of Gruadh's who is now a close associate of King Malcolm, comes to pay his respects. Gruadh realizes this means she must be careful not to say anything that can make its way back to the king, and seeing her understanding of politics, Macbeth observes, "we shall make a queen of you yet."

Although Black Duff is her relative, Gruadh knows he has no loyalty to her. A lifetime of observing politics has given Gruadh a keen political eye. Macbeth increasingly sees what Gruadh already knows—she will be a good queen.



That night, Luag, the bard, recites the names of the significant men and women in Gruadh's lineage, from her ancestors to Bodhe to Lulach. She realizes Lulach will never be fully safe until King Malcolm, his children, his grandchildren, and his supporters are dead.

The bard's account of her family's history reminds Gruadh both of her obligation to her ancestors and to her living son, whom she must protect for the sake of their bloodline.



Drostan has returned from his monastery to pay respects. He is on official business, keeping a record for the scribes. Gruadh is happy that he will "record old Malcolm's evil deed forever."

Drostan, a monk who records history, has the power to make or break the legacy of politicians and kings. This is thus a small, but powerful act of revenge.



During the funeral Gruadh thinks how she wants "mourning over so revenge could begin." As she and the funeral party return to Abernethy after burying the bodies, Duncan, Crinan, and a group of men approach on horseback. They represent King Malcolm and have ostensibly come to offer condolences. When pressed, they deny that the king was involved in the Bodhe's death.

Gruadh is single-mindedly focused on revenge. It has become an issue, superseding all other more normal emotions. Because she doesn't give herself time to mourn, she will never truly be able to move on after the death of her father and nephew.



Duncan promises that when he is king the feud between Bodhe and King Malcolm will be forgotten. Gruadh promises that once she is Lady of Fife, although she will make an effort to make peace, her "men will never forget the death of their leader." Duncan and Crinan are confused—they feel Gruadh cannot rule Fife as a woman. This frustrates Gruadh, which Macbeth recognizes, and he quickly ends the conversation.

Duncan knows he will be king, indicating the nepotism at play in Scottish succession. Gruadh knows that Duncan and his family were responsible for the death of her father, and so subtly suggests Duncan and his family will pay. Unfortunately, because she is a woman Malcolm plans to take the lands that belong to her away, only angering her further.



Gruadh is frustrated that as Bodhe's daughter she cannot enact revenge herself and must wait for men to avenge her father for her, whereas if she were his son, she could seek revenge herself.

Although Gruadh places no limitations on herself, society makes it more difficult for her to enact revenge as a woman with no military or true political influence except through her husband.



The next week, while still at Abernethy, Finn, Macbeth, Gruadh and others discuss revenge. They wonder who sent the men who killed Bodhe, whether it was King Malcolm, Duncan, or even Crinan. Gruadh wonders when justice will be brought. She places her hands on the table and considers how she has "such feminine hands for such masculine thoughts." Macbeth warns her it will be a "bloody matter," but Gruadh is not put off.

Gruadh's line about her feminine hands references similar lines from Shakespeare's play, in which Lady Macbeth asks to be "unsex[ed]" so she can more easily enact violent fantasies.



Gruadh wants Macbeth to kill Malcolm, but he refuses. He argues installing someone from Bodhe's bloodline in a position of power would be better revenge. Gruadh complains Lulach will not be old enough to fight for years, but Macbeth clarifies he's talking about her as "rightful queen and claimant." Gruadh knows she must be patient, but she wants swift violent revenge.

Gruadh wants to avenge her family as soon as possible, but what she has difficulty understanding is that revenge doesn't always have to be immediate and bloody. Macbeth knows that the best revenge will be taking power from Duncan, the same power Duncan's family tried to take from them.



CHAPTER 19

Gruadh and Macbeth return to Moray in late August. Macbeth transfers his household from Elgin to Craig Phadraig in the northeast. As they ride noisily from one fortress to another, Macbeth notes that a warlord trying to intimidate his enemies "should not travel about with puppies and children." Gruadh counters that by doing this he shows his strength and rallies his constituency "with the humble appeal of your escort."

Although not traditionally a woman's role, Gruadh increasingly understands what it takes to be a successful warlord. She offers her husband sound advice on how best to rule—advice that proves especially helpful because it increases his power without violence.



A few weeks after their move, Gruadh and Macbeth receive a letter from King Malcolm, announcing he's installed Black Duff as Fife's mormaer. Malcolm acknowledges Gruadh's lineage and gives her lands and property but strips her of her inheritance and rights. She is unhappy, but glad to own a small part of Fife—some of which she gives to Dolina who she is sure will want to leave Abernethy once Duff arrives.

This letter is an insult to Gruadh, whose land King Malcolm is taking away because, as a woman, he doesn't trust her to oversee it. Although she is angry, she understands that she must not act on her anger and instead should enact revenge in a subtler way.



In the hall one evening Dermot tells the story of "The Three Sons of Tuirenn." One aspect of the story involves a man diving into the ocean and encountering dozens of bana-ghaisgeach, or warrior women. The next day Gruadh considers these warrior women, and how she is part of their Celtic legacy of women who took up arms and fought on their own or beside their husbands for hundreds of years.

Gruadh has often faced criticism for her fiery personality and interest in swordcraft, but her behavior fits into a long tradition of Celtic warrior women, who have been immortalized in stories.



Gruadh notes that although the church does not approve of warrior women, it is too far away to control the actions of the Gaels. She adds, "warlike behavior in a woman is not sinful heresy, and is sometimes even necessary." She also thinks to herself that she has an obligation to her legacy to protect herself and her sons through any means necessary.

Gruadh believes that her interest in war and occasional violence is in fact a part of her femininity. She wants to protect her family, and sees fighting as the best way to do it.



Gruadh has another dream of the future; in this one, Macbeth fights a single opponent as a bloody battle rages around him. Gruadh feels an intense foreboding when she wakes from this dream and does not share it with her husband.

Gruadh doesn't fully understand what this dream means, and therefore doesn't want to upset Macbeth by sharing it with him.



Macbeth rides into his territory to curry favor with his people. Gruadh spends much of her time with Lulach. She prays daily, and occasionally finds time to practice with her sword.

Gruadh manages to find a way to incorporate both her more traditionally masculine and feminine interests into her life.



That winter Gruadh and Macbeth return to Elgin. Gruadh and Macbeth often have sex, but she has not become pregnant again. Maeve suggests that Gruadh's continued insistence on practicing with her sword and her desire for revenge are physically changing her body and making her unable to carry a child. Gruadh ignores Maeve, but later—when reflecting back on this time in her life from middle age—wonders if she should have heeded her nursemaid's advice.

Gruadh often has to deal with advice about her infertility. Maeve repeatedly argues that Gruadh's negative thoughts along with her interest in masculine pursuits like war and sword-fighting make her body too masculine and therefore inhospitable for a baby. There is no scientific basis for this, and Gruadh ignores her nurse.



Gruadh sends a request to Duff asking for Bodhe's hawks. Two weeks later, Ruari arrives with hawks and hunting dogs, and asks to stay at Elgin with her. Later that winter Elgin gets a new priest, who Gruadh likes more than she ever liked Father Anselm. He tells her that "your wish for vengeance is sinful" but "understandable," and hopes that she can find peace with time.

Although Gruadh continues to want revenge, she realizes that her desires are ruining her life. She looks to the Christian church for guidance, which is often where she turns when trying to find forgiveness and release. This reflects the fact that she, like many Scots at the time, merges both pagan and Christian traditions.



That winter Lulach takes his first steps, and sometime later Gruadh is pregnant again. She prays to the goddess Brigid for protection, but miscarries not soon after, before she even has the opportunity to tell Macbeth. She returns to her swordcraft and feels "a bitterness growing in me like a hard kernel nut."

Gruadh desperately wants to be a mother again but her miscarriage makes her wonder if she is unable to carry life. Despite Maeve's warnings, she continues with swordcraft, reasoning that it is not her hobbies that are preventing her from carrying a baby to term.



CHAPTER 20

That spring Macbeth, Gruadh, and an envoy of eighty men on horseback set out to survey Moray. Gruadh insists on brining Lulach so she can look after him, to prove to observers that she and Macbeth have a happy marriage, and to make their party look less like a "war band."

As she did in an earlier chapter, Gruadh explains to Macbeth that by making himself look less warlike and violent he will win over his people.



As Macbeth and Gruadh set out, he mentions Enya, Thorfin's grandmother, who now lives in northern Moray. Macbeth has met with her, and can attest to her powerful magic, although he will not tell Gruadh what she told him about her future.

This is the first mention of Mother Enya, who will become an important character in Gruadh's life, a fortuneteller and witch whose power proves aspirational.



On their journey Macbeth, Gruadh, and their party stay with many friendly thanes. Gruadh can see that "approval gather[s] for Macbeth like a wave." Across the territory men pledge their "admiration and loyalty," and Gruadh notices men pledging specific numbers of soldiers who can rally behind Macbeth if he needs them. She recognizes that Gilcomgan was resented by his people, and understands that Macbeth knew this, and saw that his people were waiting for him to return to power because they had loved his father, Finlach.

Macbeth retook Moray in order to get revenge on Gilcomgan and to honor his father and his heritage. However, Gruadh can see that the people of Moray have always considered Macbeth their rightful ruler and wanted him to retake the region as much as he did. Now, the support they offer him is also a kind of bid to support him if he attempts to take the crown.



One morning, Gruadh asks Macbeth when he decided he wanted more power than could be attained by simply avenging his murdered father and taking over Moray, and when he began to aspire to be king. Macbeth said that from early childhood Finlach had told him he should be king. He was descended from kings and princesses, and now feels that to fully revenge his father he must not just be mormaer but king.

Gruadh observes that, if they were to become king and queen, they could avenge both of their fathers. Macbeth agrees, and reveals that he had always planned to use her heritage to make his claim. But, he adds, he did not know she would be such a perfect partner, or that the fateful death of Bodhe would motivate her, too, to seek out revenge.

While staying with a mormaer whose territory, Ross, borders Moray, Gruadh listens to a bard tell the story of Deirdre and Naisi. Although Deirdre was hidden from the world with her father, she elopes with Naisi to live in a remote glen. They live in happiness for a while, but in the end Naisi is killed, and Deirdre kills herself in grief. That night, Gruadh talks to Macbeth about the story—she feels that Celts and Gaels no longer have freedom, and cannot live like Deirdre and Naisi anymore. Macbeth says this is for the best, and life is less brutal than it was. Gruadh worries Scotland will become too Roman, or Saxon, or Viking, and hopes they remain Celts.

Later in their journey, Macbeth gifts Gruadh with a small dagger with which she can keep herself safe. They travel towards Moray's border with Argyll, where Gruadh's mother, Ailsa, was born, and these men promise Macbeth three thousand men whenever he needs.

That Saturday Macbeth and Gruadh go to pray at the local church. Macbeth leaves gifts for the priest, who promises to pray for Macbeth's soul, but Macbeth "asked him to say the prayers for Moray, and all Scotland, instead."

CHAPTER 21

A few days later, as Macbeth, Gruadh, and their party ride home, a group of men attacks them. One man grabs Gruadh and tries to drag her into the trees nearby but she stabs him with her knife, killing him. One of Macbeth's men then grabs Gruadh and brings her towards the cart where Lulach is. Gruadh realizes the attackers are trying to kill her son. She holds him close until the fight is over.

Macbeth has been ambitious his whole life. His ambition was baked into his blood, but the death of his father pushed him over the edge, motivating him to fight both for the sake of his own family heritage, but also to avenge Finlach.



Although Gruadh and Macbeth have previously discussed how their heritages and temperaments make them good partners, now their desire to avenge their fathers perfectly matches their ambitions. This moment further reflects how their personal fates are intricately tied to the fate of their country.



Gruadh and Macbeth have different opinions when it comes to whether the new order, or old traditions, are better. This will continue to be a debate even as they gain power, with Gruadh clinging to Celtic traditions and Macbeth believing that Scotland and its inhabitants need to embrace Christianity and other relatively new innovations in order to be competitive in the future.



Macbeth's gift, like Bodhe's gift of a sword years before, indicates that he supports her continued practice with the sword, and that he sees her as an equal who should have say in his political and military endeavors.



Macbeth and Gruadh often see their lives and futures as entwined with Scotland's, and here they put Scotland's wellbeing ahead of their own—praying for their land and nation instead of themselves.



This is the first man Gruadh has ever killed. However, she does not hesitate, because she knows she must protect herself and her family. Her first instinct is to go to Lulach and make sure he is safe from harm.



The battle ends. Macbeth and his men “won,” but there were casualties on both sides. Macbeth comes to check on Gruadh and tells her he suspects Crinan sent the attackers to cut off Bodhe’s line. Gruadh wonders if it was King Malcolm who sent the men, but Macbeth points out Crinan, Duncan, and Malcolm are all working together.

Gruadh has been aware of the abstract danger she is in now feels the reality of the acute, violent threat against her life and Lulach’s. She understands King Malcolm and his children see her as a threat and want to cut off her line completely.



Gruadh is suddenly overwhelmed by guilt. She has killed a man and wants to go to church to confess. Macbeth argues she doesn’t need penance. He believes “battle killings are defensible even within the Church.” Gruadh wonders how Macbeth has managed to kill so many men. He tells her he’s let it go. Still, before they make it back to Elgin Gruadh finds a priest to confess to. He quickly absolves her although she wonders how “faith and violence could exist as near bedfellows.”

Gruadh occasionally turns to the church to absolve herself of guilt or to let go of grudges. In this case, however, Macbeth argues that killing a man in self-defense or in battle is not a sin, and she should be able to forgive herself. Macbeth has had more practice with this, but Gruadh has not, and cannot fully reconcile “faith and violence.”



A few weeks later Macbeth is thrown from his horse. He recovers in a tenant’s house and Gruadh goes to see him. She is surprised to find Catriona already there. She urges Macbeth to return to Elgin with her, but cannot share a saddle with him because, she reveals for the first time, she is pregnant. Although this is true, she announces it in order to “claim [her] territory.” Catriona offers to help with the pregnancy, but Gruadh insists Bethoc can take care of her. Macbeth returns to Elgin with her and recovers for a few days. Although happily pregnant, Gruadh is filled with a vague foreboding.

Gruadh no longer feels as angry towards Catriona as before, still she does not want the woman’s involvement in her life or pregnancy. Gruadh knows that Macbeth had an affair because she was not intimate with him, and so she uses her pregnancy to prove that she and Macbeth are now intimate, a kind of nonviolent revenge against the woman she feels wronged her.



Gruadh has another dream of the future. In this one, she is in a boat, and from her boat can see Macbeth in a warship along with two young men, all sailing west towards the setting sun. She recognizes the two men are her sons with Macbeth but is surprised not to see Lulach. She tries to catch up with the ship but fails.

Seeing Macbeth with two sons suggests to Gruadh that they will have children together. However, that they are sailing on a boat without her and Lulach seems ominous. Later she will learn that sailing west means sailing towards death.



That fall, on All Saint’s Eve, Gruadh goes out into the community with Bethoc and Aella. Her two friends are most excited to visit an old woman who is said to be able to tell the future. The old woman is the charcoal burner’s wife, Una, dressed up as Old Cailleach, a woman from Celtic mythology.

Although All Saint’s Eve is a pagan holiday, everyone enjoys celebrating it anyway, as it is a long-standing tradition that brings the community together. This points to the frequent mixing of Celtic and Christian tradition of the time.



By cracking eggs into water Una predicts when and if women will marry. She tells Aella she will marry a tall man, which delights her, but Bethoc may not marry at all, which the healer finds upsetting.

Often, specific knowledge about the future only makes the seeker unhappy—Bethoc learning she might not marry at all is more upsetting than ignorance.



Una wants to talk to Gruadh and takes her aside. Gruadh has come to see Una but is reluctant to admit it, before finally asking about dream reading. She tells Una about her most recent dream and Una suggests “when we sail west in dreams [...] then death is beckoning.” She says Gruadh’s sons will go west, but one will be a warrior, and Macbeth will be remembered as a great king. Gruadh wonders about her other two sons, but Una can only say that they will not be warriors like their brother.

Una continues her prophesying—she tells Gruadh she will have three husbands, six pregnancies, and more than six heartbreaks. Una then give Gruadh a warning to bring to Macbeth—“beware the son of the warrior whose spilled blood will make him a king.”

Gruadh does not repeat Una’s message to Macbeth. She realizes either Una is telling her lies or telling her truth’s she doesn’t want to hear. She decides to bury the little crystal Una gave Lulach for protection, and to try to forget what Una said.

A few weeks later riders arrive at Elgin. They announce King Malcolm has died in an ambush. Duncan is now king. Macbeth will go to bury his grandfather on Iona, where all kings are buried. Gruadh insists on coming with him.

Before arriving in Iona, Macbeth, Banchorrie, and Gruadh meet in Scone and discuss King Malcolm’s death. Banchorrie warns the couple that some people are accusing them of orchestrating the murder. Gruadh asks Macbeth if he was involved, but he insists he was not. Macbeth anticipates Duncan will likely be a bad king, for although he “bears the ambitions of three—himself, his father, and his grandfather [...] he lacks the wit or judgment of the others.” Macbeth has been asked to serve as Duncan’s general. He puns drily that while the crown needs Moray, it is also true that “Moray needs the crown.”

Sometimes, it is better to only know part of the future than the whole tragic story. Macbeth and his sons traveling west suggest they are traveling towards death. Even though Gruadh is happy to know she will have two sons with Macbeth, she suspects that, by saying they won’t be warriors, Una is saying they will not live into adulthood.



This prophecy is arguably the most important one in the novel. Unlike other prophecies, it takes the form of specific instructions, that Gruadh can choose to heed or not.



Gruadh worries that Una is a fraud, but that Una already wanted to talk to Gruadh before knowing her dream suggests she is not, and thatnGruadh simply doesn’t want to believe the dark truth.



Just as Malcolm had threatened, his grandson is succeeding him as king, although traditionally this was not how succession worked, King Malcolm did all he could to ensure the longevity and power of his bloodline.



Although often the weight of a family legacy can do good—Gruadh and Macbeth are both made more ambitious by their heritages—Duncan is burdened by the memory of his grandfather and the machinations of his father, who remains alive. Duncan was not chosen because he was a good king, but merely because his grandfather and father installed him. More than ever, Macbeth’s ambitions drive him towards the crown, which he fears Duncan will corrupt.



CHAPTER 22

King Malcolm's body is brought to Scone, where candlelight vigils are held. At Scone, Gruadh also witnesses Duncan's crowning. Macbeth stands on the hill with Duncan as the ceremony begins, and Gruadh observes he "looked far more a king than plain, stocky Duncan." Gruadh reports that the ceremony is a "crowning" not a "coronation," because the kingship it is not bestowed by the church, but by "ancient, mystical rite."

Crinan serves as Duncan's crowner, which, because they are father and son, "smacked of conspiracy to some." That day and night, although there are celebrations, Gruadh has an ominous feeling.

Malcolm is buried at Iona. Macbeth goes with the escort, but Gruadh remains at Dunsinnan. Gruadh reflects on Lady Sybilla, who is "effectively queen," although because she is Saxon can never be a fully Celtic queen. Gruadh wonders if she will also have the title of queen, acknowledging envy is a sin and coveting anyway.

Gruadh and Lady Sybilla spend a lot of time together while their husbands are away. The morning Gruadh is set to leave Dunsinnan, Lady Sybilla asks Gruadh to promise that if she dies, Gruadh will watch over her children, Donald Bán and Malcolm mac Duncan. Gruadh agrees.

Macbeth has returned from Iona and travels home with Gruadh. He hopes to be buried on Iona one day. Shortly into Lent, Gruadh miscarries a premature son. Macbeth is away when his wife miscarries, but rushes home. He tells her that her health is all that matters, but Gruadh is embarrassed she "kept such ill care of the little souls we invited between us."

When Macbeth, Finn, and Ruari all ride out without telling Gruadh where they are going, she reflects on how, although she has a place on the war council, lately she has not been included. Stuck at home, bored, she decides to do more charitable works in the community. She feels her "arms [are] so empty," and knows Macbeth needs his people's loyalty.

The crowning ceremony is pagan, relying on Celtic traditions instead of Christian ones. This is because Christianity came to Scotland relatively late, only after the people had already established many Celtic rituals.



As succession is normally supposed to travel nonlinearly, and crowners have a say in who will be king, but it is clear to everyone Duncan's family is looking after its own.



Gruadh wants to be queen, and could be, because her ancestry is right. Although she envies Lady Sybilla's position she has no hard feelings against her friend.



This moment is related to a vision Gruadh had many years before, when she saw King Cnut and King Malcolm meet. She held little Malcolm's hand and felt a weight—the weight is this obligation to his mother to protect him.



Gruadh feels it is her responsibility as Macbeth's wife to bear healthy children, a message that others, like Maeve, have driven home. Macbeth, however just cares about her wellbeing, and understands it isn't her fault.



Gruadh feels that she should be distracted with childrearing. However, since she has only one son who doesn't need constant supervision she turns towards ruling her region and gathering loyalty for her husband.



As she learns the names of her tenants and becomes known in her community, Gruadh begins to prepare herself for queenship. In exchange for her goodwill, people in Moray begin to send gifts back to her, which she sees as an indication that in the future they will provide loyalty and support if Macbeth ever makes a bid for the crown.

That summer, Finn and Ruari return with two thousand men. Macbeth returns with sixteen hundred. They are preparing for war, and make arrangements for the men to be housed, armored, and fed. Gruadh wonders if this is on Duncan's behalf or for Macbeth's personal army. Finn explains Macbeth is both recruiting an army for the king and one for himself at once.

Macbeth anticipates that Duncan will dispute the southern Saxon border, although King Malcolm had hashed it out years earlier with King Cnut. Gruadh complains to Macbeth that she wants to be on his war council, and to participate in "what may come." Macbeth corrects her that she will participate in "what will come," but that she must be patient.

That fall, Gruadh becomes acutely sad that she is unable to carry a baby to term. She wonders if this is divine punishment for having ambitions and for wanting Macbeth to be king. Her husband comforts her, pointing out that they want the kingdom so that they will have something to give their children.

Still, Maeve tells Gruadh "old grief" is "poisoning" her body against pregnancy, and that by trying to be a warrior she is hurting her ability to be a mother. Gruadh disagrees. She believes "a queen tends to both" domestic duties and war games outside the home.

One day Macbeth returns home with a letter from Duncan—compensation for Bodhe's death. He gives Gruadh crowning rights, which would make her bloodline second only to the king's. They both understand this would "dilute" Gruadh's claim to the throne but that refusing "would be rebellious." She recognizes that, in theory, this is a great honor and, although angry, signs that she agrees to Duncan's terms.

Gruadh commits her life to helping Macbeth, and therefore helping herself and her son, garner support in their region in anticipation of a potential bid for the Scottish crown.



Although Macbeth is ostensibly supporting King Duncan, he is also supporting himself. He anticipates Duncan being a bad king and wants to be ready to rebel against him if and when the need arises. Macbeth does this for his own ambition but also for the sake of Scotland, underscoring that the two are closely intertwined.



Macbeth is confident that he will one day be king. Although Gruadh has had visions and knows this will be true, she remains impatient.



After a lifetime of criticism, Gruadh has internalized the argument that her interests in more traditionally masculine spheres have made her infertile. In Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth's infertility is similarly linked to her interest in, and ability to carry out, violence.



Even as Gruadh is upset that she cannot have another child, she understands that she must be both soft and strong in order to be a good mormaer's wife, and eventually queen. Her interest in politics is not holding her back, but instead driving her forward.



Gruadh understands that she is being insulted and in a way her heritage is being undermined, but she is also beginning to understand that she is playing a long game and can absorb this slight in order to take over the throne later.



CHAPTER 23

Banchorrie arrives one morning with a band of men to warn Gruadh and Macbeth that Scottish warships have been sighted off the Moray coast. Duncan has asked Thorfin for tribute for his province of Caithness (which he owns outright and owes no tribute on), and Thorfin refused. Now Duncan wants to arrange a new agreement, where Thorfin pays or else there will be war. Macbeth recognizes Duncan wants to take over as much of Scotland as possible, and likely set the tribute high to give himself an excuse to attack Thorfin. Although everyone agrees the cause is foolhardy, if Duncan weakens himself or his image, or dies, “it will only aid the cause” Macbeth, Gruadh, and others favor.

A few days later, Gruadh rediscovers the jet-and-bronze **brooch** from her childhood. She knows even if “war came to our shores,” she “would stand strong” and protect her family. Thorfin sinks five of Duncan’s ship and Duncan retreats with the rest. Macbeth and Banchorrie gather troops in anticipation of a clash with Orkney on land, and Macbeth orders Gruadh to prepare to leave at a moment’s notice.

Gruadh visits Finn in the blacksmith. She asks him to make her a helmet and hauberk. He points out Bodhe already gave her armor, but she notes that it was ceremonial, and she wants battle gear. He resists, but she is persistent. She knows she will never be a soldier, but there is a Celtic history of women warriors, and marching by Macbeth’s side makes both of them seem strong, “for Moray, for Lulach. And Scotland.” Finn eventually agrees.

Macbeth is gone for months, but eventually, that spring, a messenger arrives. The messenger removes his helmet and reveals he is Ketill Brusisson. He reports that Macbeth, Duncan, and Thorfin met to negotiate. Macbeth encouraged Duncan to back down, but he would not, and now Thorfin has returned to Orkney to gather more troops. However, Thorfin, not Macbeth has sent word to Gruadh. In thanks, she tells Ketill to tell Thorfin she hopes for peace between Moray and Orkney.

Duncan is motivated by a desire to claim land for his country. Although most characters are driven to make their families proud, the weight of Duncan’s family’s legacy, in addition to his general unfitness to be king, means that his attempts to leave a mark on Scotland is likely to end in disaster. Still, even as his enemies and allies see this they, like Macbeth, reason it is better to let him dig his own grave, which will only strengthen Macbeth’s eventual claim to the throne.



Gruadh’s brooch, which she used to stab one of her kidnapers as a child, is a symbol of her fighting spirit; as such, it lends her strength in tumultuous times. She is nervous to see Macbeth go to war, and nervous to that there are naval battles so close to her home, but she knows she must stay strong for her family, her husband, and the people of Moray.



Gruadh spends much of her life convincing men to let her learn to fight. Once again, she must convince a man to help her continue in the tradition of Celtic women warriors. Finn, her childhood friend who sparred with her as a child, is eventually convinced, having seen Gruadh’s stubbornness before first-hand, and heard the same stories of women warriors. Here again Gruadh ties her own fate to that of her country.



Many years after her kidnapping, Gruadh has begun to forgive Thorfin. She liked Ketill all along, but now, given time, and having practiced forgiveness and patience as she plotted revenge for her father’s death, she sees this as not a hill to die on, and instead as a useful alliance to foster in the future, especially when Macbeth makes a bid for king.



Macbeth returns to Elgin and tells Gruadh to gather her household and move somewhere safer. He tells her Thorfin wants to join together with Moray to defeat Duncan. Macbeth considered but refused. Now, he still supports Duncan, and will fight Thorfin's troops if they ever attempt to march across Moray. Over the summer Duncan continues to fight with Thorfin, and Thorfin continues to sink his ships. Thorfin then sails his troops to Caithness, and begins to march them southwards, kicking off months of war.

Although Macbeth desperately wants to be king, and could likely win with Thorfin's help, he wants to go about enacting his revenge and plot in a way that seems nobler. He and Thorfin have no hard feelings, each understanding their battle is not personal.



CHAPTER 24

Gruadh is happy to have Macbeth home for an evening. He has been spending weeks and months fighting Thorfin at the Moray border and managing Duncan. At dinner, Dermot recounts a battle between Macbeth and Thorfin, where Thorfin relied upon the magic of his raven banner. Dermot concludes his poem calling Macbeth "fierce" and "generous" and notes that although his poem is concluded for the night it "will only be complete when Macbeth achieves his destiny." Gruadh decides she must use magic to protect her husband. She decides to visit Enya, Thorfin's grandmother, who taught Thorfin his own magic.

Gruadh will go to any lengths to protect her famil, and decides she must use magic in order to defend her husband. Dermot's story about Thorfin's raven banner, and Dermot's belief that Macbeth will achieve his destiny and become king, inspires Gruadh to seek out Thorfin's grandmother, who enchanted his banner, in order to enchant an object for her husband, and help him win the crown.



That spring Gruadh returns to Elgin. While there, she is happy to hear Thorfin and his army has been temporarily distracted by infighting. Thorfin's nephew betrayed him, and Thorfin in turn murdered his nephew. Gruadh thinks killing family "takes a black heart," but Macbeth notes that "when kin slaughters kin, it cannot always be judged poorly [...] sometimes it is necessary."

Gruadh has become more comfortable with violence, or, at least, less disturbed by it. Still, there are certain kinds of violence that horrify her—such as the murder of a relative. Macbeth, who himself has murdered relatives (including his cousin, Gilcomgan) understands that sometimes there are no other solutions.



Later in the year, Gruadh is upset to hear Lady Sybilla died in childbirth. She remembers her promise to watch over her children Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán. Gruadh still has not told Macbeth about her oath, and wonders if she will be able to fulfill it.

Gruadh's oath begins to haunt her, in conjunction with Una's prophecy—she knows to beware of the son of the man Macbeth will kill to be king, and it increasingly seems like Duncan will be that man, and his children thus will be threats.



Accompanied by Angus, Aella, and other guards, Gruadh finally goes to meet Enya. Enya greets Gruadh as Queen, which she corrects to Lady, and Gruadh greets Enya as Lady, which she corrects to Mother. Enya recognizes that Gruadh wants "an end to sorrow," and can tell that Gruadh herself can see the future and doesn't need Enya's help. Gruadh explains she wants "good omens and powerful charms" to bring fortune to herself and her family.

Because Enya can see the future, she can likely see that one day Gruadh will be queen, which is why she addresses her as such. Enya can also tell that Gruadh can see the future without help, but, although this is true Gruadh often does need assistance in untangling her visions. Additionally, she came not for fortune telling but for spells.



The two women look into a bowl of water together. Enya predicts Gruadh will have two sons, although they “remain in God’s hands.” Gruadh is not excited by this news. Enya then has Gruadh tell her own future. Looking into the water Gruadh sees a boat carrying a dying king. She cannot determine any details, but Enya says this is for the best.

Enya tells Gruadh what she has heard before—that she will have sons with Macbeth, but they will not grow into warriors, and will remain “in God’s hands”—that is, they will die young. Her vision of a dying king is important and represents several distinct moments in Gruadh’s life yet to come.



Gruadh asks Enya about Thorfin’s raven banner. Enya admits she gave it power through spells and charms. Enya refuses to help strengthen Macbeth against her grandson, but agrees to help Gruadh, although warns her that she can either choose to study magic or be queen. Gruadh rejects this binary, arguing that if she is going to be queen she has to do her best to help her husband. Finally, Enya gives the younger woman a **brooch** that Gruadh will say a spell of protection over.

Throughout her life Gruadh has been told she can only be a good wife or a good woman if she behaves in a certain way. She has continually rejected this binary, and rejects it again, believing she can be a queen and practice magic. The protective brooch mirrors Gruadh’s own brooch, which she took from a man who kidnapped her as a child, and which reminds her of her own strength.



Duncan continues to fight Thorfin and lose. That summer, Macbeth comes home one evening and he and Gruadh watch the northern lights. Macbeth says they are “celebration for a king and a queen.” He tells Gruadh that if they never have a son, he will make Lulach his heir. He adds that Lulach, because of laws of Celtic succession, would be his heir, and anyway, is his son “in all ways but one.”

Although Gruadh and Macbeth have been unable to produce an heir, Macbeth sees Lulach as his true son, and wants him to be part of his legacy. In a way this is direct succession, but it also follows the Celtic tradition of zigzag succession, because it technically passes to another branch of the family tree.



CHAPTER 25

Over the next year Duncan continues to send ships to fight Thorfin and continues to lose. Macbeth is often away at war, and Gruadh misses him. Gruadh spends her time embroidering, mostly images of battles, which fascinate young Lulach. His interest in violence frightens her, and she tries to distract him with “books and monkishness,” but it does not work.

Lulach is fixated on violence, which scares Gruadh because she worries he will grow into a warrior and come to harm. She understands where his obsession has come from—as a young boy he has seen his father go to war and has already had sword lessons himself. Meanwhile, her embroidery—a typically female task—of battle images—a typically male realm—reflects her own embrace of both masculine and feminine attributes.



That winter, Macbeth returns and he and Gruadh have sex, but she does not become pregnant. She has become more resigned to their combined infertility, but wonders “if, and when” Macbeth will replace her with someone more fertile.

Gruadh understands that a wife’s role is to produce heirs. Even though she loves her husband and wants to stay together, she understands he might think she is not doing her duty. Her loyalty to family means she recognizes he may replace her with a fertile bride.



Banchorrie acts as a messenger between Duncan and Macbeth. Duncan wants Macbeth to raise thousands of men to attack the Saxons. Macbeth refuses, even though without his help Duncan will not have enough soldiers. Two weeks later Duncan sends Macbeth another plea. With his messenger comes Drostan, Gruadh's childhood friend. He has come to collect reports for his monastery and has brought gifts from Duncan: two drinking horns, red wine, mead, and sweetmeats. Gruadh is happy to see her friend but unimpressed by the gifts.

That evening, Gruadh pours mead for her friends and family. She gives Macbeth one drinking horn and Drostan, her guest, the other. Drostan shares with Maeve, as he does not like mead. However, soon after taking a sip, Maeve collapses. Gruadh rushes to her friend, who dies in her arm. Macbeth, still at the table, begins to vomit. His men escort him out, and Gruadh commands Bethoc to do what she can to counteract what she suspects is poison.

Macbeth convalesces in bed. Bethoc does what she can, but Gruadh realizes she needs Catriona's expertise. Catriona arrives and begins to care for Macbeth. Weak as he is, Macbeth is happy to see his old friend and lover. Gruadh recognizes this but swallows her jealousy, reasoning that, if his love for Catriona will save him, so be it. Catriona determines the poison was a mixture of foxglove and purple fairy flower. The antidote requires the herb *ruigh*, or rue—Gruadh's nickname.

As Macbeth recovers he and Gruadh receive word of Duncan from Ruari. Duncan tried to capture some holy relics but failed, and many Scottish men were slain in the process. Now, Duncan has returned to Dunsinane and complains that he failed because he did not have the support of Moray's troops. Behind his back other mormaers have begun to meet and say that Macbeth is "the only mormaer in Scotland who can repair the damage Duncan has wrought."

Early in August Macbeth asks Gruadh to prepare the house for a war council. Mormaers and warriors from across Scotland come to meet in secret. Banchorrie comes too and argues that Duncan must be stopped before he destroys Scotland. The other men agree they need an "elected king," who is both a warrior and a wise man. Emboldened and convinced by the support of his fellow mormaers, Macbeth agrees to rebel.

Although he has supported Duncan for many battles, Macbeth is beginning to turn. He knows if he doesn't help Duncan, the King will falter, and thus Macbeth can more easily usurp him. Gruadh knows Duncan must be desperate, and the gifts are some kind of manipulation.



Duncan has tried to poison Macbeth and Gruadh because they are standing in his way. He sees this kind of subtle, ignoble violence as the best way to get rid of his political enemies. He only did this because he could see Macbeth was beginning to turn on him, and he wanted to remain in power.



Although Gruadh hated Catriona for undermining her marriage, Gruadh is able to move on. She understands that Catriona is the only one who can save her husband, and therefore is willing to let go of her grudge for the sake of her family. In the end, it is Gruadh, or "Rue," who symbolically saves Macbeth's life, as it was was Gruadh who called for help.



Duncan is on his last legs, and hopes capturing holy objects lend legitimacy to his kingship. Unfortunately for him, he does not capture the objects and the mormaers who formerly supported him have turned against him. Everyone but Duncan can see that he's ruining Scotland, and for the sake of the country want a new king.



Macbeth has wanted to be king his entire life but has waited patiently. Finally, his moment has come—he has the support of many of his peers, and he knows that fighting Duncan for the crown is what is best for Scotland. His own personal ambitions align with the country's future.



Later that night Macbeth joins Gruadh in their bedroom. He tells her his coconspirators want him to participate in an old Celtic tradition—they want him to kill Duncan himself and win the crown. Although he has killed many men before, even his cousin Gilcomgan, Macbeth wonders if it is sinful to kill Duncan, thereby “forcing fate.” Gruadh counters that “sin is a choice [...] and so is this path.” Macbeth points out that he’s always had ambitions for Scotland as much as for himself—he sees Duncan as destroying the Gaelic traditions, and believes he can save them.

Macbeth’s dreams of being king are, he claims, as much for Scotland’s sake as for his own. Still, he worries that, even though prophecies have declared he will be king, by actively taking the crown from Duncan he is going too far in grasping his own future. However, Gruadh, who has struggled with the morality of killing in the past, now understands that sometimes violence is necessary, and that Macbeth can choose to have a clean conscience.



CHAPTER 26

After two weeks of planning, Macbeth receives word that Duncan is advancing Elgin with his troops. Gruadh gives Macbeth the blessed pin from Enya. Before he rides to battle. She says a final prayer of protection and the couple kisses.

Gruadh does what she can to protect her husband. She knows that Thorfin’s raven banner has protected him and hopes this pin will ensure Macbeth’s safety.



Macbeth prepares to ride out, and so does Gruadh. She reasons that if Macbeth is willing to die “for the sake of my kin group, I had to be there too.” She dresses in Finn’s armor, and arms herself with Macbeth’s dagger and Bodhe’s sword.

In addition to giving Macbeth a pin, Gruadh wants to give him her full support. Although women generally do not ride into battle, she feels it is the best way to stand by her husband.



When Macbeth sees Gruadh he tries to send her back inside, but Gruadh will not budge. She argues her presence will encourage the people of Moray to gather behind them. She also reminds him of the vow she made years before to protect her family and home. She points out she has killed and wounded before and is participating in a tradition of Celtic women warriors. She adds that she has her own reason to ride out—the deaths of Bodhe, Maeve, and the poisoning of Macbeth. Finally, her husband consents and allows her to ride.

Macbeth fears for Gruadh’s safety, but is also being close-minded—in his view, even if he has allowed Gruadh to participate in political discussions, the battlefield is for men only. However, his wife wins him over, invoking Celtic tradition as well as her own need for revenge.



Just as Gruadh suspected, her presence encourages men to join Macbeth’s army, and she even inspires some women to grab weapons and march. For the first time, Gruadh feels “like a monarch.” She feels the loyalty of her people and is inspired by them. They are unified in their cause—protecting Moray from invaders.

Seeing Macbeth’s wife ride with him shows his followers that he is a family man who deserves their respect, and seeing Gruadh shows women they, too can fight if they want to.



Eventually, Macbeth, Gruadh, and their army crest a hill and see Duncan and his forces on the other side. The Moray army prepares for battle, saying chants and prayers. Before the two sides can clash, however, Macbeth and some of his most trusted warriors ride out to meet Duncan. The men negotiate and decide Macbeth and Duncan will fight one on one and the winner will take Scotland.

Macbeth knows his feud is only with Duncan, and so he wants to save as many lives as possible. He is also a strong warrior and knows he can likely beat Duncan one on one, even if their armies are more evenly matched.



Macbeth and Duncan battle. Although Duncan is a strong fighter, cutting Macbeth's leg, Macbeth first breaks his opponent's jaw and then gashes his shoulder. Duncan falls to the ground, but Macbeth does not kill him; instead he walks away, the clear winner. Gruadh watches her husband kneel and pray before wiping his sword on the ground.

This is an instance of necessary violence. However, Macbeth, even after he has won, does not inflict any more harm than he must. Afterwards, he kneels to pray, likely to thank God, and to be absolved of Duncan's imminent death.



In Celtic tradition, in between times are magical. That night—before Duncan's wounds kill him and he is no longer king, and before Macbeth is crowned—is one of these special times. Gruadh does her best to nurse the dying king, but there is nothing she can do. She rinses her hands of his blood, and with Macbeth and a cluster of priests and medicine women sit with Duncan so he will not die alone.

Although Duncan is her enemy, Gruadh is kind to him. When she washes her hands the blood comes off easily—she has no guilt, and his death is honorable. This scene is the opposite of one in Shakespeare's play, in which Lady Macbeth feels as though her hands will (metaphorically) never be clean of the sin of murder, speaking the famous line, "Out, damned spot!"



CHAPTER 27

Thorfin sends a messenger to ask about the outcome of the battle. Hearing Duncan has died, Thorfin offers to carry the body to Scone on one of his boats. Macbeth thanks him but turns him down. By noon the day after the battle Macbeth and Gruadh are sailing south along with Duncan's corpse. Macbeth is quiet and tense and Gruadh senses he feels sadness and anticipation, emotions she also feels.

Sailing down the river with the body of a king was one of Gruadh's visions. Although she does not know it yet, this one vision in fact depicts multiple moments in her life. Macbeth knows he will likely be chosen to be king and is excited—a lifetime of preparation has led to this moment.



Two days after arriving in Scone, mormaers, thanes, priests, and soldiers meet to elect a new king. Gruadh is not involved in the conversations and prays in her bedchamber until Macbeth finally joins her and announces he will be crowned High King of Scots. Everyone but Crinan, who is not present, has agreed he is the best choice. Macbeth explains that, since he married into Gruadh's bloodline, "our combined claim could not be denied," and Gruadh's ancestry "holds the key in this." Together, they unite "two branches of the oldest ruling tree," and because of this Gruadh will be a full queen, not a lady or a consort. Gruadh and Macbeth embrace, and she cries, for herself and for her ancestors, who will finally reign again, through her.

Gruadh rarely prays, but this moment is important enough to warrant it. Gruadh and Macbeth had discussed previously how their combined lineages strengthened Macbeth's claim to the throne. Additionally, their combined desire for revenge motivated them to fight for the crown. Finally, years of plotting, and years of waiting, have paid off. Gruadh's desire for swift revenge was not met, but becoming queen, which she will be called because of her lineage, will be a slap in the face to everyone who tried to cut off her family line.



According to tradition, Macbeth dumps a boot-full of soil on the mound at Scone, a hill that, according to legend, was built by generations of handfuls of dirt from across Scotland. Macbeth will be crowned on this hill later in the day, and then the mormaers in his land will bring him handfuls of soil as homage. Gruadh joins Macbeth and says a chant for him. She feels "the old spirits watching."

Macbeth participates in a centuries-old tradition. It is a humble gesture that suggests that even as he rules over Scotland, he remains a part of it. It is also a sign of respect for the land itself. Gruadh feels the weight of the moment and the weight of their combined ancestry.



That day, Gruadh and Macbeth participate in the Celtic crowning ceremony. A bishop says prayers, and then leads Macbeth in Latin and Gaelic vows. Gruadh places the crown on her husband's head, to cheers and joyous stamping from the crowd. Then it is Gruadh's turn, and, like her husband, she circles the Stone of Destiny, and repeats the ancient poem, "I am a wind, I am a wave, I am a hawk." Macbeth crowns her. Gruadh thinks of her family as she listens to Dermot recite the list of past kings, ending with Macbeth.

As when Gruadh watched Duncan's crowning, the ritual is more pagan than it is Christian, calling upon Celtic tradition. When Dermot recites the names of kings before, he calls upon the great tradition of Scottish rulers, some of whom were Gruadh and Macbeth's ancestors, and whose memories they are doing their best to honor. This reflects the novel's recurrent theme of family and heritage.



In her early days as queen Gruadh first visits Dolina, and then Drostan in his monastery. Gruadh invites him to come and be a royal cleric. She explains that she trusts him and needs him and would benefit from his advice. He agrees to join her.

As a cleric with a monk's training Drostan will be a valuable addition to the royal household. He has knowledge of history and can be trusted to record current events in a flattering way—something Gruadh understands the importance of.



CHAPTER 28

Gruadh and Macbeth move to a new fortress, Kincardine O'Neil. Gruadh briefly returns to Elgin to fetch Lulach, but she also takes the time to work on fulfilling what she sees as her obligation as queen "to give the king a hero of his own blood." Bethoc feels she has done all she can for Gruadh's fertility, and the pair decide to visit Catriona.

Gruadh believes that it is her duty as queen to give Macbeth a royal heir. She is so committed to this that she is willing to put aside her grudge against Catriona entirely, if the woman can help her conceive.



Catriona is surprised to see Gruadh, but gracious. As they talk Gruadh begins to warm to her former rival, realizing that Catriona has saved both her life and Macbeth's. Catriona gives her herbs and potions to drink and bathe in. Both women offer a kind of truce—Gruadh tells Catriona Bethoc would like to learn from her, and that she and Macbeth would be happy to foster her son. Catriona, for her part, informs Gruadh she is going to remarry. Gruadh understands why Macbeth once loved her but knows she will always be hurt by his betrayal.

Now that Gruadh and Catriona are both committed to making amends, they are able to form a shaky alliance. They likely will never be close friends, but Catriona's promise to marry shows that she is truly no longer interested in carrying on an affair with Macbeth. Meanwhile, Gruadh's offer to foster Catriona's son, shows that she respects the woman and no longer minds being reminded of her; she is truly moving past her tendency to hold grudges.



By Christmas, Gruadh is pregnant. For the first time she tries to be careful—and displays a "new devotion to quiet activities," reading the gospel, and embroidery.

In the past Gruadh has rejected suggestions that her temperament or interest in swordcraft sabotaged her pregnancies, but this time she decides to heed that advice.



Later that winter Macbeth debates whether or not to kill Duncan's young children, who Crinan has recently smuggled out of Scotland. Some advisors insist these children should be killed, and others agree that if they are allowed to live they will grow into warriors who will return and challenge Macbeth's title. Gruadh thinks of her promise to Lady Sybilla and her own pregnancy. She leaves the room to bring in Lulach. She points out that he is so young, the same age as young Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán, and that they are children and no threat to Scotland. She urges the men to be "merciful and rightful," and to not be obsessed only with power. She argues that each child is precious, and they are not enemies of the crown but children. Macbeth agrees to let the children live, although they are banished from Scotland.

Years earlier, Gruadh promised Lady Sybilla to look after her young children. Although Gruadh has heard a prophecy, warning her to beware of Duncan's children, who will later threaten Macbeth, she decides she would rather risk Malcolm and Donald Bán growing up to take revenge against her husband than have the blood of children on her hands. This is partly a maternal instinct, and partly a desire to fulfill a promise. It also harks back to an early vision of Gruadh's, when young Malcolm held her hand and she felt a great weight of obligation.



A visiting mormaer argues it is a mistake to let Malcolm mac Duncan come of age and tells Gruadh she has "sealed [her] husband's fate." That night in bed Gruadh reflects Una's prophecy "Beware the son of the warrior whose spilled blood will make Macbeth a king." She wonders if Una was referring to Malcolm, and if killing a child would have been a fair price for saving a kingdom.

Gruadh understands the risks of letting the children live, especially given Una's prophecy, but stands firm—she believes killing children is wrong, even if they will grow up to be her enemies.



CHAPTER 29

It is now the year 1050, a decade and a half after Macbeth's crowning. Thanks to Macbeth, Scotland has enjoyed years of peace, and so Gruadh goes to visit Mother Enya with only a small envoy.

Macbeth has been a good king, as he expected he would be. He honors tradition, respecting the land, its people, and his ancestors.



Gruadh reflects on past battles—Macbeth killed Crinan six years earlier, and bested the Earl of Siward, uncle of Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán, although the second battle left him with a limp. Now, in 1050, Gruadh discusses politics with her friends and guards. Angus believes Malcolm mac Duncan has the Saxon king Edward's support, and has spent his whole life nursing resentment for Macbeth.

Just as Una, the coal-burner's wife has predicted, Duncan's children have grown up to be threats to Macbeth. They blame him for the death of their father (ignoring Duncan's irresponsible rule beforehand) and want to punish Macbeth and take back the throne they believe is theirs.



Macbeth is currently in Rome, visiting the newly elected Pope. This is the first pilgrimage ever undertaken by a Scottish king. Macbeth, along with Thorfin, attended a meeting of kings and leaders organized by the Pope, who "dreamed of unity among leaders in the West," or, at least, dreamed of coinage from them.

Macbeth's rule is defined by a combination of respect for Celtic traditions and an embrace of new innovations. He understands that Christianity is the future and wants to help modernize Scotland.



Macbeth brought the simple clothes of a religious pilgrim with him, as well as a "small sack of the earth of Scotland," so "he would not leave Scotland entirely." He left Gruadh behind, and she serves as regent—managing trade, land disputes, and even legal judgments.

Macbeth's journey is as much religious as it is political. In his absence Gruadh rules. He trusts her, and their partnership is truly equal. Additionally, Gruadh has spent her life preparing for queenship and so can competently rule in her husband's absence.



Over the past decade Gruadh gave birth to two sons. The first, Ferchar, died before he turned two. The second, Cormac, died at six months old. Gruadh realizes history will likely say “the good wife of Macbeth [...] was barren,” and people will wonder why he did not replace her with a more fertile wife. She knows some will assume that he remained married to Gruadh because of the strength of her bloodline, but in reality, they remain married because they love each other and rule well as a couple.

Gruadh felt it was her responsibility as Macbeth's wife to give him children and is upset that they cannot have healthy babies. Although she has one living child, Lulach, she is aware of how the history books will remember her, as she had no children with her second husband. This reflects the novel's preoccupation with the subjectivity of history. Still, her marriage to Macbeth is loving and respectful, and he will not cast her aside for another woman.



Gruadh notes Macbeth became more religious after the death of his sons and spent a lot of time with his private priest. He worries that because he murdered Gilcomgan and Duncan, his first cousins, he has cursed himself and prevented himself from ever having heirs.

Gruadh often worried about the moral cost of violence, and now Macbeth worries as well. He turns to Christianity, which unlike Celtic traditions has a more complete framework for working through sin and guilt.



Over the years, Mother Enya and Gruadh have become friends. First, they talk, and then they look into the water to see the future. Enya tells Gruadh she sees a ship and Macbeth will be home soon. However, she also sees Viking ships, and tells Gruadh she must act now to save Macbeth. Enya pushes Gruadh out the door.

Rarely do visions require immediate action. This is a rare instance, however, where Enya is seeing into the immediate future, and her visions suggest a specific course of action.



Gruadh and her men rush to the beach. Thorfin and Ketill, come to greet them. Angus and two other guards ride out to defend Gruadh, but Thorfin raises his arm and uses magic to stop the warriors in their tracks. This is the first time Gruadh has seen Thorfin use this kind of power, and suspects he used magic to sink Duncan’s warships many years ago.

Although magic is often in the background of the novel, and Gruadh's visions are obviously magical, this is the first instance of explicit magic taking place. It is also one of the instances that is decidedly unhistorical, and has been embellished for the narrative.



Gruadh decides to hear what Thorfin has to say, although she still doesn’t fully trust him after he abducted her as a child. He tells her they have since made a truce and warns her Saxon ships approach, intending to sink Macbeth’s ship. Malcolm mac Duncan knows if he “should sink the king’s ship [...] in full sight of his people, and then invade Scotland, he could take the kingship.” Thorfin, who does not want to see Malcolm as king, offers Viking assistance on water, and Gruadh readies troops to defend the land.

Gruadh has held a grudge against Thorfin for many years but understands that trusting him will save her husband's life. Once again Una's prophecy has come back to haunt her—Malcolm, the son of the man Macbeth killed to become king, is proving to be an enormous threat.



The next morning, Gruadh stands on the cliffs of Moray backed by twelve hundred soldiers, with her son, Lulach, and her friends—Ruari, Angus, and others—by her side. Gruadh wears the armor Finn made for her many years before.

Although for years people told Gruadh that women couldn't be warriors, in the end, she was right—she can be, and must be, for the sake of her husband and nation.



From her perch Gruadh watches Thorfin's long ships hide themselves along the shoreline. Gruadh then watches Macbeth's merchant vessel slowly make its way towards shore, and Saxon ships approach from the south, hoping to attack and trap Macbeth. Gruadh orders her troops down to the beach, reasoning that Malcolm mac Duncan "must know that no matter what happens on the sea today, he will not set foot on this land!" She knows that she, her troops and her country "could not lose all we had, all we loved, heritage and pride and our very selves." This display reminds her of the gathering of forces when Macbeth won the kingship from Duncan.

Malcolm mac Duncan's ships chase Macbeth's, but just when they are about to overtake him, Thorfin's Viking ships reveal themselves and chase Malcolm's boats away. Although they have won the battle today, Lulach comments that Malcolm will return by land, now that he knows he cannot attack by water.

CHAPTER 30

Eight years have passed. Gruadh wakes from the dreams of a citadel, inside of which is Macbeth. Out of the window Gruadh can see a burning wooden fortress. Suddenly, in the dream, Gruadh is outside and can hear fighting and screaming.

Waking up, Gruadh wanders the halls of Elgin. She has been spending her days considering her story, but notes, "I am reluctant to reveal all of the events," because some are too painful, others too personal.

Gruadh finds Drostan and a messenger from Malcolm mac Duncan in the great hall. Malcolm has sent gifts, and a final marriage proposal. He is also informing Gruadh he has claimed Fife. He further disputes Lulach's claim as the true king of Scotland. Drostan and Gruadh speculate that, once Malcolm learns of Gruadh and Lulach's plots against him, he will accuse her of treason. Drostan predicts "he will ruin Macbeth's name now through rumors, and permanently in the annals and chronicles."

Gruadh does not know what will happen—prophecies have warned her to be wary of Malcolm mac Duncan, as did Enya hours before. She is relatively powerless but does what she can to display strength for the sake of her husband, and for the sake of her nation. She sees this as a moment of reckoning and knows that she cannot let down her and Macbeth's ancestors, and the thousands of residents of Scotland.



Young Malcolm has his heart set on revenge and will never stop attacking Macbeth and trying to claim the crown he believes is his. In a way, this reflects the actions of Gruadh and Macbeth in their younger years, suggesting the cyclical nature of violence and revenge.



Gruadh dreams of the past—the novel is primarily looking back on the events of her life, and this dream is a recollection of the battle in which Macbeth dies.



The novel takes the form of Gruadh's own recollections, which she admits are biased, based on which events she does and does not feel comfortable sharing.



Gruadh is aware of the power of history, and the ways in which history can be shaped. Although she does not acknowledge young Malcolm as the rightful king, she understands that he will write histories anyway, and will slander her husband as revenge against him.



Gruadh thinks back over the past eight years and recounts the death of her husband, Macbeth, and the ascension of Malcolm mac Duncan. In July 1054, Malcolm crossed the border into Scotland. He and his troops fooled Macbeth's guards by carrying leaves and branches and disguising themselves until they were close to Macbeth's encampment between Dunkeld and Dunsinnan. Gruadh notes that annals state Macbeth was defeated, when in reality both leaders were wounded and retreated.

Malcolm mac Duncan declared he was King of Scots, although the priests did not agree, and Gruadh, the crowner, would not crown him. After Macbeth's defeat he returned to Elgin, where Gruadh and Catriona treated his wounds—specifically a blow to the eye that left him half-blind, similar to the wound Macbeth himself had given Duncan years earlier. For the next three years Macbeth continued to rule as King, but Malcolm mac Duncan remained a usurper, attempting to gain the throne.

When Malcolm and his troops advance on Dunsinnan, his tactics mirror a famous passage in Shakespeare's play, in which a fortune teller warns Macbeth he "shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinan Hill / Shall come against him." This scene also further underscores the subjective nature of historical records.



Malcolm's actions are entirely motivated by a desire for revenge. Even the wounds he inflicts on Macbeth are an attempt to right the wrongs he feels Macbeth committed against his own father; that the wound Macbeth suffer's is similar to Duncan's again suggests the cyclical, self-perpetuating nature of revenge and violence. Gruadh knew this would happen, because of Una's prophecies, but now it is too late to do anything.



CHAPTER 31

Gruadh knows that although Macbeth reigned for seventeen years of relative peace and prosperity, he will not be remembered by history, as "contentment is a thing not often recorded in the annals."

Gruadh reflects on how, given more time, Macbeth would have worked to blend Celtic traditions with the "the ways of the Church and even the Saxons." Gruadh protested that giving up any Celtic traditions was threatening Scotland's soul, but Macbeth argued that blending old traditions with new ones would allow Scotland to survive, grow, and thrive, integrating and trading with the outside world.

Gruadh recalls that in 1054 Lulach married Thorfin's daughter, Ingebjorg, uniting Moray and Orkney. That spring, Mother Enya died, and in her last meeting with Gruadh told the queen that she should "heed your dreams [...] for they are your counselors." Within a year Lulach and Ingebjorg had a young son, Nechtan. He had dark hair like Thorfin and Bodhe. Gruadh instantly loved him.

Gruadh remembers how one evening Malcolm mac Duncan's men attacked the fortress at Kincardine where she and Macbeth were staying. Gruadh helped Ingebjorg with her new infant daughter so Ingebjorg could carry Nechtan. Macbeth urged Gruadh to leave whereas he would stay and "put an end to this."

Gruadh understands how history is written and that it often focuses on strife; because Macbeth was a good king, there is thus not much to say about him.



Gruadh and Macbeth often debated about the value of tradition versus the new order. Gruadh preferred Celtic tradition, but often turned to Christianity in her life. In his kingship Macbeth did his best to help bring Scotland into the future, by blending both the new and the old together.



Although Gruadh and Macbeth were never able to produce children, her son, Lulach, acted as he de-facto heir. She is happy to have her and Bodhe's line continue on through her grandchildren. Additionally, Lulach's marriage finally puts Gruadh's grudge against Thorfin to rest.



Macbeth does his best to protect the ones he loves and his step-grandchildren who he hopes will carry on his legacy. At the same time young Malcolm is doing his best to avenge his own ancestors.



Gruadh, her daughter-in-law, and her grandchildren escaped to Banchorrie. They waited all night and in the morning realized it was the seventeenth anniversary of the day Macbeth killed Duncan, which Malcolm mac Duncan had likely known and planned. Eventually, Macbeth arrived. He had been stabbed in between the ribs by Malcolm and was clearly dying. He refused to come inside, but insisted they took a boat south to Scone so they could crown Lulach as king.

Macbeth explained to Gruadh that if he died before Lulach was made king, Gruadh and all her heirs would be in danger. He also warned Gruadh that Malcolm mac Duncan might force her to marry him, so, instead of staying at Banchorrie to potentially recover, Gruadh agreed to go with Macbeth and Lulach to Scone. They traveled on a boat lent by Thorfin.

Gruadh remembers feeling dread decades ago when she saw three ravens sitting on a stone. She realizes now the site was Lanfinnan, where Macbeth and Malcolm mac Duncan battled and where Macbeth was fatally wounded.

Gruadh also acknowledges that she almost singlehandedly saved the lives of Malcolm mac Duncan and Donald Bán, both because of her promise to Sybilla and her instincts as a mother. She understands that she indirectly led to the death of her own husband, Macbeth. She believes she made the right choice, but with a steep price.

Macbeth made sure Gruadh understood that he wants to die in Scone as “rightful king of Scots,” not up north “a wounded king with half a realm.” He insisted on being buried on Iona, like a true king, even if Malcolm mac Duncan protested. Macbeth lived just long enough to see Gruadh crown Lulach, and then died upon the hill where Gruadh once crowned him.

EPILOGUE

In 1058, Gruadh is excited to greet Lulach, who has just arrived at Elgin. She is happy to see her grandson, Nechtan, who is a toddler but already mormaer of Moray, and her granddaughter, Ailsa.

Malcolm is totally motivated by revenge, and by his desire to kill Macbeth is fully a desire to make up for the death of his father. The wounds he inflicts on Macbeth are the same wounds Macbeth inflicted on Duncan, and the dates are similarly significant—again showing violence and revenge to be cyclical. Meanwhile, Macbeth does all he can to guarantee his legacy will continue through Lulach.



For the second time in her life, Gruadh’s vision of traveling on a boat with a dead or dying king has come true. Macbeth’s dying wish is to make sure his legacy continues on through his stepson. Although he would likely die anyway, Lulach’s crowning is more important to him than any medical attention.



Essentially all of Gruadh’s visions of the past have now come true—visions of dying kings on boats, of Malcolm’s rise, and of the site of her husband’s death.



Gruadh must live the rest of her life knowing she had the information to save Macbeth but did not use it. Still, she feels that killing a child, and breaking her promise to Lady Sybilla, would have been unforgivable.



Tradition and legacy has always been important to Macbeth, and so it follows that his dying wish would be to continue his legacy through his stepson, and ensure that he will be buried in a way that acknowledges his status.



Gruadh’s family line is represented in her grandchildren, who not only bear her DNA, but the names of their deceased great-grandparents.



The family gathers inside. Gruadh is acting regent of Moray for young Nechtan, and he jokingly asks her “how his province fares.” Lulach asks Gruadh about any messages from Malcolm mac Duncan. Lulach plans to gather forces, using memories of and loyalty to Macbeth to rally troops.

Ruari and Lulach tell Gruadh that Macbeth has finally been buried at Iona, as he always wanted to be.

Lulach plans to launch an attack on Malcolm mac Duncan’s forces, and wants to move Gruadh to a safer fortress. She refuses, instead she will go live in solitude in a small house where Malcolm cannot find her and marry her or kill her, and where she will be removed from war and politics. She plans to “seek a little peace and magic.”

Although not his blood descendant, Lulach is Macbeth’s son in every other way, and wants to honor his father’s legacy by using his armies and the people’s loyalty to him to defend the throne.



Macbeth always loved the tradition of kings being buried at Iona, and his own burial there adds legitimacy to his rein and legacy.



Although not explicitly stated, Gruadh likely will go live in Enya’s house, or a similar cottage, growing old as a king of prophetess and witch. The book’s ending is uplifting, but historically Lulach died later that year in a clash with Duncan.





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