

The image features two white theatrical masks, one on the left and one on the right, set against a background of intense, bright orange and yellow flames. The masks are positioned as if they are about to be thrown into the fire. The overall mood is dramatic and intense.

# THE BAD LUCK PLAY

**Q**UICKREADS

JANET LORIMER



*“By the pricking of my thumbs,  
something wicked this way comes!”* Nick  
Finney paused and then grinned at his  
audience. “Anyone recognize that line?”

The hands of half a dozen high school  
students shot up. Nick glanced at the adults  
scattered about the room.

Nick was the new drama director at  
Cold Forks High School. He expected his  
students to recognize the line from a play  
they were studying. He wasn’t so sure about  
the adults, though. They were members of  
a local little theater group. Right now they  
looked baffled.

One student waved his arm excitedly,

begging Nick to call on him. Nick was disappointed in the adults. They sat in their chairs as still as statues.

“Don’t *any* of you recognize that line?” Nick asked the adults. “It’s from Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*.”

In the front row, Joe Collier—the local newspaper publisher—shifted uneasily in his chair. “Some of us recognized the line, Nick. We know what play it’s from. We just don’t like it.”

Nick studied Joe in surprise. “It’s one of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies. How can anyone *not* like *Macbeth*?” When no one answered, Nick went on. “I hope you can learn to like it, Joe. My students are studying *Macbeth* this semester. So that’s the play I want to direct for your little theater group!”

In the back row, Gloria Valdez stood up. She was a local businessperson who owned several stores in town. “Nick, we don’t want to make life hard for you,” she said with a nervous smile. “We just think it would be better if we put on a comedy or a musical.

Or maybe—”

Other people began throwing out ideas. Nick shook his head. “It will be better for all of us if we do *Macbeth*,” he insisted. “Then I can bring my students into the production. I’ve staged this play in other places, and everyone really liked it. It’s a great story, filled with greed, betrayal, murder, ghosts—”

Harry Hardwick, the local bank president, stood up. “*Macbeth* is a bad luck play,” he said flatly.



Nick was amazed. “Harry, are you kidding me? Are you folks really *that* superstitious?” he exclaimed.

Harry turned red and looked away.

Nick noticed that his students seemed puzzled. “Maybe I’d better explain,” Nick told them. “There’s a legend that Shakespeare wanted to make a big impression on the King of England, James I. So he included a real witch’s curse in *Macbeth*. As a result, the play supposedly brings bad luck to the actors.

Even to this day, a lot of actors won't say the name of the play out loud. They refer to it as 'that Scottish play' or 'the cursed play.'"

Nick saw several students glance nervously at each other. He grinned. "Give me a break! You don't believe that old rubbish, do you?"

"What *kind* of bad luck?" asked Steve, a red-haired high school senior.

Nick laughed. "Sometimes actors have had accidents. But—" He paused, looking at each student in turn. Several of the faces looked worried. "Come on, you guys! Accidents happen all the time. There have been accidents in other shows. No one calls *them* bad luck plays."

Steve looked relieved. "So it's not *really* bad luck?"

"Only if you believe it is," Nick said. He stood up and stretched. "Okay, people, it's late. Let's wrap it up now so my students can go home and get to bed. I don't want to see any of them falling asleep in drama class tomorrow!"

The students laughed.

The adults didn't crack a smile. "Is your mind made up, Nick?" Gloria asked. "Is it *Macbeth* or nothing?"

Nick nodded. "I'm afraid so, Gloria. Of course, I'd understand if you guys decide to get someone else to direct your play—" He shrugged.

Several of the adults looked unhappy. "I guess we'll have to talk this over among ourselves," Joe said. "We'll get back to you, Nick."

Nick watched as everyone filed out of the classroom. "I wonder what's really going on here," he thought.



**H**e didn't have to wait long to find out. The next morning, before class started, Nick got a phone call from Gloria. "This is your first year in Cold Forks," she said. "I'm not sure you know about the town's history with *Macbeth*."

"History?" Nick asked.

“Five years ago, the little theater group actually staged *Macbeth*,” Gloria said. “It was a disaster from start to finish. I know you think we’re just superstitious—but it’s more than that.”

Nick frowned. “What happened?”

“Right from the start there were accidents. It sounds crazy, but it’s true.”

Nick sighed. “Accidents happen. That’s what I told my students last night. Come on, Gloria—”

“The theater caught fire,” Gloria cut in. “It was during dress rehearsal, the night before we opened. Luckily, everyone got out in time. But that’s why some of us don’t want to do *Macbeth*.”

Nick was silent for a moment. Then he said, “I can see why you’d be upset. But no one was hurt, and no one died. We have to show the kids that we don’t believe in that superstitious nonsense. I’m not changing my mind, Gloria. It’s *Macbeth* or nothing.”

“You’re making a big mistake, Nick!” Gloria snapped. Now Nick could hear the

anger in her voice. “*Huge!*” She slammed down the receiver.

Nick figured he’d soon get another call—from Harry. Harry Hardwick was the president of the theater group. Nick was pretty sure he’d call to say they were looking for another director. But before the end of the week, Harry called to say that the group had agreed.

“We voted,” Harry told Nick. “All the newcomers want to do *Macbeth*. They outnumber those of us who remember the fire. We still think it’s foolish to put on a bad luck play.”

“Give it a chance, Harry. It’s time you all put that superstitious nonsense behind you,” Nick said. “I promise—the community will *love* this production!”



“*Double, double toil and trouble. Fire burn and cauldron bubble.*”

Nick stopped quoting. Considering the history of the Cold Forks theater fire, that

line from *Macbeth* suddenly seemed to be in bad taste.

“Sorry,” Nick mumbled as he glanced sideways at his three companions. Joe, Gloria, and Harry stared at him.

Then all four of them turned to study the boarded-up theater.

“This building should have been torn down after the fire,” Gloria said crossly. “It’s a disaster. I don’t know why you want to go inside, Nick. We can’t use it.”

“It looks pretty good from the outside,” Nick said, “and there’s plenty of parking. I bet this theater can be restored.”

“How many times do we have to tell you—the building is *unsafe!*” Harry said gruffly. He yanked out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He suddenly seemed very nervous.

“I guess I need to see it for myself,” Nick said. “People say that the theater was fairly new at the time of the fire.” Nobody commented, so Nick went on. “From the fire marshal’s report it didn’t seem that the structure was damaged too badly.”

Gloria shivered. “I haven’t been in the theater since that terrible night five years ago,” Gloria said. “I’m not sure I want to go in now.”

“Why don’t you wait out here then,” Nick suggested. He was getting tired of Gloria dragging her feet. “I don’t mind going in by myself. Harry, do you have the keys?”

Harry unlocked the big padlock on the double doors. Nick checked his flashlight and then led the way inside. Joe and Harry followed right behind. The door slammed after them.

Maybe it was just his imagination, but Nick thought he could still smell smoke. He shone his light around the lobby. Aside from dust and spider webs, the room looked okay.

Nick moved from the lobby into the theater itself. As he examined the walls and ceiling, he was surprised to see very little smoke and water damage. He climbed on stage. Some of the old scenery was still stacked against the back wall. “Just where did the fire start?” he asked.