

PARRIS [*horrified*]: Woman!

MRS PUTNAM: They were murdered, Mr Parris! And mark this proof! Mark it! Last night my Ruth were ever so close to their little spirits; I know it, sir. For how else is she struck dumb now except some power of darkness would stop her mouth? It is a marvellous sign, Mr Parris!

PUTNAM: Don't you understand it, sir? There is a murdering witch among us, bound to keep herself in the dark. [PARRIS turns to BETTY, a frantic terror rising in him.] Let your enemies make of it what they will, you cannot blink it more.

PARRIS [*to ABIGAIL*]: Then you were conjuring spirits last night.

ABIGAIL [*whispering*]: Not I, sir – Tituba and Ruth.

PARRIS [*turns now, with new fear, and goes to BETTY, looks down at her, and then, gazing off*]: Oh, Abigail, what proper payment for my charity! Now I am undone.

PUTNAM: You are not undone! Let you take hold here. Wait for no one to charge you – declare it yourself. You have discovered witchcraft –

PARRIS: In my house? In my house, Thomas? They will topple me with this! They will make of it a –

[*Enter MERCY LEWIS, the Putnams' servant, a fat, sly, merciless girl of eighteen.*]

MERCY: Your pardons. I only thought to see how Betty is.

PUTNAM: Why aren't you home? Who's with Ruth?

MERCY: Her grandma come. She's improved a little, I think – she give a powerful sneeze before.

MRS PUTNAM: Ah, there's a sign of life!

MERCY: I'd fear no more, Goody Putnam. It were a grand sneeze; another like it will shake her wits together, I'm sure. [*She goes to the bed to look.*]

PARRIS: Will you leave me now, Thomas? I would pray a while alone.

ABIGAIL: Uncle, you've prayed since midnight. Why do you not go down and –

PARRIS: No – no. [*To PUTNAM*] I have no answer for that crowd. I'll wait till Mr Hale arrives. [*To get MRS PUTNAM to leave*] If you will, Goody Ann . . .

PUTNAM: Now look you, sir. Let you strike out against the

Devil, and the village will bless you for it! Come down, speak to them – pray with them. They're thirsting for your word, Mister! Surely you'll pray with them.

PARRIS [*swayed*]: I'll lead them in a psalm, but let you say nothing of witchcraft yet. I will not discuss it. The cause is yet unknown. I have had enough contention since I came; I want no more.

MRS PUTNAM: Mercy, you go home to Ruth, d'y'hear?

MERCY: Aye, mum.

[*MRS PUTNAM goes out.*]

PARRIS [*to ABIGAIL*]: If she starts for the window, cry for me at once.

ABIGAIL: I will, uncle.

PARRIS [*to PUTNAM*]: There is a terrible power in her arms today. [*He goes out with PUTNAM.*]

ABIGAIL [*with bushed trepidation*]: How is Ruth sick?

MERCY: It's weirdish, I know not – she seems to walk like a dead one since last night.

ABIGAIL [*turns at once and goes to BETTY, and now, with fear in her voice*]: Betty? [*BETTY doesn't move. She shakes her.*] Now stop this! Betty! Sit up now!

[*BETTY doesn't stir. MERCY comes over.*]

MERCY: Have you tried beatin' her? I gave Ruth a good one and it waked her for a minute. Here, let me have her.

ABIGAIL [*holding Mercy back*]: No, he'll be comin' up. Listen, now; if they be questioning us, tell them we danced – I told him as much already.

MERCY: Aye. And what more?

ABIGAIL: He knows Tituba conjured Ruth's sisters to come out of the grave.

MERCY: And what more?

ABIGAIL: He saw you naked.

MERCY [*clapping her hands together with a frightened laugh*]: Oh, Jesus!

[*Enter MARY WARREN, breathless. She is seventeen, a subservient, naïve, lonely girl.*]

MARY WARREN: What'll we do? The village is out! I just come from the farm; the whole country's talkin' witchcraft! They'll be callin' us witches, Abby!

MERCY [*pointing and looking at Mary Warren*]: She means to tell, I know it.

MARY WARREN: Abby, we've got to tell. Witchery's a hangin' error, a hangin' like they done in Boston two year ago! We must tell the truth, Abby! You'll only be whipped for *dancin'*, and the other things!

ABIGAIL: Oh, *we'll* be whipped!

MARY WARREN: I never done none of it, Abby. I only looked!

MERCY [*moving menacingly toward Mary*]: Oh, you're a great one for lookin', aren't you, Mary Warren? What a grand peeping courage you have!

[*BETTY, on the bed, whimpers. ABIGAIL turns to her at once.*]

ABIGAIL: Betty? [*She goes to BETTY.*] Now, Betty, dear, wake up now. It's Abigail. [*She sits BETTY up and furiously shakes her.*] I'll beat you, Betty! [*BETTY whimpers.*] My, you seem improving. I talked to your papa and I told him everything. So there's nothing to —

BETTY [*darts off the bed, frightened of ABIGAIL, and flattens herself against the wall*]: I want my mama!

ABIGAIL [*with alarm, as she cautiously approaches BETTY*]: What ails you, Betty? Your mama's dead and buried.

BETTY: I'll fly to Mama. Let me fly! [*She raises her arms as though to fly, and streaks for the window, gets one leg out.*]

ABIGAIL [*pulling her away from the window*]: I told him everything; he knows now, he knows everything we —

BETTY: You drank blood, Abby! You didn't tell him that!

ABIGAIL: Betty, you never say that again! You will never —

BETTY: You did, you did! You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!

ABIGAIL [*smashes her across the face*]: Shut it! Now shut it!

BETTY [*collapsing on the bed*]: Mama, Mama! [*She dissolves into sobs.*]

ABIGAIL: Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it;

I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! [*She goes to BETTY and roughly sits her up.*] Now, you — sit up and stop this!

[*But BETTY collapses in her hands and lies inert on the bed.*]

MARY WARREN [*with hysterical fright*]: What's got her?

[*ABIGAIL stares in fright at BETTY.*] Abby, she's going to die! It's a sin to conjure, and we —

ABIGAIL [*starting for MARY*]: I say shut it, Mary Warren!

[*Enter JOHN PROCTOR. On seeing him, MARY WARREN leaps in fright.*]

Proctor was a farmer in his middle thirties. He need not have been a partisan of any faction in the town, but there is evidence to suggest that (he had a sharp and biting way with hypocrites) He was the kind of man — powerful of body, even-tempered, and not easily led — who cannot refuse support to partisans without drawing their deepest resentment. In Proctor's presence a fool felt his foolishness instantly — and a Proctor is always marked for calumny therefore.

But as we shall see, the steady manner he displays does not spring from an untroubled soul. He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct. These people had no ritual for the washing away of sins. It is another trait we inherited from them, and it has helped to discipline us as well as to breed hypocrisy among us. Proctor, respected and even feared in Salem, has come to regard himself as a kind of fraud. But no hint of this has yet appeared on the surface, and as he enters from the crowded parlour below it is a man in his prime we see, with a quiet confidence and an unexpressed, hidden force. Mary Warren, his servant, can barely speak for embarrassment and fear.

MARY WARREN: Oh! I'm just going home, Mr Proctor.

PROCTOR: Be you foolish, Mary Warren? Be you deaf? I forbid you leave the house, did I not? Why shall I pay you? I am looking for you more often than my cows!