

2

ABIGAIL. She always sings her Barbados songs, and we dance.

PARRIS. I cannot blink what I saw, Abigail—for my enemies will not blink it. I saw a dress lying in the grass.

ABIGAIL. A dress?

PARRIS. Aye, a dress. And I thought I saw a... someone naked running through the trees!

ABIGAIL. No one was naked! You mistake yourself, Uncle!

PARRIS. I saw it! Now tell me true, Abigail. Now my ministry's at stake; my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life... Whatever abomination you have done, give me all of it now, for I dare not be taken unaware when I go before them down there.

ABIGAIL. There is nothin' more. I swear it, Uncle.

PARRIS. Abigail, I have fought here three long years to bend these stiff-necked people to me, and now, just now when there must be some good respect for me in the parish, you compromise my very character. I have given you a home, child, I have put clothes upon your back—now give me upright answer:—your name in the town—it is entirely white, is it not?

ABIGAIL. Why, I am sure it is, sir, there be no blush about my name.

PARRIS. Abigail, is there any other cause than you have told me, for Goody Proctor dischargin' you? It has troubled me that you are now seven months out of their house, and in all this time no other family has ever called for your service.

ABIGAIL. They want slaves, not such as I. Let them send to Barbados for that, I will not black my face for any of them! *(Enter Mrs. Ann Putnam. She is a twisted soul of forty-five, a death-ridden woman, haunted by dreams.)*

PARRIS. No—no, I cannot have anyone. Why, Goody Putnam, come in.

ANN. It is a marvel. It is surely a stroke of hell upon you...

PARRIS. No, Goody Putnam, it is...

ANN. How high did she fly, how high?

PARRIS. No—no, she never flew...

ANN. Why, it's sure she did; Mister Collins saw her goin' over Ingersoll's barn, and come down light as bird, he says!

PARRIS. Now, look you, Goody Putnam; she never... *(Enter Thomas Putnam, a well-to-do, hard-handed landowner near fifty.)*

Oh, good morning, Mister Putnam...

PUTNAM. It is a providence the thing is out now! It is a providence.

PARRIS. What's out, sir, what's...?

PUTNAM. (*Looking down at Betty.*) Why, *her eyes* is closed! Look you, Ann.

ANN. Why, that's strange. Ours is open.

PARRIS. Your little Ruth is sick?

ANN. *I'd* not call it *sick*, the Devil's touch is heavier than *sick*, it's *death*, y'know, it's death drivin' into them forked and hoofed.

PARRIS. Oh, pray not! Why, *how* does your child ail?

ANN. She ails as she must—she never waked this morning but her eyes open and she walks, and hears naught, sees naught, and cannot eat. Her soul is taken, surely.

PUTNAM. They say you've sent for Reverend Hale of Beverly?

PARRIS. A *precaution* only. He has much experience in all demonic arts, and I...

ANN. He has *indeed*, and found a *witch* in Beverly last year, and let you remember that.

PARRIS. Now, Goody Ann, they only thought that were a witch, and I am certain there be no element of witchcraft here.

PUTNAM. No witchcraft! Now look you, Mister Parris...

PARRIS. Thomas, Thomas, I pray you, *leap not* to *witchcraft*. I know that you, you least of all, Thomas, would ever wish so disastrous a charge laid upon me. We cannot leap to witchcraft. They will howl me out of Salem for such corruption in my house.

PUTNAM. Now, look you, Mister Parris; I have taken your part in all contention here, and I would continue; but I cannot if you hold back in this. There are hurtful, vengeful spirits layin' hands on these children.

PARRIS. But, Thomas, you cannot...

PUTNAM. Ann! Tell Mister Parris what you have done.

ANN. Reverend Parris, I have laid seven babies unbaptized in the earth. Believe me, sir, you never saw more hearty babies born. And yet, each would wither in my arms the very night of their birth. I have spoke nothin', but my heart has clamored intimations. And now, this year, my Ruth, my only—I see her turning strange. A secret child she has become this year, and shrivels like a sucking mouth were pullin' on her life, too. And so I thought to send her to your Tituba—

PARRIS. To Tituba! What may Tituba...?

ANN. Tituba knows how to *speak* to the *dead*, Mister Parris.

PARRIS. Goody Ann, it is a formidable sin to conjure up the dead!

ANN. I take it on my soul, (*Rising.*) but who else may surely tell us what person murdered my babies.

PARRIS. Woman!

ANN. They were murdered, Mister 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 marvelous sign, Mister Parris!

PUTNAM. Don't you understand it, sir? 'There is a murdering witch among us bound to keep herself in the dark. 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. Not I, sir, not I. —'Tis tuba and Ruth.~~

~~PARRIS. 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, a 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.~~

~~ANN. 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.~~

~~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, I'll wait till Mister Hale arrives.~~

~~PUTNAM. (*To Parris.*) 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. I have no stomach for disputation this morning. I will 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. (*Putnam crosses to show*~~