

PROGRAMME

THE
CATILDARON

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
by
Roy Pugh

*The First of The Prestonpans Witch Trilogy of Plays created in Remembrance
of the 81 people so wrongfully put to death in Prestonpans and Pardoned by the
Barons Courts July 27th 2004*

Prologue

Act 1

The Players

Mary, Queen of Scots
David Riccio
William Maitland of Lethington [Lennoxlove]

Prologue

Act 2

The Players

Reverend Patrick Cook, Minister of Salt Preston Kirk
Agnes Aird
Margaret Auchinmoutie
Kirk Elders
Hector Wood
Robert Drummond

Act 3

The Players

Rev Patrick Cook
Hector Wood
Robert Drummond
Agnes Aird
Sylvia Burgess
Margaret Auchinmoutie
Christian Blaikie
Margaret Butter
Martha Butter
Helen Gibson
Janet Gray
Margaret Hall

Finale

The Players

As for Act 3

Epilogue

PROLOGUE

You are about to witness events which took place several centuries ago in Edinburgh and in Prestonpans. The first Act takes place in the year 1563, when the Witchcraft Act was signed by Mary, Queen of Scots that was to set in motion the witch hunt in Scotland. Acts 2 and 3 describe the events which led up to the trial of eight particular women in Prestonpans in the year 1661.

It is important to remember that while a similar act against witchcraft was passed by Elizabeth I of England, witchcraft there was regarded as a crime against society and therefore was treated as a felony under the civil law; those found guilty in England were punished accordingly, not always by capital punishment. On the Continent and in Scotland, the notion of witchcraft was fundamentally religious and involved Satan, the Anti-Christ, the enemy of all mankind. His followers – witches and wizards (warlocks in Scotland) were believed to have given up their immortal souls in exchange for supernatural powers. In doing so, they were considered to have renounced Christ's teachings, rejected his love and given up their salvation, which was rewarded by immortality in the after-life. On the Continent, witchcraft was heresy, an offence against the laws of both God and man. The Continental view came to Scotland with Protestant reformers such as George Wishart and John Knox in the 16th century.

Those who practised witchcraft would burn in the fires of Hell, having lost their immortal souls to the Devil. Thus it was a crime against both man and God and it was punishable by death in Scotland. Those that were guilty were 'werrit' (strangled or garrotted) then their bodies were consumed by fire, as no witch could be interred in consecrated ground.

It is also important to recognise that the victims of the Scottish witch hunt – shadowy figures of which we know little other than their names – were consigned to their fate largely because of hysteria, hypocrisy, superstition, jealousy, greed and anti-social behaviour. The male-dominated Kirk of Scotland denounced witches as abominations, the weaker vessels who were more prone to the Devil's influence by their very nature. Unacceptable behaviour such as bearing bastard children or taking other womens' husbands from them was proof of witchcraft. This is important, for both occur in the play you are about to witness.

The Scottish witch hunt was partly a result of confrontation between the reforming fathers of the Scottish Kirk and John Knox in particular and the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. Catholicism was heresy in Knox's eyes; so was witchcraft. It could be said that Mary was the arch-architect of the witch hunt. I believe that with his bitter and unrelenting attacks on Catholicism – heresy – Knox undoubtedly had a hand in the Witchcraft Act of 1563 in Scotland.

ACT 1

[Scene: A dimly lit stage with small table and 3 chairs. Scene opens with Mary Queen of Scots kneeling at prayer with her rosary. There is a gentle knocking stage left. She rises, kisses her beads and sits at the table]

Queen: Pray enter.

[David Riccio enters stage left, bows to her and stands upstage]

Queen: Good Davey, tis pleasure to see thee but the hour is late. Wherefore come ye here?

Riccio: Pray forgive me your Highness. David Riccio begs his liege's pardon and her forgiveness for troubling you at your devotions at this late hour. But I have of words with you before the morning.

Queen: Tis of little consequence good Davey. My devotions are complete. Shall you partake of a little wine, or supper?

Riccio: Nay, my lady for I have already supped and would keep my head unfuddled for the tidings I bear. I am come to warn you that Secretary Lethington is near. He seeks an audience with your gracious Majesty.

Queen: Know you the nature of Secretary Lethington's visitation at this late hour?

Riccio: Tis concerning the Parliament which meets on the morrow, when your Highness shall attend to give assent to several Acts of Parliament to be enforced within your kingdom.

Queen: [wearily] Yet cannot the matter be resolved on the morrow? I would be abed at this hour.

Riccio: Nay, my Lady. Secretary Lethington urgently wishes to confer with your Majesty upon one Act of the Parliament, that concerning the law regarding Witchcraft and those that practise the abominable craft in the service of the Devil. Secretary Lethington would warn you that there are those in the Parliament that are evilly counselled. Such counsellors would confound you before the Parliament in this matter, for as your Highness knows, there are many that speak against your Catholic person.

Queen: I follow you not, Davey. The Parliament has prepared an act that will outlaw Witchcraft and witches, for they are abominations in the sight of the Lord. Tis but a simple matter. As Sovereign of the realm, I gladly give my assent to this Measure, for twill protect my subjects and God's holy church.

Riccio: But that is not the whole of it, your Majesty.

Queen: How so?

Riccio: Your Majesty speaks of God's Holy Church. There are those who would challenge ye as to the meaning of these words. Some of those of the Reformed Church of this realm would seek to confound ye in this matter. Tis common knowledge that your Majesty openly celebrates Mass in the Chapel of the palace.

Queen: [wearily] Must I be tormented yet more about my faith? This constant bickering wearies me. Have I not suffered enough at the hands of MasterKnox in the matter? [She thumps the table]. I shall not be dictated to by a commoner, nay nor his brethren. I worship in the manner of my ancestors, my mother and father that are lately dead. I do not force my religion upon my people. I do not order them to worship as I do. So why should they seek to force me to worship in their way?

Riccio: Tis well known how Master Knox has vexed your Highness. Secretary Maitland fears that he will endeavour to tamper with the Witchcraft Act in a manner that it may be invoked against heretics as well as witches. For Master Knox makes no secret of his views regarding the Catholic faith and those that follow the teachings and trappings of the Church of Rome, whom he publicly and daily denounces as heretics. Tis upon this point that Secretary Lethington wishes to consult your Majesty. He fears that Master Knox will seek to include heretics in the new law.

Queen: [angry] Will no man in this realm rid me of this troublesome priest?

Riccio: Mayhap Secretary Lethington shall address that matter, my Lady. Shall I bid him enter?

Queen: [wearily] Aye, bring to us, good Davey.

[Riccio exits stage left and returns immediately with Lethington]

Queen: Good Secretary Maitland, ye are right welcome even though the hour is late. Pray be seated. Davey has acquainted me upon the fears for the morrow, when I shall put my name to the Witchcraft Act framed by the Parliament. How say ye the matter shall be resolved?

Lethington: Your Majesty, I have no intelligence upon the attendance of Master Knox at Holyrood upon the morrow but tis certain that his followers shall be present. They wish to discomfit ye. The ploy is this. The act anent the witches that are known to walk abroad in this realm rightly condemns those that practise sorcery, witchcraft and necromancy. Those that have put forward the law that shall be brought against them consider a witch as a heretic, yet that word does not appear in the act. Ye know that Master Knox believes that those who worship in the form of the Catholic faith, those that attend Mass are heretics. Ye know this from his preachings. To permit the inclusion of the word heretic in the law would consign to death every Catholic in this realm. And ye know that would include your Majesty herself as well as Master Riccio, who is of like faith.

Queen: I see it plain, yet ye have not offered anything that would resolve the problem. Have I not been lenient with my people, allowing them to worship in the manner they choose? Countless times Master Knox has vexed upon this matter, with his foul threats and impudent behaviour. Tis I, not he, who is sovereign of this realm. I shall not be his servant, nor shall I be treated as a common whore, which name he uses of me. The whore of Rome. I have the body of a woman but I have the stomach of a man. I shall not allow him nor his like to challenge our authority.

Lethington: Knox or his man shall argue that witchcraft is heresy in the eyes of God. That is right. They will further argue that those who refuse to adhere to the true reformed religion of Scotland are heretics and no better than the witches this act shall condemn.

Queen: I am well apprised of this, for ye have stated it before. How shall we answer the charge?

Lethington: I shall put this to Knox and his men. The Witchcraft Act is writ in such manner to effect the will of your Majesty's government. I shall argue that the act is not the law of God, which is to be found in Holy Scriptures. Tis the will of your Parliament whose law does not masquerade as God's Law.

Riccio: Yet they shall surely counter this by insisting that these laws are one and the same. Tis what the Protestants believe in Europe, though not in England, our neighbour. And the Reformation came to Scotland by way of Europe. The Protestant teaching of John Calvin of France was seeded in this realm by Master Knox.

Lethington: Tis as ye say, Master Riccio. But I shall argue against the detractors in this manner. In Holy Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, it is writ in Chapter 22, verse 18 that God ordained this:
'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'
Holy Scripture does not say thou shalt not suffer a heretic to live. Those men of Knox's mind cannot argue against that, for the Witchcraft Act enshrines the word of God. But I know naught of God's mind upon the treatment that shall be meted out to heretics. Perhaps he was lax in the matter, or he may have handed down words to the Prophet Moses that were dark or were obscured. For Moses was concerned that his people should follow the Lord. They were not heretics, even if at times they practised evil. Your Majesty, I put this to ye. Though Catholicism may be abhorrent to Master Knox, its adherents love the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot be accused of heresy thereby. Witch heretics are the enemies of Christ, the followers of Satan. Master Knox and his followers shall be reminded of this on the morrow, when ye put your name to the act that shall make outlaws of those who practise the Black Arts.

Queen: **[Clapping her hands]** Well spoken, Secretary Maitland! I am reminded of how faithfully ye served my mother, Mary of Guise. Now ye serve me in equal and admirable fashion. Bravo. My counsellors did well to appoint ye as one of my principal ministers. Shall ye partake of wine, to celebrate the victory over Master Knox and his evil men?

Lethington: Nay, your Majesty, for I have much work to achieve by candle light, even though tis almost Midsummer. The morrow is the fourth of June, when daylight is almost of equal light to the night. Twill be a long morrow.

Queen: As you wish, good Maitland. I am much pleased with your counsel. But pray advise me upon the witches in this realm. Are they in great number? I know not of their numbers, I regret to say.

Lethington: Tis said that there are such creatures in the shire of Fife, in the Lothians and in the Borders, that area which we call the Debatable Shire in Scotland. Some say that the whole of your realm is afflicted by the Creatures, though I have no intelligence upon the matter. There are many others not guilty of the witchcrafts this act of Parliament shall remove from our midst, those who would seek to depose your Majesty from her rightful throne. But there are those among your subjects that would come to your side and that will protect ye from human harm. This act of the Parliament ye will sign on the morrow shall protect your subjects from the Devil and his servants.

Queen: I am well pleased with ye, Secretary Lethington. Ye have shewn yourself a true servant of your queen. Good Davey, let this be known among my counsellors. God be with ye both, Davey and Lethington, my true friends.

Riccio/Lethington: And with ye your Highness. Can I get you a drink, Madam?

[They bow and walk backwards from the stage. As he reaches the door stage left, Riccio bows yet again]

Ricky: Good night, my Queen, my protector, my lady. May God attend ye in sleep and upon the morrow. May he watch over ye this night and the many nights that lie afore ye.

Queen: [moving towards him and kissing the fingertips of his right hand] Sleep ye also well, my good Davey. I would have ye at my side upon the morrow but it cannot be, for there are those who are jealous of ye. No matter, we shall share wine tomorrow eve, when the work of Parliament is done. Begone now, for ye should be abed, as should I. Goodnight, my faithful servant, may ye rest in peace.

[Lights dim gradually as Mary, Queen of Scots exits stage left]

ACT 2

It is the year 1661, almost a century after the passing of the Witchcraft Act by Mary, Queen of Scots. The Reformed Church of Scotland is now firmly established as the official state religion and therefore no longer faces the threat of a Catholic backlash, as had been possible in Mary Queen of Scots time. By now, witches are no longer perceived or described as heretics as were Catholics; they are now regarded as the Anti-Christ, in league with Satan. In the intervening 98 years, several thousand people of Scotland have been put to death for the supposed crime of witchcraft. Few were guilty, for only a small minority believed they possessed supernatural powers. A good proportion of the victims were herbalists or wise-wives, midwives, servants and beggars. By far the greatest number were ordinary people, neighbours who quarrelled with one another over some petty domestic matter and cursed one another.

This case concerns a feud between two groups of women over marital infidelity and the production of two illegitimate children. One group accuses the other, which responds with counter-accusations, a common feature. The Kirk of course aided and abetted this, as it was in its interests to control the population and bring supposed suspects to account for their bad behaviour. It was done in the name of God.

I now invite you to imagine you are the congregation of the Parish Kirk of Salt Preston, as Prestonpans was then called on a Sabbath morning in the year 1661. The minister of the day, the Reverend Patrick Cook, has just finished his sermon and will now address the congregation on the matter of witchcraft in the parish. In the congregation are two women, Margaret Auchinmoutie and Margaret Hall.

[Hall and Auchinmoutie enter. Their faces are hidden behind shawls and they sit at the back of the hall. Lights come up. At a table on the dais are seated the Rev Patrick Cook flanked on either side by elders Hector Wood and Robert Drummond]

Cook: Here endeth the lesson. Now tis my duty to advert to an unpleasant matter. Ye who are Christians that dwell under the Lord's love and follow the true Religion of this realm, know ye this. Witchcraft, that abomination against the Lord daily increaseth in this parish, evidence of which I shall endeavour to bring to your notice. For tis my bounden duty as the Lord's servant to bring To justice they that are witches.

[Thumps the table] Why, this very day, theabominable creatures walk among ye in the streets of Salt Preston without let or hindrance and ye do naught to bring them to the Kirk's attention, nor do ye inform upon them. I call upon Brother Wood to enlighten us upon the matter.

Wood: Thank ye, Maister Cook. Twas lately reported to me the names of diverse women in the parish that are suspectit o' witchcraft by habit and by repute. Some do say that Salt Preston is a veritable cauldron in which seethes the souls o' mony a Christian man and woman, that they are cast into it by the loathsome creatures callit witches.

Cook: A cauldron ye say? Near every dwelling place in the parish has a cook pot. What makes this cauldron different from the cook pots?

Wood: Tis hard to say, Maister, though some say tis fashioned with the images o' serpents which as ye ken are the Deil's servants. We would hae tae seek it in every dwelling hoose in the parish and even then, are no' likely tae discover it, as the witches would hide it.

Cook: Are there none in the congregation that have knowledge of this cauldron? Or the creatures called witches? Have any here present this day discovered them? Surely there is someone-

Ist Voice: **[Hall]** Aye Maister, Ah ken a few.

2nd Voice **[Auchinmoutie]** As do I, Maister.

Cook: Shall ye not approach the pulpit or show yourselves?

Both: Nay, Maister.

Cook: Why do ye hesitate to come forward or stand and be recognised?

Wood: For we are feared that there might be some o' their friends present I' the Kirk that shall betray us to the coven, that they might torment us again.

Cook: I understand ye. But do ye know there is a box in the Kirk where ye may write their names on a paper, though ye are not required to sign it.

Hall: Aye, we ken it Maister, but me and ma neighbour cannae write.

Cook: Tis a sad business. Shall ye remain behind after divine service then? That ye may speak with the Brothers and me?

Auchinmoutie: Nay, Maister, but we shall come I' the kirk efter dark some nicht. For there are some in the parish o' Salt Preston that watch us.

Cook: So be it.

[Lights go out for a few seconds, then come on again. Standing are Cook, Wood and Drummond. Hall and Auchinmoutie stand before them]

Cook: Tis upon evil night of rain and wind that ye come to us.

Hall: Aye, Maister, there are nane but us abroad. Twas why hae we come tae ye this nicht

Cook: Sisters, holy kirk shall protect ye from all evil. Ye need fear naught for ye are baptised and walk in the ways of the Lord, are ye not?

Both: Aye, Maister.

Cook: Now to the business. Shall ye give us the names of the evil ones that torment ye?

Auchinmoutie **[softly, a little afraid]** Aye, Maister. They are callit Christian Blaikie, Margaret Butter, Helen Gibson, Agnes Aird and Janet Gray.

Hall: Margaret, ye hae forgot Martha Butter, Margaret Butter's kinswoman. She wis accusit o' witchcraft twa years syne in the parish o' Travernent though she wis set free, for they said there wis nae proof o' her wickedness.

Cook: Master Wood, ye shall write the names in the defaulters' book.

Wood: Tis done, Maister Cook. I ken these women and the Butter woman that was was accusit in Tranent in the year sixteen hunnert and fifty nine. They said there was no' enough evidence to prove her guilt. She and the ithers are backsliders. They are oft absent frae the Kirk on the Sabbath on accoont o' their habits.

Cook: And pray inform me of the nature of these habits?

Wood: Why Maister, they smook and drink small beer at the parish inns. Maister Drummond and I hae aft warned them o' the consequences. They heed us for A whiles, that they micht be excused frae sittin' on the penitential stool, then they sin again.

Cook: Were they at service upon the Sabbath past?

Drummond: Nay, Maister.

Cook: Ye must discipline them again. But I put it to ye, Brothers. These may be sins and bad though they are, they warrant only a term on the stool. There habits do not make of them witches. **[Turning to Hall and Auchinmoutie]**. There must be other crimes and sins of which they are guilty. Speak sisters, for ye have called them witches. For what reason? Worry not, the kirk shall protect ye.

Hall: We wis feared tae speak upon the Sabbath past, lest Ah be tormented again. They are strong in evil, these women, michtily strong.

Cook: Come Mistress Hall, ye may speak freely, for the Kirk shall protect your name and your person. What is the nature of their sin? Is it so that these women have ceased to believe in doctrines of the Kirk and are not afraid of its discipline? Have they renounced their baptisms?

Hall: Ah ken nocht about these matters.

Cook: Do they speak against the Lord and disdain to adore Christ? They are regularly absent from divine services, so we may take it that is the case.

Hall: As ye say, Maister.

Cook: What other proof have ye of their wickedness?

Auchinmoutie: Ye maun ask them when they last received the sacrament, for tis weel kened that witches cannae take the holy breid and the sacred wine.

Cook: Have ye any knowledge of this, Brothers?

Wood and Drummond: Nay, Maister Cook.

Cook: Mistress Hall, ye said that ye were afraid they would torment ye again. They have done so before?

Hall: Aye, Maister. Upon Candlemas Eve this year, the first day o' the month o' February. A'body kens that nicht is ane when witches forgather to make their mischief an' their spells an' charmin's.

Auchinmoutie: Mistress Hall speaks truly, for Ah was there that nicht.

Cook: And what was the nature of the torment?

Hall: Weel Maister, the nicht was dark as tis i' that month, it bein' winter. Ah was sat at the fireside wi' ma bairn, warmin' her afore Ah laid her intil the cradle. Ah heard a noise ootside in the yaird. It wis like rats claws scritch' on the stane stair. Ah pit the bairn tae her bed and went oot tae the stair wi' a caunle tae licht me. There was naught tae be seen. Then as Ah was turnin' tae the door, oot o' the shadows steppit Christian Blaikie and Helen Gibson. Ah sayed tae them "Whit dae ye here at this oor o' nicht, when guid Christians are a-bed?" They hissed at me like cats, and snakes then they pointed at me. Then Christian Blaikie did say that Ah wid seethe in the cauldron that they had lit for me. She sayed twas Hell's cauldron, intil which witches the like o' me were put. When Ah askit for why she wad cry me a witch, she sayed "Weel ye ken. For ye hae laid the glamour upon ma man and the men o' ma freends"

Cook: What is the meaning of this glamour?

Wood: Tis bewitching and chairming, Maister, the ploy o' witches that wish tae lead Christian men into wickedness.

Cook: Ye mean evil and unlawful fornication?

Wood: Aye, Maister. Ye ken that Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchin moutie hath borne bairns oot o' wedlock, for which they were chastised upon the stool o' penitence a year or so syne.

Cook: Ah, yes, I recall it.

Auchinmoutie: **[Shamefully]** Aye, Maister, Ah am ashamed tae admit it wis so but Mistress Hall an' masel hae done oor penance. We hae niver fallen syne that time.

Cook: But ye never named the fathers. Twas a sin not to name them, for the Kirk would have disciplined them also for their lewdness. Shall ye name them this night?

Hall: Nay, Maister. We cannae, for tis the men o' them we callit witches whae faithered oor bairns.

Cook: Ye mean that there were not two men but several? Ye have named six women. God save us! There is much boiling in this cauldron of sin. What more is there?

Auchinmoutie: Nae mair, Maister, Ah swear it. Mony the nicht Ah prayed for the Lord's forgiveness, for Ah' m that ashamed.

Hall: As hae I, Sir.

Cook: And so ye should, ye are likened to the whore Mary of Magdalen, whom Christ saw fit in his mercy to forgive. How many men hae ye lain with?

Hall: Some that are spouse tae the women we hae named.

Cook: **[Looking appalled]** Tis no wonder they called ye witches. Did ye bewitch them by this glamour ye speak of? Did ye take them into your beds for unlawful intercourse willingly and wilfully?

Auchinmoutie: Nay, Maister, we didnae put the glamour upon them. They comed tae oor dwellings wi' mony tales o' their womenfolk's wickedness an' their coldness, sayin' that they lacked Christian charity. They sayed they were witches that had gien their souls tae the Deil, for they were without a heart an' a soul.

Cook: Did they themselves call their spouses witches?

Hall: Aye, Maister, twas their word. And mair than yince, as Ah recall.

Cook: So they would admit it in an assize?

Auchinmoutie: Ah dinnae ken, Maister. But Ah wad.

Cook: So be it, but twould go better if the men did so. Now, ye have brought bastards into the parish. Did ye do this willingly? Or did the men force themselves upon ye. Speak up, for tis an important point.

Hall: **[sobbing]** We did it willingly, Maister, for we hae nae men o' oor ain.

Cook: **[thumps the table with her hand]** Ye are evil creatures that are worthy of the name witch. How many men did ye permit into your beds?

Hall: There were twa cam tae me.

Auchinmoutie: Twas three that cam tae me, Maister.

Cook: **[Angrily]** OH! OH! May the Lord have mercy on ye. Ye are as wicked as those ye denounce as witches!

Hall: Oh, dinnae say it Maister, we were ashamed and we hae payed the price. Forbye, we hae sinned nae mair and gang tae the kirk every Sabbath.

Cook: Shall ye tell us of your transgressions, Mistress Hall?

Hall: Ah shall but Ah shall not gie their names. The first was a young man. He wis kind tae me and brocht me a ribbon for ma hair. The second wis a man of mair years than masel'. He aye had partaken o' ale for he sayed he wis ashamed o' his wickedness bot that he wished some kindness in his miserable life. He sayed his wife was cauld and wouldnae lie wi' him. He kneeled afore me an' pit his heid upon ma lap. He wis weepin' and said that Ah had yince smiled upon him at Salt Preston market an' that twas the first smile he had kenned in mony a year.

Cook: Tis noreason for ye to have sinned.

Hall: Ah ken that sairly, Maister. Yet that nicht, Ah took peety upon the puir man for his een was richt sair frae weepin'. Kind eyes he had, yet he was troubled. Ah took him intil ma bed, tae comfort him. Mayhap he is faither tae ma bairn though Ah dinnae ken for sure. Only the guid Lord kens.

Cook: Woman! Ye are a sinner indeed! Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie, ye have disgraced yourselves in the eyes of the Lord and in the Kirk. Ye have transgressed with several unnamed persons whose spouses have rightly accused ye of bewitching their menfolk. In their sight, ye are witches if not by repute, by your habits. However, ye have already confessed your sin to the Kirk and have suffered the discipline that it imposes upon such as ye. But now the Kirk shall have to investigate this new accusation of bewitching, that it may be dealt with in proper fashion.

Hall: **[falling on her knees]** Oh, Maister Cook, Ah'm nae witch, nor is my neebour Mistress Auchinmoutie! We are but foolish women whae hae mended oor ways. We hae brocht twa bastard bairns intil the warld. There is but ane noo, for ma bairn fell seik efter they women visited ma hoose upon Candlemas Eve. The wee thing seikened and de'ed but a few weeks efter. Tis they that should be brocht tae justice, no' us. They hae callit us witches but they hae mair than the death o' an innocent bairn for tae answer tae the Lord.

Cook: Explain yourself.

Hall: We hae seen them gaun oot tae the wids efter dark, tae gaither herbs for their spells.

Auchinmoutie: Aye, an' mair. They lichtit fires and danced wi' the Deil, chantin' unco' words. They sayed that they went oot at nicht tae get herbs for the cauldron, for tis weel kent that certain herbs gaithered at midnight are stronger and better for their purpose. Ah wid like tae ken for whit purpose they gaithered the herbs. Ah think twas no' for a stew or rabbit or cushy doo. Why, Maister, Ah believe twas for evil. Mistress Hall's bairn wis healthy and fat that nicht o' Candlemas. The nixt mornin' twas seikly and lookit as though twere shrivelled like an auld man. They had pit upon it a spell, tae punish us for oor transgressions against their menfolk, which we hae admitted in the Kirk. They wished tae destroy the bairn for twas livin' proof o' their mens' unfaithfulness. Ah feared for ma ain bairn, though thankfully, twas spared on account o' the baptism twas given be yir ain guid hands. Mistress Aird's bairn wis ta'en afore twas baptised, as ye ken.

Cook: Ah, yes, I recall it. Mistress Hall, ye were given added discipline for the sin. Ye know that the child's soul went straight to the Devil for it lacked the protection that Kirk baptism bestows upon those born in Jesus. Shame upon ye, that ye consigned an innocent bairn to Hell.

Hall: **[weeping]** Oh Ah ken it sair, Maister! Ah hae lived wi' that terrible sin they past months.

Cook: Now, I wish to confer with my Brothers about this business. **[He motions to Wood and Drummond to accompany him stage right, where they whisper for a few moments. The three then return to the table]**

Cook: Mistress Hall and Mistress Auchinmoutie, if these ye have accused for witches are proven to be so, then ye have done much service to the Kirk. We shall speak them in due course. If they be witches, they could not pray nor attend divine service for fear of discovery. Tis true they are backsliders and they are not fair in countenance, being not good to look upon. But these things do not in themselves make of them witches, so we shall interrogate them to learn more of their wrongdoing. Now ye maun depart, for Masters Wood and Drummond and I have need to consult the Session. We shall speak again, after the Session has convened. Ye have done a Christian duty this day, yet ye are not blameless in this matter. Depart and go with God. See that ye sin no more for God is watching you.

[Hall and Auchinmoutie exit stage left]

Cook: Now then, what shall we make of this evil that is in our midst?

Wood: Tis clear tae me Maister Cook that there is mair tae this than meets the eye. Ah'm of a mind tae say that the women Hall and Auchinmoutie are themsels guilty o' witchcraft.

Drummond: As am I. Tis bad enough they hae brocht bastards intae Salt Preston. Tis the manner of their bringing that distresses me.

Cook: I agree. But this is a matter for the Session, not for we. And what of the others that are accused? Are they guilty also? I am thinking that this is indeed a cauldron, yet of a different kind fashioned to make soups and stews. Did they not threaten to seethe Hall and Auchinmoutie in their cauldron? Twas hardly said lightly. Twas in the nature of a curse.

Drummond: These wummin say they do not belong tae a coven, yet the one lot hae accusit the other o' the crime o' witchcraft. Tis ane side o' the coin tae absent themsels frae divine services upon the Sabbath tae drink small beer, smoak pipes and sing and dance. Tis anither tae curse and threaten wi' spells and charms. An' the glamour. They are a' the ploys o' them that practise the Black Airts. An' forbye, there is the death o' the bairn Hall. They are nane o' them free frae sin an' evil. They are a' tainted and they shall taint others in Salt Preston. Maister Cook, ye ken whit the Guid Book says. Thou shalt not suffer a witch tae live. Tis found in Exodus chapter 22 verse 18.

Cook: Ye have no need to remind me, Master Drummond. Now, we maun call a meeting of the Session that we may examine the entire business. Ye are agreed upon the matter?

Both: Aye.

Wood: Aye an' as soon as is convenient, Maister. We hae nae time tae lose. The creatures are abroad in the streets, workin' mair evil for all we ken.

Cook: Ye shall act as witnesses in the matter of Hall and Auchinmoutie. But ye maun visit the other women that we may learn of their side of this abominable tale. We shall have need of their testimonies before the Session meets, that all know the names and the natures and doings of all that are involved. Go ye with grace and speed, with God in your minds and hearts.

[Lights dim as they exit stage left. Lights go up again]

There will now be a 20 minute intermission for refreshments

ACT 3

[A dimly lit stage where six women are seated at a table. They are Christian Blaikie, Helen Gibson, Margaret Butter, Martha Butter, Janet Gray and Agnes Aird]

- Blaikie: Sisters, we are gaitherit here this nicht for evil hae been done tae us be Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie, whae are rank witches. Ye maun ken that they hae handit us intil the Kirk, saying we are witches. We ken whae the real witches are. Them that put the glamour on oor menfolk and took them intil their beds. An' they gien birth to twa bit bairns that were proof o' their bewitchin' an' their wickedness.
- Margt Butter: Aye, Mistress Blaikie, we ken the maist o' it. The witches Hall and Auchinmoutie hae gien oor names tae the Meenister. Noo we await a visitation frae the elders. Twill follow as day follows nicht, for the Kirk has oor names.
- Gibson: They are rank evil witches, baith o' them. They wranged us through oor menfolk. Noo they wrang us through the Kirk. Whit can we dae aboot them? Shall we no' gaun tae the Kirk and hae oor say afore the elders come?
- Gray: Aye, Ah think we should.
- Aird: Fie, Janet. Ah wad rather settle the score in the wey o' ordinair folk. Tis surely the best wey.
- Martha Butter: Mistress Aird,. that wad be foolish, for the Kirk wad say we were as bad as they. Forbye, ye forget that me an' Mistress Gibson were accusit o' witchcraft in Travernent but twa years syne. We were let aff, but the Kirk has a lang memory.
- Blaikie: Mistress Aird, hoo wad ye go about the matter?
- Aird: We should gaun tae their hooses again like the last time. On Candlemas Eve. We should knock upon their doors an' gie them a guid hidin', then we should warn them that there must be nae mair said aboot us for bein' witches, or else the Auchinmoutie bairn will gaun they wey o' the Hall bairn.
- Margt Butter: Och save us frae this daftness! They i' the Kirk will say we torment them mair an' that we are richtly accusit o' witchcraft. As Martha sayed, she an' Helen Gibson hae a'ready been accusit twa years syne. The maisters hae lang memories, they forget naught. Forbye, the name Butter is no' common in Salt Preston.
- Gray: So we dae naught then?
- Blaikie: Aye. Let us await the visit frae the elders, when we maun make oor plea. Tis the best by far, that we keep the maisters sweet. Wrangit innocence is oor best wey. The maisters shall be mair kind tae us thereby. Tis oor best protection.
- Martha Butter: Weel spoken. But me and Helen Gibson ken anither wey tae silence the bitches Hall and Auchinmoutie.
- Blaikie: Whit wey is that?

Martha Butter: We maun mak likenesses o' the baith o' them. In caunle grease. Shall ye store yir caunle grease for the ploy?

Blaikie: Ah hae heerd o' this afore, a ploy that witches use tae rid theirsels o' them that torment them. They say that some roast the likeness ower an open fire, while ithers stick preens and bodkins intil it.

Gibson: Nae matter how tis done, tis secret. Twill ne'er be fund oot. Tis the best wey Mistress Blaikie. Ma mither tocht me the wey o' it. Twas the wey she rid hersel' o' ma faither, whae abused her. Aye and me as weel, when ma ain man wis cruel tae me, damn his ill-getted soul. **[She spits on the floor]**

Blaikie: Ah dinnae care for this. If we were fund oot-

Martha Butter: In Travernent parish, Ah did the same. An' Ah wis freed. But the guilty yin Ah tormented perishit. She wis guilty

Sylvia Burgess: Aye!

Blaikie: Sisters! We maun vote upon the matter! Are ye agreed upon the ploy?

All: **[save Blaikie]** Aye!

Blaikie: Ah like it not but the turn is done. Martha and Helen shall await yir caunle grease, that they micht fashion the images o' Margaret Hall an' Margaret Auchinmoutie.

[Lights dim for a few seconds then go up again. Martha Butter and Helen Gibson are seated at a table. Each has a waxen image or doll in their left hand. They are sticking pins into the images. Watching them are Margaret Butter, Agnes Aird and Janet]

Gray. Christian Blaikie enters from stage left]

Margt Butter: Tis richt guid that ye come, Christian, we maun bide the gither.

Martha Butter: Ye are richt welcome. **[Holding up the image]** This is Margaret Hall.. A foul fiend that took ma man frae me.

Gibson: An' this is Margaret Auchinmoutie, that took mine. May they baith see the in Hell's cauldron!

Blaikie: Hae a care sisters! Twould gae agin us were the Kirk session kent whit ye dae this night!

Martha Butter: Ah care nocht for they creatures. They cannae right the evil that hae been done tae us. But we are able. Come Christian, shall ye no' stick a preen in the doll, for ye hae been wrangit like we. Or mayhap ye wad like tae licht a caunle under it, for they say twill bring on the sweatin' seikness.

Blaikie: Ah'm feared tae dae it. For the maisters hae fowk abroad, keekin' in the windaes, watchin' fowk like we.

Martha Butter: Ach, awa' wi' ye. They ken nocht. Tis late. They are a' abed.

[There is a loud knocking at the door stage right. A voice calls out. 'Hae nae fear within, for tis me Hector Wood an Robert Drummond, come tae speak wi' ye. Are ye hame?']

Blaikie **[snatching the dolls from the two women and hiding them under her apron]**
Margaret, lass. Let them in!

[Margaret Butter opens the door stage right. Wood and Drummond enter. They doff their hats and bow to the women]

- Margt Butter: Why Maisters, tis richt kind o' ye tae visit, though at sik a late oor. Micht Ah ken for why ye come sae late?
- Wood: Weel, Mistress, Ah wis feared for ye. For there be twa weemen that are lately evilly disposed tae ye. Yet Ah see ye hae the company o' freends this nicht. Tis guid. But Ah hae some questions tae ask of ye and your freends, for there hae been lodged I' the Kirk a severe chairge upon ye here this nicht.
- Gray: Tis richt kind that the Kirk cares aboot me an' ma freends. Whae has gien ye a chairge agin us?
- Drummond: We are no' allowed tae say at this time. But ye ken them, for they are residenters in Salt Preston.
- Blaikie: Tis weel ye care for us, Maisters. But tis a cauld nicht. Shall ye no' hae some broth frae the cauldron? Ah hae a fu' pot o' it ben the hoose.
- Wood: Ah thank ye, Mistress, but we cannae bide lang, for we hae ither Kirk business this nicht.
- Gray: Ah ken ye wark mony days and nichts fur the Kirk. Twas kind o' ye tae come tae ma door. But ye dinnae say why ye come.
- Wood: Tis ma sad duty tae tell ye we come on the orders o' the Session, for ye an' yir friends hae been accusit o' a terrible crime.
- Gray: Ye stunner me. Pray whit is the crime ye speak o'?
- Drummond: Tis a fell sair crime. Ah'm saddened tae say tis the crime o' witchcraft.
- Gray: Oh ma God! Dae ye hear this sisters? They hae accusit us o' witchcraft! [She puts her hands to her face, as does Martha Butter and Helen Gibson. In doing so, Christian Blaikie drops the images she has been hiding under her apron]
- Blaikie: [trying to kick them away] Oh, Maister Wood, whae has accusit me an ma freens o' the evil?
- Wood: [looking down at the images on the floor] Weel, twas Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie. But pray Mistress, whit hae we here?
- Martha Butter: [snatching the images from the floor] Tis but playthings for oor bairns.
- Drummond: Micht Ah look upon the playthings, Mistress?
- Gibson: Ach Maister, tis but dollies we fashioned for the bairns.
- Wood: That may be the wey o' it. Mayhap tis so. But ye ken weel enough that the Kirk forbids images o' ony kind. Why, did we no' rid the Kirk o' images near a hundert years syne, when the reforming faithers pit them tae the horn? Graven images are the wark o' the Deil an' his man in Rome, the Pope.
- Blaikie: But Maister, tis but bairns' playthings.
- Wood: So be it, Mistress Blaikie. The playthings o' bairns. Weel, Maister Drummond, we hae seen enough. We maun gae upon oor wey. Good nicht tae ye all here gathered.
- All: God be wi' ye, Maisters.

[Wood and Drummond exit stage right]

Blaikie: Ah am richt gled they are gone. Martha and Helen, shall ye no' tak the images and pit them in the fire or the cauldron? We maun rid oorsels o' the things, for Maister Wood and Maister Drummond shall report this tae the Session.

Martha Butter: Ye are richt, Mistress Blaikie. Twill be done on the morrow.

[A loud knocking at the door draws Christian Blaikie to the door stage right]

Blaikie: Tis the Maisters! They hae come back! Quick, Martha, quick Helen, rid us o' the playthings. Cast them intae the fire!

[The door bursts open. In walk Wood and Drummond. They stride up to Martha Butter and Helen Gibson and snatch the images from their hands]

Wood: Ye foul fiends! Ye shall no' rid yerselves o' the evidence. Gie up the images for we maun hae them for the Session. Ye hae tormented twa wummen in Salt Preston. They hae accusit ye o' witchcraft. Ah'm thinking the yin is as evil as t'ither. Ye shall a' be ta'en! Ye are a' witches! Ye are blasphemers, backsliders, drinkin' an' smoakin' upon the Sabbath. They that accusit ye are whores that bewitched yir men be witchcraft. Ye are a' evil. Margaret Hall hae accusit ye o' murderin' her bastard bairn. Ye are guilty o' the crime o' witchcraft, all o' ye!

Drummond: An' Ah'm witness tae the foul deed!

Gray: [falling to her knees, clasping her hands] Nay, nay Maisters, twas but a harmless ploy. We fashioned the bit dolls for the bairns!

Wood: Then why cast them intae the fire? Answer me wumman or Ah shall tak a rod tae yer back.

Margt Butter: Oh, Maisters, Mistress Gray tells ye the truth. She was gaun tae burn the bit dolls lest the bairns thocht they were sugar dollies and wad come tae grief in the eatin' o' them.

Wood: Then why mak' them at a'? There is mair tae this than meets the eye. Come, Maister Drummond, we maun tak' the evil things tae the Session.

[Martha Butter barrs the door stage right with her person]

Margt Butter: Oh, please Maisters, let us hae them back that we can pit them tae the fire.

Wood: [threateningly] Or perhaps the cauldron ye keep in which ye seethe Christian souls? Noo get oot o' ma wey afore Ah tak' a besom tae yir back. Ye hae been accusit o' witchcraft afore Mistress Butter-

Martha Butter: But Ah wis set free!

Wood: Then if ye are nae witch, ye hae naethin' tae fear frae the Salt Preston Kirk Session. Noo get oot o' ma road, wumman! Ah command ye!

[She steps aside and allows Wood and Drummond to depart. Helen Gibson and Janet Gray are weeping into their aprons, Margaret Butter and Christian Blaikie are consoling them. Agnes Aird is slumped in a chair by the fire. Margaret Butter goes to the door and listens for a few seconds]

- Margt Butter: Wheesht, wheesht! [This to the weeping women. After a few seconds, she turns to them] Aye they hae gone this time.
- Gray: But no' for lang. They will come back. We shall a' be summonsed tae the kirk tae appear afore the Session upon the coming Sabbath.
- Blaikie: [wringing her hands] Oh, Martha and Helen, why did ye fashion they dolls? We are nae witches. Tis Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie that are the guilty yins. They be the witches.
- Margt Butter: Aye, that they are, for they took oor men frae us. Noo sisters, we maun stick the gither and say the same words tae the Maisters when we are summoned.
- Blaikie: An' we maun pray earnestly that nocht ill befalls Hall and Auchinmoutie afore the summonsing, lest they think twas ill that we hae causit them. Tis why we cannae cast the dolls into the flames for tis weel kenned that when witches dae that the man or wummin they wish tae torment aften fall seik or dees.
- Gibson: Oh, whit hae Ah done, makin' graven images?
- Blaikie: [moves to her side and puts her arm round her] Wheesht, now, twill be fine. We are nae witches. There is nae testimony agin us barr that o' Margaret Hall an' Margaret Auchinmoutie. We are six tae their twa. The Session will surely gie us credit fur that.. We hae nae powers, we are nae witches. If the Hall and the Auchinmoutie wummin become seik, tis no' o' oor daen'. Fever aft comes at this time o' year.
- Gibson: Aye, we ken it but the Maisters will say twas oor evil that brocht it. Shall we no' gaun the gither tae the Minister i' the mornin' tae plead oor case? Ah wid gladly sit upon the repentance stool this very Sabbath if twould help.
- Blaikie: Nay, Helen, tis ower soon. They wad think we had somethin' tae hide. They wad think it proof o' guilt. Nay, tis no' wise. We maun await the pleasure o' the Maisters, when they call us afore the Session. Are we a' agreed upon the matter?
- All: Aye, Christian.

[Lights go out for a few seconds. When they come on again, the Minister, Patrick Cook sits at a table flanked by Hector Wood and Robert Drummond. The six women, Blaikie, Gibson, the two Butters, Agnes Aird and Janet Gray are standing on the stairs]

- Cook: Come ye forward and stand before us.

[The six women move towards the table and stand in a row before the seated men and bow]

- Blaikie: Good day, Maister Cook. An' to ye Maister Wood an' Maister Drummond. We are come here this morn tae plead for oor souls an' oor lives.
- Cook: And why should ye do so?

Gibson: Oh, Maister, we ken that there are some in Salt Preston that hae accusit us o' witchcraft. Tis a rank lee. Mah friends an' me, we are nae witches.

All: Aye, tis the truth.

Cook: Then why did ye make graven images out of wax? Ye cannot deny this for Masters Wood and Drummond have borne witness to the fact. They have told me all of the other evening. What say ye to this?

Gibson: Maister, it wis but an innocent ploy, a daftness. They were but wee dolls for the bairns. There wis nae herm intended, nor did we wish tae make a nuisance o' oorselves afore the Session.

Cook: The Session has yet to sit in judgement of ye all. Mayhap ye are aware that Mistress Hall was brought down with the sweating sickness two days syne. Mistress Auchinmoutie has suffered evil pains in her side syne yesterday. Is it not so, Brother Wood?

Wood: [nods] Aye, Maister Cook. They are baith outworkers in the fields at Butterdean. Monday wis a cauld day an' they were sair wetted wi' the rain. But fever and pain dae not come on sae soon. The first, Margaret Hall fell seik the very nixt day efter Brother Drummond and I visited the hoose o' Helen Gibson. Margaret Auchinmoutiefell seik the day efter. Twas the nicht we fund Helen Gibson and Martha Butter wi' the images that they cry dolls for bairns.

Cook: What was the likeness of these images?

Wood: Ah cannae say, Maister, for they were badly formit. But tis ma opinion they had bore the faces o' Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie.

Cook: So be it. Is it a coincidence that these women have lately fallen sick? There are many in the parish that suffer from the sweatin' sickness.

Drummond: Aye, that be so, Maister, but no' as quick as they women.

Cook: So what have ye to say on the matter Helen Gibson?

Gibson: Oh Maister, Ah ken nocht why this should be. Ye maun say that me an' ma friends sought tae wrang they wimmen be the fashionin' o' images. Please Maister, twas but a daft ploy for tae mak the bairns content.

Cook: Then why did ye seek to destroy the images in the fire?

Gibson: For fear they hermed the bairns, that micht hae suckit them as though they were sugar dollies, they bein' fashioned frae the white caunle grease.

Cook: So ye cast them into the fire after ye were discovered with them?

Gibson: Aye, Maister. But we had made tae dae that afore the maisters came tae ma hoose.

Cook: [shaking his head] So say ye, yet when the Brothers came not once but twice, ye still had them. I put it tae ye Mistress that ye were of evil intent, ye and Martha Butter and your other accomplices. [He thumps the table] I put it to ye that ye consort with those that deal in the black arts. It is well kent that ye go to the woods at dark to gather herbs. And that ye make fires and dance and sing lewd songs and cavort.

Gray: [sobbing] Oh Maister, tis me an' Mistress Blaikie that gaithers the herbs for the pot, for tis said they are at their best at the hour o' midnight.

Cook: Silence, woman!

Blaikie: [defiantly] Ye ken whae the real witches are! Ye ken they are Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie! Why dae ye persecute me an' ma freendswhae hae been wrangit by these evil weemin? Is it no' so that the Kirk is for oor protection against the lewdness o' ithers an' that those that hae been fund tae be guilty o' unlawful and evil fornication are punished?

Cook: Silence! If ye have been wronged by these women, why did ye not come to the Kirk. That was your Christian duty, yet ye chose to take the law into your own hands. Ye threatened the women, then they claimed ye put a curse upon Mistress Hall's bairn, that died afore it could be baptised. The soul therefore went straight to Hell and the Devil. Do ye not repent of that? Ye invoked evil to answer evil. Tis not the way of the Kirk, nor is it to be found in the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is that not so, Brothers?

Sylvia Burgess: Aye!

Wood and Drummond: Aye, tis the Christian wey.

Cook: Have any of ye renounced your baptisms?

All: Nay, Maister.

Cook: Do ye attend divine service every Sabbath day?

All: Aye, Maister.

Cook: Do ye partake of the Communion regularly?

All: Aye, Maister.

Cook: [raging] Ye are liars! I have depositions from the Brothers Wood and Drummond that ye often are absent from divine service, that ye enter alehouses and smoke pipes, singing and dancing when ye should be in Kirk! Answer me, ye liars!

Blaikie: Weel, Maister, mayhap Ah missed the service a time or twa.

Gibson: An' me. But Ah didnae smoke nor partake o' ale.

Cook: I do not propose to examine each and every one of you this morn, for that is a matter for the full Session. But it seems to me that ye have lit a fire beneath a cauldron of hate and have accused two women of witchcraft. That is a damnable business and it maun be addressed. Your transgressions against the Kirk have been noted and written down in the book of sederunt, so we shall discover the nature of your laziness and backsliding.

Blaikie: Ah'm sorry for what Ah hae done. As are ma friends and neighbours. Are ye no' sorry? [Turning to the others]

All: Aye!

Cook: Tis too late for that. Christian Blaikie, Agnes Aird, Margaret Butter, Martha Butter, Helen Gibson and Janet Gray, ye are to be examined by the Session in due course.

Aird: Micht it please ye, Maister, but may Ah be excusit? Ah'm but lately come tae this business and-

Cook: [angry] Silence woman! Ye were seen at the door of Margaret Hall's tenement upon Candlemas Eve, when the business begun. None shall be excused! As for ye Mistress Aird, I cannot recall seeing you at Divine Service for some time.

Aird: Weel, Maister, Ah bide far frae Salt Preston. But Ah say ma prayers every Sabbath.

Cook: Tis not enough. Were ye, Margaret Butter and Helen Gibson not lately accused of witchcraft in the parish of Travernent but two years syne?

Margt Butter: Nay twas ma kinswoman, Marthal. She and Mistress Gibson were set free.

Cook: Upon insufficient evidence against them, I believe. Perhaps they bamboozled the assize upon that occasion. There were some from that trial in the year of sixteen hundred and fiftynine that had relatives among the suspects, some with names that seem uncommonly familiar to me. Witches often engage the ploy of changing their names as well as their appearances.

Wood: It may be that we should speak on the matter with the Brethren in Travernent, Maister.

Cook: Tis too late for that now, the assize is long disbanded. Forbye, I have written to the minister of that parish and he informed me that the papers upon the assize are destroyed. No matter, we shall address this present outbreak in our own parish. Ye women are all suspectit of witchcraft. That will be the decision of the Session, for the Brethren have already heard of these matters. Tis but a formality. And the women Hall and Auchinmoutie are also suspectit. **[Turning to Wood and Drummond]** We shall presently have the decision of the Session. However, ere that, we have need of the testimony of those that have accusit those that are here gathered. Master Drummond, ye shall bring in Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie that they may answer for themselves.

[Drummond exits stage left and returns with the two women. As they descend the stairs into the Thomas Nelson Suite, the six women hiss at them. Christian Blaikie calls out.]

Blaikie: Ye rank witches, ye are evil, the baith o' ye! Hoors and witches! Ye are foul fiends that daur show thirsels in this place!

Cook: **[thumping the table]** Silence. I shall have none of this in the Lord's House!

Gibson: Look at them, the spawn o' Satan! They took oor men intae thir beds be the glamour!

Margt Butter: May ye seethe in Hell's cauldron and be roastit be the faggot's in Satan's fires!

Cook: **[standing up and beating the table with both fists]** I shall have silence! Or else I shall have the magistrates to ye all. Ye shall have your say presently. **[Turning to Hall and Auchinmoutie]**. Now Mistress Hall and Mistress Auchinmoutie, shall we proceed. What is the precise nature of the charges ye bring against these six women?

Hall: They did threaten us upon Candlemas Eve. They laid a spell upon ma bairn that de'ed a few weeks efter their visitation.

Aird: **[shouting]** Twas just punishment for the wrang ye did tae me and mine! Ye bewitched ma man David Bald that he came tae yir hoose and yir bed.

Gray: Aye, ye did the same wi' ma man, John Clorrat. For ye pit the glamour on them baith, and led them intae sin.

Hall: Twas not we whae brocht them tae us, twas ye yirsels. We didnae pit the glamour upon them, for they cam for pity and comfort. They sayed ye had a' lain wi' the Deil and kent his caress, that ye were nae longer able to lie mortal men. An' the nicht o' Candlemas, ye cast spells upon me and Mistress Auchinmoutie. Ahe askit ye that nicht "Why come ye tae ma hoose at this oor o' nicht?" an' ye said twas tae punish us, aye an' tae bring haim tae oor bairns for they were bastard bairns, born oot o' wedlock.

Auchinmoutie: Tis true Maister Cook. They are cauld and hertless, that wad seek tae tak the life o' a babe in airms. They hae enterit intae a paction wi' the Deil. Ask their men, whae havenae lain wi' tir wives for a twelvemonth. Tis ye that are the foul fiends, that daur show themselves in this holy place!

Cook: Enough! I shall not have this kind of talk in the Lord's House!

Gibson: Tis ye that are the foul fiends! May ye seethe in Hell's cauldron!

Cook: Shall ye be silent? Tis the last warning ye shall have. (turning to Christian Blaikie) Now Mistress, is it true ye and your neighbours have entered a paction with the Devil?

Blaikie: Nay Maister Cook, Ah swear it. Ah, m a Christian an' Ah love the Lord.

Gibson: Maister, she speaks the truth. We are a' Christians, even though we hae sometimes been absent frae divine services. The witches here are Margaret Hall and Margaret Auchinmoutie, the ill-getted bitches that are nae better than hoors!

Cook: Yet ye have been found with graven images in your possession, images that are said to have been likeness of the two women that have accusit ye. Answer me for why ye did that, for tis a habit of witches.

Gibson: Twis wrang o' us tae dae so.

Blaikie: Aye, twas, as Ah sayed tae them at the time. Ah wisnae for makin' the images, but the turn wis done.

Cook: Aye, twas so. I have heard enough. Ye shall all of ye appear afore the Session to answer for your behaviour. Master Wood, master Drummond, they shall be treated in the ususal manner prescribed for those suspectit of witchcraft.

Drummond: Aye, maister. They shall be lodged I' the Kirk spire as is custom. Already, Ah hae the names o' a dozen Brethren whae hae volunteered tae watch over the women day and nicht.

Cook: Thank ye, Brother Drummond. [Turning to the eight women]. Now depart. But I give ye warning. If ye should attempt to leave Salt Preston, twill be seen as proof of your guilt. For the moment ye are free to go to your homes. Now I have much work to do. Good day to ye.

Blaikie: When shall we ken o' the Session's decision, Maister?

Cook: [writing at the table does not look up] Ye shall be informed when the time is right. Now go ye and let me get on with the work of the Lord.

[Lights go out]

FINALE

[Lights go up. Seated at a table are the Rev Patrick Cook, Hector Wood and Robert Drummond]

Cook: Dearly beloved gathered here in the name of the Lord this fine Sabbath morning, ye may rejoice. For I have good news to bring ye. Lately, I spoke to ye on the terrible curse of witchcraft that has arisen in our parish of Salt Preston. Twas no rumour, for there were indeed several of the abominable creatures discovered in our midst. Thanks to our good Brothers in Christ, Master Hector Wood and Master Robert Drummond, whose efforts in finding the creatures have been robust, the Kirk Session seen fit to examine eight suspects who are residents in the parish. Shall ye proceed Master Wood?

Wood: Thank ye Maister Cook. Maister Drummond and me first examined two women who had accusit six ithers o' havin' bewitched them an' laid upon them spells. Ane spell carryit aff a bairn that was no' baptised when it de'ed. As ye ken, the soul o' a bairn that is unbaptised and deid gangs straight tae Hell and the Deil. The crime was abominable, that a puir wee bairn become fodder for Hell. But that wisnae a' that these six women did. Shall ye speak Maister Drummond?

Drummond: Aye, that I shall. Maister Wood and masel went tae visit the six weemin in the hoose o' ane o' the ringleaders. She an' anither were discoverit wi' wax images o' the twa weemin that had accusit them o' witchcraft. They had been stickin' preens intil the images for to cause them pain, then they roastit them ower a cauldron fire tae bring on the sweatin' sickness. The twa weemin were shortly efter gripped wi' the sickness and terrible pains in the body. Tis the usual ploy o' witches that wish tae torment their enemies.

Cook: Thank ye Master Wood and Master Drummond, ye have been most explicit. But the truth is that not six witches but eight were discovered. The other two were the accusers themselves. After brief examination by Master Wood, Master Drummond and myself, we had sufficient evidence to lay before the Session, then the Presbytery itself, so fearful were we for the wellbeing of the good parishioners of Salt Preston. While in custody of the Kirk, when they were kept awake for sixteen days and nights, four of the creatures confessed to renouncing their baptisms; four others confessed to making spells, images, charmings and incantations. All eight duly confessed they were witches. Master Wood, shall ye inform the congregation of the subsequent proceedings.

Wood: Right gladly, Maister Cook. Ah wish tae say that their confessions were given freely upon the sixteenth and seventeenth days o' their bein' watched be the Brethren. At nae time wis ony strict dealin' gien tae them. They confessit be their ain free will. Maister Cook wis orderit be the Presbytery tae report the matter tae the magistrates in Salt Preston. They an' no' the Kirk are the richt folk tae tak the

proceedings further. They did so. They applied tae the King's Privy Coouncil and the Parliament in Edinburgh toon for a warrant tae try the suspectit persons. A commission tae try them wis receivit frae His Majesty's Privy Coouncil a week syne. A further commission wis receivit upon Friday past frae the Committee o' Estates o' the Parliament tae try ithers. Ah shall noo read oot the nature o' they commissions, that ye here may be comfortit be the knowledge that these evil weemin are tae be dealt wi' be oor ain magistrates in time cummin'. Ah shall noo reads frae the papers that hae been put intil the hands o' the Presbytery.

[He puts on his spectacles and reads from two papers]

'Forasmuch as Helen Gibson and Christian Blaikie have confessed abominabe crime of witchcraft in entering into paction with the Devil, renouncing their baptisms and many otherways as their depositions under the hands of Mr Patrick Cook, Minister, William Robertson, Baillie, John Hamilton, Baillie, John Clerk, Robert Drummond and Hector Wood, elders of the parish of Salt Preston, it being necessary that the kingdom be purged of such vile sin and justice administered on the offenders, the King's Majesty with advice and consent of the estates of Parliament gives full power and commission to Robert Cockburn of Butterdean, John Hamilton of Falsyde, John McMorran in Preston, George Hepburn of Addieston, Ninian Henderson in Preston, Ninian Reid there, William Robertson Baillie there, John Hamilton Baillie there, Mr Andrew Rutherford, schoolmaster in the Pans, Mr James Oswald there, Thomas Home and Alexander Henderson Baillies there or any five of them to meet at such times and places as they shall think fit and hold courts. And whereas Margaret Butter, Margaret Auchinmoutie and Margaret Hall are suspect and dilate guilty of witchcraft, the said commissioners shall secure them and such others as are or shall be dilated guilty and bring them to a confession of their sins. Further to this, Janet Gray, spouse to John Clorrat and Agnes Aird, spouse to David Bald in Preston are to be examined, their confessions being under the hands of the said commissioners.

Cook: And what of Martha Butter, the eighth woman accused?

Wood: Though she be not named, she is to be examined as dilated guilty, for she hae already been dilate in a trial at Travernent in the year of Oor Lord sixteen hunert and fiftynine.

Cook: I thank ye Master Wood. Tis clear to me and to the Kirk that the evil that is within our parish shall be dealt with according to the law of our late sovereign, Mary, Queen of Scotland, she of blessed memory. For in her wisdom, Queen Mary saw fit to protect the subjects of her realm from the abominations of witchcraft. Though she did not worship in the manner of the true Kirk of Scotland, she loved her subjects and detested witchcraft, which she knew was a crime against the laws of man as well as the laws of God. Master Wood, shall ye again read out the names of the accused, that we may know all of them and thereby shun them.

Wood: They are named as this. Agnes Aird, Margaret Auchinmoutie, Christian Blaikie, Margaret Butter, Martha Butter, Helen Gibson, Janet Gray an' Margaret Hall, all residenters o' the parish o' Salt Pans.

Cook: Iown that there has been much harm done to worthy and innocent persons in the common way of finding witches in the past but tis clear to me that these eight women are guilty of abominable sins that were instilled by their paction with Satan. Neighbour has defamed neighbour which is proof that Satan lives for tis his purpose to destroy God's cratures upon this earth.

Drummond: Maister Cook, mony deny there are those that we cry witches, though we have it expressly contained in the Word of God. For there tis wrote that there was a witch at Endor that Saul in his distress resorted tae consult. Today, we hae the abominable creatures in oor midst, them that did perpetrate evil. Twa hae brocht bastard bairns inta oor parish, ane of which died unsigned in the Lord, so it's soul went straight tae the Deil. Others hae made graven images that brocht seikness an' near death.

Cook: Thank ye Master Drummond These vile creatures have brought a cauldron of evil into this fine parish. I am thinking that tis not an ordinair cauldron that is used in every dwelling place. Tis a cauldron that is forged for hate and evil.

Wood: We hae sought this cauldron ye speak of. Tis said it has serpents upon its sides. Maister Drummond and masel hae sought it but it cannae be found.

Cook: Mayhap tis but a wife's tale. Yet it has dwelt here and was used for fostering hate and evil. We shall never find it. I am thinking it does not exist. Mayhap tis wrought in the minds of evil creatures, never forged by blacksmith. Mayhap twas forged by black souls.

Drummond: Me an' Maister Wood hae sought it oot these past few weeks. We hae failed tae find it.

Wood: Ah doot we niver shall, for the witches that hae fashioned it hae hid it.

Cook: Tis of no consequence. A cauldron is a cauldron. Tis the wickedness that it seethes that concerns the Kirk. As for these eight women, may God Almighty have mercy upon their souls. Shortly, they shall be taken from the House of the Lord to the House of Man, in Salt Preston Tolbooth, where they shall be judged and found guilty. Thus shall the Lord's will be done as he has commanded in His Holy Scriptures which are found in the Book of Exodus, chapter 22, verse 18.
Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.
So tis done. We are the servants of the Lord and we have done our duty. May ye go in peace and sleep well in your beds this night. Amen.

[Lights go out]

[Lights on]

EPilogue

Ladies and gentlemen, it is without doubt that during the last, terrible epidemic of the witch hunt in Scotland, these eight women were put to death. They were victims of prejudice, hypocrisy, sexual misconduct, jealousy and hysteria. Accusations made were answered by counter accusations in the hot, narrow intimacy that was uppermost in Scotland's post-mediaeval social structure. The Kirk of Scotland was only too ready to encourage people to accuse one another, for it suited their purpose. That purpose was simple. The Kirk had to control the population, to keep it obedient by instilling the fear of God into every person. The population of that time was largely uneducated and then as now, exceeded the Maisters. The threat of witchcraft was one way of controlling the people. The threat of execution kept them in check. And an accusation of practising witchcraft was one way of ridding the population of beggars and unmarried women who for one reason or another could not support themselves. The Kirk then was the Social Security of the day.

May the God you believe in see you home safely this night.