

THE DEVIL'S CRAFT

BY

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Prologue

The Players

Act 1, Scene 1

James VI of Scotland

Chancellor John Maitland of Thirlstane

Act 1, Scene 2

Reverend John Davidson of Salt Preston Kirk

David Seton, Magistrate, Tranent (Travernent)

Act 2

Francis Stewart, 5th Earl of Bothwell

Dr John Fian, Schoolmaster, Salt Preston

Agnes Sampson

Euphemia McLean

Geilie Duncan

Bessie Thomson

Janet Stratton

Meg Bogton

Act 3, Scene 1 Trial

James VI

Judge Blinksheils

Chancellor Maitland

Rev John Davidson

David Seton

Agnes Samson

Euphemia McLean

Geilie Duncan

Janet Stratton

Bessie Thomson

Meg Bogton

Act 3, Scene 2 In Edinburgh Tolbooth

Geilie Duncan

Bessie Thomson

Epilogue

PROLOUGE

It is the year 1589. James VI, King of Scotland awaits anxiously the arrival of his bride Anne of Denmark. Great storms force the Danish fleet carrying Anne to Norway. James decides to sail himself to bring her to Scotland. Further storms nearly swamp his vessel; the royal couple are obliged to remain in Denmark until the Spring of 1590.

During the King's absence, Scotland is rent with rumours of a Catholic uprising led by Earls Bothwell and Huntly. These rumours are largely the work of Chancellor Maitland in what has become a bitter political feud between himself and Bothwell. Maitland circulated a rumour that Bothwell dabbles in the Black Arts, is head of a large coven of witches and warlocks who regularly meet in the ruined Kirk at North Berwick. Blame for the terrible storms is put on Bothwell and his coven, known as the North Berwick Witches. Of the 120 members of the coven, over 50 are from Salt Preston [Prestonpans].

When the royal couple arrive in Scotland in May 1590, the seeds of Bothwell's supposed rebellion are now bearing fruit. At first James VI believes that Bothwell and his coven are guilty of treason, then he

changes his mind. It is the Devil's Craft, with Bothwell named as Satan's principle servant. In June, Bothwell escapes from Edinburgh Castle and he is never tried for witchcraft. The subsequent trials of the North Berwick Witches are held in Edinburgh, where many are found guilty and executed for witchcraft.

In this, the third and final play in the Prestonpans Witch Trilogy, we shall witness the turmoil evolving from a period of uncertainty in Scotland's stability. James VI's court is rent with political feuding which is largely laid at the door of the quixotic and eccentric Francis Stewart, 5th Earl of Bothwell and his arch enemy, Chancellor John Maitland of Thirlstane. Bothwell is accused of casting his eyes on the throne; he is accused also of witchcraft, giving the events a somewhat disingenuous air of supernatural intrigue which it does not deserve. The propaganda of the day suggests otherwise. James is convinced that the crime is not treason but witchcraft and sets in motion a trial which results in the deaths of the minor players, the witches and warlocks supposedly in Bothwell's service. Bothwell escapes justice and lives until 1612, dying in poverty in Naples, still the King's rebel and guilty of witchcraft.

The events of 1589-90 form the first of four severe outbreaks of the Scottish Witch Hunt. Witchcraft, sorcery incantation and making spells were foremost in the catalogue of sins which the Reformed Kirk of Scotland saw as concrete proof of the state of lawlessness, moral disorder along with idolatry (as practised by the outlawed Roman Catholic Church), blasphemy, adultery, incest, whoredom, murder and last but not least, breaking the Sabbath. The years 1589-91 were a time of renewed Calvinistic zeal, bent on strengthening the Reformed Kirk's hold on the population. It is against this background that the play is set.

ACT I SCENE I

[Holyrood Palace. Lights on. James VI is pacing up and down, frowning and muttering. Goes to desk, sits, takes up quill pen and begins to write. Enter Chancellor John Maitland, who bows].

James Good Maitland, the hour is late and we are much troubled for the Queen's well being. Do ye bring news of her ship out of Denmark? We are feared by the great storms at sea.

Maitland A thousand pardons, Your Majesty. But I do indeed have news that Shall soothe thee. The queen is safe.

James *[Clutching his breast]* Thanks be to God! How fares my Anne? Is she indeed well?

Maitland I have this very hour received a messenger out of Leith who has lately come from Holland by way of Norway, engaged there upon trade. He brought ill news-

James God in Heaven Maitland! Ye confound us! Ye say that the person of the Queen is safe, yet ye speak of ill news. Is she in fair health?

Maitland *[Soothingly]* Tis well with the Queen. She has safely gained the shores of Norway.

James Norway? How is it so?

Maitland The way of it is this. The Royal Danish flagship upon which the Queen was borne sprang a leak. There was a great storm that drove the Danish fleet to Norway. The Hollander barque that landed at Leith was sorely pressed. Her sails were in rags, her shipmaster barely alive. The storm was so wild that she was blown off course and landed at Leith.

James See to it that the messenger be granted drink siller for his pains.

Maitland Tis as ye command, Your Majesty. The shipmaster said twas the Devil that raised the storm by his servants that are called witches. He did say many a Christian soul perished upon the waves and-

James *[Impatient]* We shall hear naught of the Devil and his witches. The mere mention of his name unmans us. Tis it not the season of high storms?

Maitland Mayhap. But some do say that My Lord Bothwell had a hand in the Matter.

James Good Maitland, My Lord Bothwell hath not the power to prevent sea storms.

Maitland That may be. But mayhap he can raise them through his master.

James What is your meaning, sir?

Maitland Why, tis common gossip in the Lawnmarket taverns that Bothwell openly boasts of the power given him by his master.

James But we are his master. Ye speak in riddles.

Maitland Your Majesty it is well kent that Bothwell serves another. Tis said that he hath abused your name and your lineage. Why sir, he was heard to say but recently that his true master is not of this earth, though tis where he walks.

James Ye mean Satan, the Devil Incarnate?

Maitland Tis so. Bothwell boasts that his master the Devil shall through his craft cast ye from the throne of Scotland. Bothwell hath callit Your Majesty a bastard whoreson, that ye were fathered by the Italian David Riccio, your mother's secretary and a low born man.

James Tis a lie! We are the son of Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley.

Maitland Bothwell openly casts doubt upon the matter.

James Then we shall reprimand him for it in time coming. But what further news of our Anne, the Queen of Scotland?

Maitland She is in fair health. The Hollander shipmaster saw with his own eyes that she steppit lightly from the Danish flagship Gideon and did walk unaided upon the Oslo quayside.

James Thanks be to God! Our Queen is safe and well!

Maitland Aye, Your Majesty. For the moment.

James Why say ye so?

Maitland The Queen is abroad, where tis said that there are many there in paction with the Devil who would harm the Queen. Aye and ye were ye to go to her.

James We have heard tales that those that are in the service of the Devil may put to sea in sieves that do not founder. Tis but child's tales.

Maitland Would it were so, Your Majesty. The witches are legion. Did not your own mother make a law that would punish the abominable creatures within this realm but a score and six years past?

James We shall hear no more of this talk. Tis more fitting that we speak of the Queen and the manner of her coming to Scotland

Maitland Shall ye command the Lord Bothwell to escort her? He is High Admiral of Scotland and tis his duty to obey ye.

James We are confounded by your counsel. Did ye not say that Bothwell is not a true servant? Twould go ill with the Queen were we to place her life in his custody. Nay, we shall act in person. Have we not ordered a fast and prayers said i' the kirks these past weeks for the Queen's safe delivery to Scotland? Good Maitland, take up pen and write this.

[Maitland sits at table with pen and begins to write]

James Write ye these words to our Privy Council. We, James, King of Scotland declare that we are a true prince of this realm, not an irresolute ass that can do naught by himself. Therefore we shall take ship out of Leith in six days for to bring home Anne, Queen of Scotland from Denmark. A true prince can do no less.

Maitland Shall ye avyse Lord Bothwell of this?

James Nay. We shall say that he is needed in Scotland to guard her shores, for that is his duty as High Admiral. Forbye, if tis true that he plots against us, he shall hang himself with his own rope if he should move against us in our absence abroad.

Maitland Bravo, Your Majesty! Ye are truly a great prince that shall confound Bothwell by his own actions. May God bless ye and the Queen and that he keep thee safe upon this venture.

[Bows and leaves the King. Lights out]

ACT 2 SCENE I

[Salt Preston Kirk manse. Rev John Davidson and David Seton, magistrate in Tranent are seated at a table]

Davidson Tis an evil business that we lack the King's person in Edinburgh. Be that as tis, we maun maintain the law. Maister Seton, what have ye to say upon the manner of your servant Geillis or Geilie Duncan?

Seton Tis known that she goes abroad at nicht when good Christians are a-bed
Davidson Ye have nae doot speered her upon the matter.
Seton That I have. She confesses tae visiting the seik and the ailing in Travernent and Salt Preston. She is a kind lass and warks weel in my hoose
Davidson But think ye not that her wanderin' abroad i' the dark is queer?
Seton That I dae. I have askit her about the habit. I hae avysed her that her nightly wanderins are suspectit. But she says that she maun gae oot at nicht for tis only then that she maun visit the seik. She travels far. Travernent, Salt Preston and even North Berwick.
Davidson Tis of her journeys tae North Berwick I wish tae speak to ye.
Seton Aye, sir, I ken
Davidson Lately, my Brothers in Christ hae attended the auld kirk at North Berwick, where tis said that at the hour of midnight, mony eldritch sounds and queer lichts abound the place. Your servant Geilie Duncan has been seen comin' and goin' there, along with mony uthers frae Salt Preston. The Brethren say that the door is watched be one named Grey Meal, a powerful man that is feared in this parish.
Seton I have heard on it.
Davidson Tis kent that your servant lass Geilie Duncan, Dr John Fian, Agnes Sampson, Euphemia McLean, Janet Stratton, Meg Bogton and Bessie Thomson and mony other Salt Preston folk attend the kirk. They say near a score.
Seton Tis a sair business richt enough. They say that Fian is also kent as Cunningham. The low folk mak a jest o' the name, crying him Sly Bacon. The shoe maun fit for tis weel kent that Fian is versed in the Black Airts, the servant o' the Deil and o' Francis Earl Bothwell. Did not his late kinsman debauch the late Queen Mary in the castle of Dunbar and force her to marry him, that he would gain the throne?
Davidson Tis as ye say. Now his kinsman casts his een upon the throne o' King James the Saxth. The first Bothwell deed in a Danish prison. Tis strange that oor present King is there this day. Why cannot the Scottish fleet bring the royal fowk hame?
Seton Tis said that Chancellor Maitland puts it about that Bothwell is no' to leave the realm, for fear that he wrecks herm upon the King.
Davidson There is nae smoke without there be fire. Bothwell is rumoured tae lead the coven at North Berwick and that they hae already brocht storms to droon the Queen and then the King himself. Would that I had the power tae accuse him.
Seton Ye micht not hae the power but there is ane that does. My Lord Chancellor Maitland has the King's ear in this matter. He has avised the King that Bothwell is evilly disposed tae him. In time coming, Bothwell shall be brocht low.

Davidson We maun pray for that day. Noo I bid ye goodnicht, Maister Seton, for there is much work to be done.

[Lights out]

ACT 2 SCENE II

[Dimly lit stage with Bothwell and Fian seated at a table]

Bothwell Good John, tis right glad I am that ye have called upon me. There is much work that awaits us. Tis said in court that he that calls himself James the Sixth shall not return from Denmark until the Spring. We have achieved much since his departure but more is needed. I would move against Chancellor Maitland if I but had the strength.

Fian Upon that may I assure ye my Lord? The support for ye grows be the hour. Above six score have sworn allegiance to ye, all humble folk but all well versed in the Devil's craft. I am clerk to the coven that increases daily. Those that serve ye await your command.

Bothwell Ye speak of the Devil's craft. My enemies accuse me of paction with that gentleman. Chief among them is Chancellor Maitland who employs a different craft – lies and deceit which he pours into the King's ear. He will not rest until I am got into the Edinburgh Tolbooth or the Castle. He has openly accused me of witchcraft. So be it, for mayhap the weaker vessels in his employ may waver in their allegiance to him.

Fian I take your meaning, my Lord. Fear of ye and your magical powers may bring these weaker vessels to your side. Or at least they shall not move against ye. Shall ye move now against Maitland or the King?

Bothwell Master Fian, I have laid careful plans to rid Scotland of this King. He is a whoreson, the spawn of his murdering mother Mary that was executed but two years ago in England for her attempts upon the life of Elizabeth the Queen there. This James is the bastard son of his mother and the low-born Italian David Riccio. Good Fian, think ye not that he has the face of an Italian gigolo?

Fian I have never looked upon his countenance but they say tis true that his reputed father Lord Darnley was murdered by his own mother, that she might wed your kinsman the third Earl Bothwell.

Bothwell Aye. And had the courage to despatch Mary, he would have become King and thereby passed the throne to me and mine. I shall have this throne first, then I shall have the guts out of Maitland for his treachery.

Fian I shall serve ye in this. As will thy servants in the Devil. Thy will be done.

Bothwell For this service I shall reward ye and my faithful servants with gold, silver and victuals. All shall enjoy my bounty when the King is gone.

Fian *[Bowing]* I shall make this known to those that serve ye.

Bothwell Shall ye name the chief among them?

Fian That I shall right gladly. First is Euphemia McLean, heiress to the lately deed Lord Cliftonhall, a senator in the Court of Justice. Another is Agnes Sampson, wise-wife of Nether Keith who is well-versed in the making of potions to cure the sick. Then there is the comely lass Geilie Duncan, her that serves the magistrate in Travernet, David Seton. There are others out of Salt Preston that be strong in the Devil's craft. Janet Stratton, Meg Bogton, Bessie Thomson, Robin Grierson –

Bothwell Enough, Master Fian. I have not the time to hear of them all. There is intelligence that the King and his bride shall set sail from Denmark in May month. Shall ye and the followers out of Salt Preston foregather at North Berwick upon my signal when the King sails? Tis is of great import, for I would have ye and the coven rise up a great storm that shall send their ship to the bottom of the sea.

Fian Aye, it shall be as ye command. But not at North Berwick for there are those that have espied our meetings there. I speak of the Salt Preston minister John Davidson and his brethren. Upon this occasion, we shall foregather at Acheson's Haven, Salt Preston, where none shall watch us.

Bothwell Tis best done i' the dark.

Fian It shall be done upon the darkest night of the year. Upon Beltane, the eve of the 30th April, which is called May Eve, a night when all candles and fires are put out for to greet the dawn. Those that serve the Devil may then walk abroad unseen.

Bothwell Good Fian, ye serve me well.

Fian Shall ye attend the gathering at Acheson's Haven upon May Eve my Lord?

Bothwell Nay, for methinks I have other fish to fry that night. But say to the gathered there that Lord Bothwell greets them and that they shall be rewarded by gold and silver and wheat.

Fian Ye may say the words to the chief of your followers, for I have brought them to meet ye, my Lord. Shall ye receive them?

Bothwell The hour is late but bring them before me.

[Fian goes to staircase and brings in Euphemia McLean, Agnes Sampson, Geilie Duncan, Janet Stratton, Meg Bogton and Bessie Thomson]

Bothwell *[Stands and bows to them].* My good and faithful friends, it pleases me that ye are come to me this night. Now I should know ye by name. *[Looks at Euphemia McLean who bows to him].* Shall ye come forward?

McLean Aye, my Lord. I am called Euphemia McLean, spouse to Patrick Moscrop, lawyer and adulterer, the kinsman of your enemy David Seton, magistrate in Travernent. I have powers that I would give to you in service.

Bothwell Thank ye, Mistress McLean. *[Beckoning to Agnes Sampson]* Come ye forward, Mistress, name yourself

Sampson I am callit Agnes or Anny Sampson, grace-wife. I am skilled in the making of potions that heal the seik.

Bothwell Tis a noble profession. And how are ye called? *[To Geilie Duncan]*
Duncan *[curseying]* I am but a serving lass Geilis Duncan in the service of David Seton, Magistrate of Travernent. I also heal the seik. I play upon the Jewish harp for it amuses my sisters and brothers when we are within the cauld chambers o' North Berwick's ruined kirk.

Bothwell Shall ye play for us now?

Duncan Nay sir, for I do not have the instrument. I play only when the Deil is present amang us.

Bothwell Mayhap ye shall play it for me upon a favoured hour?

Duncan *[curtseying again]* Twill be my pleasure, sir.

Fian *[Motioning Janet Stratton, Meg Bogton and Bessie Thomson forward]* And here are three other loyal servants my Lord. They are callit Meg Bogton, Janet Stratton and Bessie Thomson. *[They all curtsey]*

Bothwell I have heard of ye Mistress Stratton. That ye were present at the port of Leith when the King set sail for Denmark last October. Were ye not she who cast into the sea the cat that brought forth a great storm that day?

Stratton Aye, sir, I were. As were Meg and Bessie.

Bogton Twas my duty to be there.

Thomson And mine. And Janet did give us strength upon that day, saying that there shall be nae deceit amang us, for we are united in the ploy that shall bring doon a faus King.

Bothwell I thank ye, my good servants. Dr Fian, see that ye nurture these women well. I shall reward ye and they in time coming. Gold, silver and food shall ye all have, for I am bountiful to those that serve me faithfully. And now the hour is late. I bid ye all goodnight.

[All bow as he exits the stage. Lights out]

ACT 3

INTRODUCTION

In May 1590, King James the Sixth and his new bride Anne of Denmark arrived safely in Leith, despite the onset of further storms that delayed their crossing. Six women in Denmark were indicted and executed for witchcraft. On 31st July 1590, August Eve or Lammas, another date revered by witches, the North Berwick Witches met for the last time. On that occasion, they convened at Acheson's Haven. At that convention, Agnes Sampson proposed the death of James the Sixth, Reputedly on Bothwell's orders. At her subsequent trial, she confessed that the Devil had appeared before her, saying that the King would be destroyed by toad's venom and the roasting of his image in wax.

By October that year, James had instituted proceedings against Lord Bothwell and his Coven. The trials of Bothwell, Fian, McLean, Sampson and many others were ordered to begin. Bothwell's trial never took place as his standing required that he be tried by his peers and many declined to attend. In the course of the next few months, Fian was tortured and executed in January 1591; Euphemia McLean was cast alive into the flames on Castle Hill, Edinburgh in June 1591.

Bothwell, incarcerated in Edinburgh Castle managed to escape with outside help in the same month. He fled to the Continent and was never recaptured. His hapless followers, the so-called North Berwick Witches were put to death, Geilie Duncan and her friend Bessie Thomson being among the last to be executed at the end of that terrible year.

ACT 3: SCENE I

[The Tolbooth in Edinburgh. The judge appointed to preside over the many trials is assisted – even directed – by the King in person]

Judge Hear ye, hear ye! This day is foregathered a multitude of persons that have confessed to serving Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell who is accused of treason against our sovereign lord, James, King of Scotland. Among those that have served the rebel Bothwell are two score and ten residents of Salt Preston, men and women that are confessed followers of the Devil. Chief among these are Dr John Fian, dominie, Euphemia McLean, a rank Papist, Agnes Sampson, Barbara Napier and Richard Graham of Edinburgh and sundry others. All are indicted for treason against our sovereign King, James, Sixth of Scotland. I call upon the first witness, Master David Seton, magistrate of the parish of Travernent.

[Seton is brought in]

Judge How are ye called and what is your profession?
Seton David Seton, magistrate of Travernent. My testimony shall be vouchsafed by Master Patrick Moscrop, my advocate and kinsman, spouse to the accused Euphemia McLean.

James *[nods]* We have foreknowledge of ye, Master Seton, aye and of your kinsman. Pray be seated.

Judge How shall ye inform this assize?
Seton In this manner. My servant Geilis Duncan is a witch that goes abroad at night when good Christian souls are a-bed. I have followed her and seen the abominable spectacles that occurrit in the ruined Kirk at North Berwick, where above 5 score folk met the Devil.

Judge Is there one who shall attest to this?
Davidson I shall sir, for I am minister of Salt Preston Kirk and was present with Maister Seton upon several nights at North Berwick, where we did witness the abominable gaitherings there.

Judge Pray be seated Maister Davidson. As ye have knowledge of the coven that met at North Berwick, thy testament shall be used against those that are on trial this day. Pray enlighten this assize upon thy hand in this matter.

Davidson I cannae say all, for I saw not all i' the kirk at North Berwick. Me and the Brethren were obleeged tae remain hidden for there was a man they callit Grey Meal who stood guard at the broke door i' the kirk there

Judge So what saw ye there?
Davidson A gaithering of ower five score, mony o' them frae my parish.

Judge And what did they do there?
Davidson They made homage to the Deil that appeared as a black man wi' the horns o' a black beast upon him. Ah couldna see his face therefore.

Judge What manner of beast's head did he adopt?
Davidson Twas like that o' a ox or bullock. The black man stood upon the ruint pulpit an' invited them assembled to approach him, that they micht kiss his arse be way o' homage.

Judge Did ye witness this foul act?
Davidson Aye, that Ah did. Twas mostly women that kissed the Deil's arse.

Judge Shall ye give their names?
Davidson There were ower mony Sir. But Ah did witness the women callit Sampson, McLean, Stratton, Bogton and sundry others performing the foul deed.

Judge Was the woman called Geile Duncan among them?
Davidson Aye, Sir

Judge Did ye witness other foul deeds?

Davidson Aye Sir. Some o' the women showed their bare breasts that the Deil might suck upon them. Tis weel kent that the Deil favours womens' milk.

Judge Have ye more to tell the assize?

Davidson Aye, that Ah have. That nicht the Deil said he would hae the heart o' the King, that he wad roast it in Hell for he was weel servit be a noble man and his servants.

Judge Did he name the noble man?

Davidson Nay, but those that were present upon the nicht spake o' the name o' Francis, Earl Bothwell.

Judge And what did they then?

Davidson They did take up the corpse o' a black cat and held it ower the sea, then they did dispatch it, saying that twould mak a grit storm that would droon the King.

Judge Saw ye more?

Davidson Nay Sir, for me and mine were sair afraid and would return tae the kirk o Salt Preston, there to pray for oor deliverance be the Lord Jesus Christ, oor Saviour.

Judge Thank ye Master Davidson. Ye may stand down. I call next upon David Seton, Magistrate of Travernent.

[Seton is brought in and he bows to the judge]

Seton I am a humble servant at your service Sir.

Judge Was it not your servant Geilie Duncan that made known the plot to kill the King?

Seton Aye Sir.

Judge Bring in the panel she who is callit Geilie Duncan that she may face her accusers.
[Duncan is dragged in. She has clearly been tortured] Ye are among the chief suspects that have made threat upon the King's life. What say ye to the crime of which ye are accused, that of witchcraft?

Duncan If ye please Sir, Ah'm nae witch. Ah am but a puir lass that has been gien the pow'r o' healing.

Judge And muckle else twould seem. Did ye attend the gathering at North Berwick Kirk?

Duncan Aye Sir

Judge And what did ye there?

Duncan Ah played upon the Jewish Harp for to entertain ma sisters and brothers.

Judge And the Devil?

Duncan Ah ken nocht for Ah saw him nocht, though they say he was present upon ane nicht i' the kirk o' North Berwick

James VI May we question the panel?

Judge As ye wish, Your Highness, for tis thy right.

King Now, lass, shall ye enlighten us on your art and part in this business?
Duncan *[curtseying]* 'Twas my task to play upon the tromp, sometimes kened as the Jew's Harp, that the company might join in a dance.

King And did the Devil dance?
Duncan Aye, sir, but not ower long, for would move amang us and smile upon his favoured servants and them that jiggèd weel.

King And shall ye play the tromp for us this day?
Duncan Nay sir, for the maisters have ta'en the instrument from me.

King Do ye worship the Devil?
Duncan Nay, sir. I worship the Lord Jesus.

King Yet ye were present at the gatherings at North Berwick and Acheson's Haven were ye not?
Duncan Aye, sir. But it was in fear o' my life, for I was bidden there. They said that if I werenae present, my life would be hermed.

King Shall ye enlighten us on those that threatened ye.
Duncan Doctor John and Mistress McLean
King Ye advert to Dr John Fian, sometimes known as Cunningham?
Duncan Aye, sir
King *[whispers to Judge who nods]*
Judge The panel is dismissed. The assize calls upon Dr John Fian, dominie of Salt Preston school. *[Fian is brought in; he has been badly tortured and there is blood on his face]* Are ye John Fian alias Cunningham, servant of Lord Bothwell?
Fian I am, sir
Judge Do ye worship the Devil and practise the black arts?
Fian I recognise but one master and he is My Lord Bothwell.
Judge Tis written that ye have confessed that the Devil has carried ye to high mountains, that ye were transported there in spirit, while your body lay a-bed? Is that so?
Fian Aye. But twas but a dream
Judge Ye were present in the flesh at North Berwick Kirk however.
Fian Aye.
Judge Tis been reported that there ye did blow open the door and lit candles that burnt blue, that the hellish company ye were with could cavort and make free with each other. Is that true?
Fian Aye.
Judge Tis common knowledge that ye have cast spells upon divers women. That they would lie with ye?

Fian They lay with me at their pleasure, not my own

Judge Fie, sir, ye add calumny to your compearing. How many women did ye lie with?

Fian A score and ten [*Gasps from the assembled cast*] But they did not come to my bed by enchantment.

Judge Ye are adulterer and whoreson! Let that be added to the panel's list of malefactions. Now, upon the matter of Lord Bothwell, shall ye confess that he is the Devil's servant and that he uses of the black arts.

Fian I know naught of these matters. My Lord Bothwell is the King's servant and as I am servant to My Lord, then it must be that I am the King's servant also. The Devil's craft is to gain power, that he might destroy what is builden, to cast down what is good, to uproot that which thrives. My Lord Bothwell hath done no manner of such things. I swear this as the best of my knowledge, for I am not party to all that he does.

Judge Yet ye have confessed enough to damn yourself. Your interlocuters have sworn under oath that said ye did give faith to and adore the Devil, that ye gained converts to his cause and administered potions to them. Forbye, ye committed monstrous acts the like of which were thus- the digging up of corpses of children that died without baptism, that ye might use of their bones to distil your potions. That ye destroyed cattle, corn and divers goods. That ye did raise storms and tempests that would harm the King's person upon the high seas.

Fian These are falsehoods.

Judge Then why did ye freely confess to them?

Fian I have never practised witchcraft. I abused the people by putting fear into them. But I am no witch or warlock. I confessed these matters by fear of torture and to save my life.

Judge Silence! Enough of your calumnies! Ye are possessed of evil and ye have earned the reward ye deserve under the law. Ye shall be taken from this place to the Castlehill, there to be werrit and his body thereafter to be consumed by fire. [*The King raps on the table in agreement and shouts out "May God have mercy upon ye!" Fian is led away, his head held high: he is smiling*] I call upon the prisoner Agnes Sampson. [*She is led in. She is unafraid and proud. She looks disdainfully at the judge and then the King*] Pray state your name.

Sampson I am callit Agnes or Anny Sampson, guid-wife or wise-wife of Nether Keith

Judge Ye are also midwife?

Sampson Aye.

Judge Ye have confessed to the crime of witchcraft have ye not?

Sampson Aye, but twas got from me under strict dealing by evil men that ye employ as jailers.

Judge How came ye to serve the Devil?

Sampson Twas after my husband died. The Devil appeared afore me in the likeness of a man. He commanded me to call him my master and that when I was afflicted, to summon him by calling out Hola! Master!

Judge Did he promise ye rewards for your service?

Sampson Aye, that he did. Riches were to be granted to me and mine. And powers to be given me that I might wreak revenge on them that have wronged me.

Judge So ye admit that the Devil promised ye reward. Tis said that ye were promised reward from Lord Bothwell. Let me remind ye of your confession [*Reading from a paper*] “My Lord Bothwell promised me gold, siller and vittles for my service unto him”. Are these your words?

Sampson Aye, but none came to me.

Judge Yet ye deny ye are witch? That ye have turned from the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sampson I worship as I am minded to for I bring bairns into this world that are in sair need of succour. Aye and the sick that languish for want of comfort and vittles.

Judge Ah yes, the sick. Ye have skill in the healing of the sick, have ye not?

Sampson I am blessed with that gift.

Judge Ye have cured men, women, children and even animals, have ye not?

Sampson Aye, tis so.

Judge Let us consider divers of those ye have cured. Is it not so that some years past, ye cured an afflicted noblewoman?

Sampson Aye. She was Lady Kilbaberton of Baberton, nigh Edinburgh

Judge How came ye to cure her affliction?

Sampson How else? Be prayer, Maister. For does not the kirk teach us that prayer brings comfort to the ailing, the distressed and the dying?

Judge I grant ye that. But I would enquire of the manner of the affliction possessed by Lady Kilbaberton

Sampson Twas ane heavy disease that was like to carry her off

Judge And ye cured her? It what manner?

Sampson Be my skills.

Judge You advert to the potions ye concoct?

Sampson Aye and the benison of prayer.

Judge Are ye acquaint with one Robert Kerse of the Parish of Dalkeith?

Sampson Aye, I was.

Judge And what was the manner of the acquaintance?

Sampson I cured Robert of a heavy disease that was laid upon him by a warlock out of Dumfries.
 Judge Ah, a warlock. Methinks ye are minded to seek to remove the stain of witchcraft from ye by saying so.

Sampson Tis not true. The warlock was evilly intended and Robert was cured
 Judge And by what means did ye cure Master Kerse of this warlock's disease?
 Sampson Why, I took it upon myself, then I cast it upon a passing dog.
 Judge Tis recorded so. But the dog passed the disease upon another man who died of it
 Sampson I heard twas so. But I did not seek to pass it to another. Twas the dog's doing, not mine
 Judge Mistress Sampson, I admire ye for the play ye make upon words.
 Sampson Tis not a play, tis as it was.
 Judge Let us revisit more recent events. Were ye present at a gathering at the port of Leith in the year of our Lord 1589, when our Sovereign James set sail for Denmark to escort his bride Anne, our Queen, to Scotland?

Sampson I was
 Judge Shall ye give the names of those that were present with ye?
 Sampson Euphemia MacLean, Barbara Napier, Ritchie Graham and Janet Stratton. I disremember the names of others
 Judge And did ye and others cast upon the waters a dead cat and make incantations that would bring forth a great storm.

Sampson Aye. When we were gatherit upon the quayside, Janet Stratton aided me in casting the cat upon the water. I recall she said this: "See that there be nae deceit amang us" for she was feared that there were some in the company that would betray us.
 Judge Were ye also in attendance at meetings in Acheson's Haven and North Berwick Kirk?
 Sampson Aye
 Judge And what did ye there?
 Sampson A picture of the King that was wrappit in cloth or paper was put into my hands. Twas passed among those that were present at Acheson's Haven.
 Judge Did the Devil attend that night?
 Sampson Aye
 Judge What form did he take?
 Sampson He appeared afore us in the shape of a bundle of straw.
 Judge That ye might not witness his countenance?
 Sampson I ken nocht. But he spake from the bundle of straw, ordering that the wax picture be passed among those present.
 Judge Shall ye give us the names of those that handled it?
 Sampson They were Euphemia MacLean, Barbara Napier, Meg Bogton and Janet Stratton. There were four others but I disremember their names.

Judge Let me clear the fog that afflicts your memory. I call upon Janet Stratton [*Stratton is brought in; she shows no signs of torture*] Are ye Janet Stratton, resider of Salt Preston?

Stratton That I am. And prood o' it

Judge Were ye in attendance at Leith in the year of our Lord 1589 when a dead cat was cast upon the waters that it would raise a storm that would harm the King's life?

Stratton Ah was. But the cat was no deid, for it did swim to the shore.

Judge And were ye in attendance at Acheson's Haven upon a night when a picture of the King was passed among those assembled?

Stratton Aye

Judge Shall ye name those that were there?

Stratton Weel, there was Anny Sampson, Euphemia MacLean, Barbara Napier, Geilie Duncan, Catherine Wallace, Meg Bogton and Bessie Thomson. Anny Sampson said the wax picture was of the King, orderit to be consumed be fire upon the orders of a nobleman of the realm.

Judge [*Turning to Sampson*] And did ye give name to this nobleman of the realm?

Sampson Nay

Stratton [*Screaming*] Anny Sampson, ye are a liar! Ye said "This is King Jamie the Saxth consumit at the order o' a noble man, Francis Bothwell! These were your very words! Confess!

King [*Rising to his feet, his right fist clenched in triumph*] Ah, we have him! Though he escaped from our castle of Edinburgh these six months past, he is rightly branded as warlock and our rebel. [*Turning to Agnes Sampson*] When he fled us, did he spare a thought for ye, Agnes Sampson? [*She hangs her head*] Nay. For he uses his servants abominably. He is traitor and scoundrel both. [*To Judge*] You may proceed, sir. [*Judge bows*]

Judge Thank you, your Highness. Now Agnes Sampson, were ye also present at the Kirk of North Berwick upon the eve that Dr John Fian blew open its doors and lit hellish candles that burnt blue instead of white, as Christian candles do?

Sampson Aye

Judge And was the Devil present?

Sampson Aye, that he was. He sprung up i' the pulpit sudden, as though he had been lying there unseen. He was in the likeness of a black man with a black beard the like of which can be seen on any male goat. In his hands, he held a black book and callit out the names in it, saying that those that were his good servants should never want.

Judge Was it upon that night that ye did advise the gathering that yet another storm would be raised that would do mischief to our King and his Queen, coming from Denmark?

Sampson Aye

Judge Ye have confessed that ye spake the words that our Sovereign Lord spake unto his Queen upon the voyage home. Is that not so, Your Majesty? *[The King nods then rises]*
 “She did say word for word that which passed between us and our bride. Twas witchcraft rather than treason. We know it, for when we sent word to our father-in-law in Denmark, six witches in league with the creatures from Salt Preston and beyond were put to death. Good Judge, pray proceed in this matter of witchcraft. *[Judge bows]*.

Judge So Agnes Sampson, ye were aboard the barque bearing our Sovereign King and his Queen to Scotland? In what otherwise could ye repeat His Majesty’s words to his Lady?

Sampson I was not aboard the ship, yet I heard the words in Nether Keith, when I was a-bed that night. May it please ye sir, My Lord Bothwell meant no harm to Her Majesty. *[The King rises]*

King That is enough to damn ye. Let this creature of Satan remain in the assize that she may learn of what others say of her. Please proceed sir *[this to the judge]*

Judge Thank ye your Majesty. I now call to the stand the panel called Euphemia MacLean. *[She is led in]* Are ye Euphemia MacLean, spouse to Master Patrick Moscrop, lawyer and heir to your umquile father, Lord Clifton of Cliftonhall, he that died a senator of our College of Justice a few years syne?

MacLean I am. But my spouse is not heir to my father’s estate. I am. That vexes him to distraction, that he is forced to bring me to this assize upon the accusation of witchcraft. For he knows that a witch’s goods and property may be awarded to her spouse.

Judge Enough of this. I put it to ye that ye were present at the port of Leith to raise a storm that would drown His Majesty

MacLean I was present. That is all I have to say.

Judge And were ye present at Acheson’s Haven when a wax picture of His Majesty was passed among those gathered there?

MacLean I was. There is no gain in denying it, for others have said I was present.

Judge And were ye present upon divers nights at North Berwick Kirk when John Fian and his hellish legions debased the kirk by their imprecations and spells?

MacLean I cannot deny it, for others have said it

Judge Ye have practised witchcraft for many years have ye not?

MacLean Ye say it. I do not call it witchcraft

Judge Then what shall we call it by another name? Tis known that ye consulted with a rank witch known by habit and repute in Edinburgh, the capital of the realm. It is said that ye were seen often in the company of a woman by the name of Jonet Cunningham, known as Lady Bothwell. Think ye not that this be a strange matter, as ye have confessed that ye served Lord Bothwell?

MacLean *[Smiling]* Her name was Jonet Cunningham. The name Lady Bothwell was but a jest. She was in years aged, and could never have been My Lord Bothwell's wife.

Judge In what matter did ye consult her?

MacLean Twas to obtain a potion of poison to end the life of Joseph Douglas of Pumpherstons who had wronged me.

Judge And that was not the only occasion ye attempted the life of a Christian soul. I put it to ye that ye fell into the company of Agnes Sampson that ye might destroy the life of your father-in-law John Moscrop by means of a wax picture roasted upon a fire. Shall ye answer the charge?

MacLean Aye, twas so. For John Moscrop would take from me my father's estate at Clifton Hall to his advantage. His son, my spouse Patrick Moscrop also seeks to gain it from my death

Judge That is the manner of justification for your crimes and I shall not allow it as evidence in your support. For is it not proven that ye did assist in raising vile storms that would bring to grief our Sovereign Lord James the Sixth of Scotland. Ye are a Papist, are ye not?

MacLean That is naught of your concern, Sir, though it be true.

Judge Papism is known to be heresy as is witchcraft. Ye shall be given the just reward for the heresy. Ye shall be taken from this place to the Castlehill there to be fastened to a stake and burnt to ashes. All and sundry of your lands, heritage, corn, cattle goods and gear shall be forfeit to Our Sovereign Majesty

MacLean Tis just if the accusations against me are just. For if His Majesty shall receive my wealth, I shall be content. I would not have it placed in the hands of my worthless husband Patrick Moscrop, a scoundrel and wife beater who shall meet his end in Hell *[Euphemia is led away, still proud, still defiant]*

Judge I now call upon the panel called Barbara Napier. *[She is brought in and is clearly pregnant]* Pray state your name

Napier Barbara Napier of Edinburgh, a Christian soul.

Judge We shall be the judge of that. Ye are declared guilty of unlawful enterprise against the person of our Sovereign King, James the Sixth of Scotland. But that is not the first attempt ye have made upon our people, for did ye not confess that ye were in consultation with Agnes Sampson, a known witch for many years. I put this to ye. Were ye not in consultation with Agnes Sampson some years before to give aid to My Lady Angus, that ye would keep her from vomiting when she was breeding of a child? How say ye to this?

Napier Twas true. I did succour the lady with the aid of Anny Sampson. My Lady Angus was desperate to give an heir to her spouse and she was in fear of losing her unborn child.

Judge Are ye a qualified doctor?

Napier Nay sir. I am desirous of a child myself, which ye can see may be birthed soon.

Judge That is not our concern. What we wish to prove is that ye have consulted with necromancers to the abuse of the people of this realm by promising them long life. But ye have compounded this crime by associating with witches. These crimes are expressly forbidden by the Witchcraft Act that was given the Royal Assent by our late Queen, Mary, she of blessed memory, mother to our present sovereign. Know ye of this law?

Napier I know of it. What I have done was in mercy for those that are afflicted. I gave them aid. Shall ye hang me for doing my Christian duty?

Judge We shall see. Did ye entertain mischief that would place in peril the King's life?

Napier *[sobbing]* I am shamed by your words, Sir, for I respect the King's person. I did not care for My Lord Bothwell, for he is a man of cold nature. He promised much yet he has beguiled us with soft words. If I am to die because of my service to him, I die without a single groat of gain.

Judge What have ye to tell the assize of your accomplice Agnes Sampson?

Napier I recall at Achesoon's Haven or mayhap North Berwick Kirk that she said these words to the devil, who was present:
 'We have a turn to do and we would fain be at it if we could, so therefore help us to do it'
 The devil answered that twould be difficult but we prepared a wax picture of the King. Before that, we were bidden to roast a toad and caught its venom in a cup, then we mixed it with the skin of an adder and the thing that is present on the forehead of a new-born child.

Judge Ye advert to the caul which they say is a charm against drowning. That is of interest to the assize, for the coven at North Berwick was intent upon drowning the King. Why so was the caul added to the hellish brew?

Napier I cannot say. Twas My Lord Bothwell's intent to cast the mixture upon the King's person as he rode through the streets of Leith to embark upon his journey.

Judge And when the hellish potion did not work its evil effects, a wax picture of the King was fashioned.

Napier Tis so.

Judge Are ye with child?

Napier Aye, sir, a Christian man's child. Shall ye spare it?

Judge That is not for this assize to decide. Go ye from this place to await the judgement that shall be passed upon ye. *[Napier is led away]* Now I call upon the woman callit Bessie Thomson. *[She is brought in]* Are ye of the name Bessie Thomson?

Thomson Aye, that I am. I am friend to Geilie Duncan of Travernent

Judge This may damn ye for the saying of it. Were ye present at Acheson's Haven upon the night a wax picture of our Sovereign Lord James the Sixth was passed among the assembly?

Thomson Aye.

Judge And did ye hear Agnes Sampson speak of the picture as ‘the art and part of the turn to destroy the King’?

Thomson I ken it nocht.

Judge Well Mistress, I put it to ye that did hear the words. Ye have been acquaint with the panel Sampson for many years. Twill go in your favour if ye advise the assize on her former crimes.

Thomson Weel Sir, though it be hearsay, tis my belief that Anny Sampson hath done the same turn wi’ a waxen picture some years afore.

Judge Pray advise the assize upon the matter.

Thomson Tis said that she made a picture o’ a noble man, that he would thrive nae mair and perish

Judge Pray tell us of the man

Thomson Weel sir, the way I heered of it was that My Lady Jean Lyons, sometime spouse to His Grace the Earl of Angus did command Anny Sampson for to fashion a picture of her man and work evil upon it, for there was a jealousy atwixt them

Judge And what became of it?

Thomson I ken nocht.

Judge Shall ye advise the assize if upon the eve of Lammastide, Agnes Sampson was present at Acheson’s Haven?

Thomson Aye, sir, that she were. Twas she who said the picture of the King would be roastit until he were nae mair

Sampson *[rising and shouting]* Tis a rank lie! Ye foul fiend Bessie Thomson that ill uses my name so!

Judge *[hammering on the table with his gavel]* Silence, woman! Others have said the same! *[Sampson slumps down in her seat]* Now *[turning to Thomson]* tis said that Agnes Sampson and Euphemia MacLean were offered rewards for their evil by Lord Bothwell. Is that so?

Thompson I ken it nocht

Judge Tis also said that Euphemia MacLean spake with the Lord Bothwell and that she said to him that when the King was dead, the realm would not want for a King. And that Bothwell would give her riches. Did ye hear the words?

Thomson Nay, sir, I ken nocht of that. Mistress MacLean is a woman possessed of much siller. She has nae need of gowd. If offer of gain was made, twas to Agnes Sampson who was promised it if she fashioned a waxen picture of the King.

Judge Twas not the only evil deed that Agnes Sampson would use against the King. Is it not so that she would lay a toad washed in adder’s poison in the King’s path, that he might thereby forfeit his life?

Thomson Aye, I heered it was so
Sampson *[screaming]* Liar! Liar! Twas Euphemia MacLean that would work that turn, not I!
Judge Silence, woman or I shall have ye removed from the assize. Now I call upon Meg Bogton.
 [Meg Bogton is brought in] Pray state your name
Bogton I am Meg Bogton, guidwife of Spilmersford.
Judge Were ye present upon Lammastide in the year of our Lord 1589 at Acheson's Haven
 when the matter of casting toad venom upon His Majesty's person was spoken of?
Bogton I was
Sampson *[screaming]* She lies like her accomplices! Can you not see her false face?
Judge Remove the panel Sampson! She has forfeited her right to be here! Take her to the
 Tolbooth to await the assize's judgement upon her.
 [Turning to Bogton] Were ye also present at Acheson's Haven when the waxen picture of
 the King was handed from Agnes Sampson to the divers folk that were there?
Bogton Aye, I was. But I did not curse it. Twas given to me from the hands of Janet Stratton and I
 held it but briefly, for I kent it was a picture of the King, for I had seen him at Holyrood in
 Edinburgh toun a year past
Judge Ye are of the same profession as Agnes Sampson?
Bogton That I am, sir. But I am nocht possessit of her evil
Judge Ah, we speak freely, now the woman Sampson is gone from us
Bogton Aye sir, for I have aye been feared o' her
Judge Too feared that ye could not give her name to the Kirk authorities and thereby do your
 Christian duty
Bogton Aye sir
Judge I put it to ye that twas not fear of Agnes Sampson that kept ye from your duty. Twas
 because ye have renounced your Christian baptism and have turned your back upon the
 worship of our Lord Jesus Christ
Bogton *[sobbing]* Aye sir. But I was feared o' Anny Sampson tae.
Judge What know ye of the panel Geilie Duncan?
Bogton That she is given to sit with the seik and erstwhiles cure them, though I know naught
 how she does this
Judge I think ye know it. Did ye not aft accompany the woman Duncan and the woman
 Sampson?
Bogton Aye sir. They teached me their skills. For I was wont to give succour tae the seik, as were
 they.
Judge So be it recordit. I call upon Maister John Davidson, Minister of Salt Preston Kirk
 [Davidson is brought in] Now sir, was the panel Geilie Duncan the foremost of the
 prisoners to be examined by ye?

Davidson She was
 Judge And what did ye jalouse of her healing powers?
 Davidson Why sir, I cannot say. May I speak of a man that was sore afflicted in this parish?
 Judge Ye may
 Davidson Weel sir, within Salt Preston abided a poor man who was diseased with the leprosy. He told me that upon the day of Pentecost in the year fifteen hunnert and aughty nine, Geilie Duncan came to his cottage. There she did gie him a shiel- begging your pardon sir I meant it was a shell- fillit wi' ane ointment. Geilie bade him tae put upon his sores the ointment, saying that it would heal his impostumes, that which ye would cry a growth upon the skin

Judge And what came of the potion?
 Davidson Why sir, the impostume witherit away. Though the leprosy pustules were still there
 Judge Was Duncan payed siller for this cure?
 Davidson I ken nocht. Twas unlikely, for the man was poor.
 Judge What know ye of the business at the Kirk of North Berwick?
 Davidson Ah wisnae present but this was reported to me by ain o' my Brethren in Salt Preston Kirk
 Judge Shall ye advise this assize of the proceedings there?
 Davidson Aye, richt gladly. Ma Brither elder keepit watch upon the kirk . He was blessed to hear the words o' a hellish pact which went thus:
 "My Lord and Maister Lucifer, I acknowledge thee as my god and prince and promise tae serve and obey thee as long as Ah shall live. Ah renunce the ither god, the baptism an' a' the merits o' the Lord Jesus Christ. An' Ah sall serve and adore thee an' if Ah do not pay ye homage thrice a day, Ah gie ye ma life as thine own."

Judge Tis a mockery of Christian prayer and an insult not only to God and the Christ but to the Kirk of Scotland. Reverend Davidson, pray advise us if ye have more.

Davidson Weel sir, ma brother in Christ heered the Devil who was present l' the pulpit as a black man. He bade his servants to open graves and tak away bones that they might be ground tae powder for to be used in spells.

Judge Can ye say what passed atween the Devil and his gathering? Were words spoken atween him and the accused?

Davidson Aye, sir. But ma Brither remembered only Agnes Sampson's words.
 Judge And what were they?
 Davidson She asked the Devil why he hated the King
 Judge And what was his reply?
 Davidson He said twas because he was the greatest enemy he had and that he had nae pow'r against him

Judge Ye are certain that twas the Devil and not Lord Bothwell that was masked as the Devil?

Davidson Ah ken nocht, for Ah wasnae present

Judge *[turning to the King]* Your Majesty, twould be in keeping with the rebel Bothwell to say the words and appear masked, that his servants did not ken him

King It may be so, it may be so. But pray continue

Judge Thank ye your Highness. Now Mistress Sampson, ye have heard the testimony of the Reverend Davidson. Did ye invoke the Devil to appear in North Berwick Kirk, as ye have said in your confession?

Sampson Aye, for I was sore afraid that he had left us to take the blame for his actions

Judge In what manner did ye call him to ye?

Sampson He taught me to say the words that would summon him

Judge And what were they?

Sampson He bade me to cry “Hola Master” and he would appear, sometime in the shape o’ a black dog or a black man and aince a sheaf o’ straw or hay

Judge Agnes Sampson, ye are charged with no less than four score and ten abominable crimes against God, your King, men and women, children and animals. I pronounce ye guilty of heresy and the crime of witchcraft. Ye shall be taken from this place to the Castlehill, where ye shall be werrit at the stake, then thy foul body be cast into the fire that your remains shall be denied a Christian burial. Take her away. *[Sampson is led away. She is defiant and spits on the floor as she is removed].*

Judge Now, I recall Geilie Duncan to the assize. *[She is brought in]* Mistress Duncan, the assize has heard that ye administered to a leper in Salt Preston and that ye cured him of an impostume. Is that so?

Duncan Aye sir.

Judge How came ye by your skills?

Duncan Twas Anny Sampson that taught me

Judge So, Mistress, ye have the gift of healing that doctors do not have.

Duncan Twould seem so

Judge But tis not a gift from God.

Duncan It mattered not to me from whom it comed

Judge Not even if it were the Devil?

Duncan *[breaking down]* Oh maister, I am but a poor serving lass and I ken nocht from where the power comes. But I took nae airt or pairt in evil, though I confess I was present at the meetings at North Berwick Kirk and at Acheson’s Haven. All that I did there was to play the tromp or Jewish Harp that my friends might be made merry.

Judge *[turning to Rev Davidson]* Now Maister Davidson, when the panel was brought before ye, what did she?

Davidson Why sir, she scraiched like a scaldit cat, crying ‘pity me!’ all the whiles. She said she had done nae herm tae man, woman, child or beast.

Judge And what did ye and the Brethren do next?

Davidson We carrit her tae Travernent Tolbooth for to be examined be the magistrates who drew from the crature a confession of witchcraft. She said that her friends Bessie Thomson and Janet Stratton were guiltless.

Judge She named these women but no others?

Davidson Nay sir. Ah mean aye.

Judge Bring in the panel Bessie Thomson and the panel Janet Stratton. *[Turning to Duncan]* Now Mistress Duncan, for why do ye acquit those women above any others in your coven?

Duncan Oh, sir. By naming these two Ah did not seek to abuse the ithers. I answer upon my soul and conscience afore God that Ah have Ah never knew Anny Sampson, Barbara Napier nor Euphemia Maclean for to be witches or use ony sorcery at North Berwick nor Acheson’s Haven against His Majesty’s noble person. No, nor John Fian, though Ah telt he with God and that the women Ah hae named shall presently join him in Heaven

Judge Then why did ye speak of their wickedness before?

Duncan Ah was made to confess be Maister David Seton, the magistrate at Travernent. Twas all lies, for which I crave God’s pardon

Judge And what say ye, Mistress Stratton

Stratton As Ah shall answer tae God, Ah never knew the Earl of Bothwell but to be a noble man and that he never dealt in the black airts as he is accusit, that he micht gain the hurt of ony person.

Judge Yet ye were present at North Berwick and Acheson’s Haven where evil was worked.

Stratton As Ah shall answer tae God, Ah was never in they places, no nor ony conventions nor place where witchcraft was done. Nor did Ah ken o’ the wax picture fashioned o’ the King

Judge *[gasping disbelievingly]* But out of your own mouth, ye have spoken of such evils before.

Stratton *[sobbing and wringing her hands]* Twas fause and feigned for fear o’ ma life and the torment that was put upon Geilie Duncan and the ithers. Ah wis sore feered that the same fate would be mine if Ah didnae confess. That is why Ah said the words, that Ah micht escape the cruel dealin’.

Judge *[turning to Bessie Thomson]* And no doubt ye have the same excuse? What say ye?

Thomson As God be ma witness, Ah never meant ony herm tae the King nor ony ither living soul. Ah confessit Ah was at North Berwick Kirk and Acheson’s Haven, but the things that were said and the deeds done there were fause. For Ah dinnae believe in witchcraft, nor do Ah worship ony ither than oor Lord Jesus Christ.

Judge Well, well, this is a pretty kettle of fish. The Devil's craft is more cunning than any Christian man could fathom. We give him credit for that. It is well kened that he makes of his servants liars and slaves. These three women have proven the turn. *[Getting up from the desk and walking about the stage, to address the audience]* Ye here present this day, know ye that the penalty for crimes that cannot be repaired is death. For witchcraft is an abomination that exists in this realm. When its master the Devil is frustrated in his devices, he resorts to calumnies and falsehoods, that his servants, the witches and warlocks might save themselves from the fire of the law.

King Verily it shall be thus, for witchcraft is not only a sin against man's law but also God's. Pray proceed sir.

Judge The sentence of death shall be passed upon such as those that have been examined in this place, those that are guilty of witchcraft, abusing the people with false remedies to cure them and the use of images and poisons to bring an end to the King's noble life. For that was the intent of the North Berwick Witches, though the most of them are residents of Salt Preston and beyond.

King *[rising up in anger]* Ye speak of those that await their punishment, yet there is one that was set free to roam the countryside, doing her evil upon others. We advert to Mistress Barbara Napier, who was lately and unjustly released on account of her pleading her belly. Shall this assize condemn her in her absence, that she may be brought to the Tolbooth to answer for her crimes?

Judge Your Highness, tis said that the woman Napier has fled the country and cannot be found.

King *[thumping the arm of his chair]* Aye, much to our extreme displeasure, that one that is clothed in her guilt is free to roam the earth and work more mischief. Yet justice will be done, for if she set foot upon the soil of this realm, she shall answer to us in person and be sentenced under the law.

Judge *[bowing]* I humbly comply, your Majesty. It was not I but my colleagues who set the woman at liberty. I was not party to it, for this assize has weakened me in spirit and body.

King *[waving his hand]* Yes, yes, good sir. Yet see that ye are not incontinent in your duty upon this occasion. Is it the will and wish of this our assize that all held in the Tolbooth are guilty of the crime of witchcraft and that they shall receive the due penalty of the law?

Judge It shall be as you command, your Majesty.

King We do not command it, we expect that the law shall be observed. For it is our bounden duty to rid our fair land of the filthy abomination of witchcraft. Does not God's Book instruct us in this matter? His holy commandment is writ clear in Exodus, Chapter 22, verse 18. We shall remind ye of what is commanded. 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'.

Judge *[bowing]* It shall be as the Holy Book commands. God's will shall be done. And your own, for ye rule this land by God's divine right.

King *[nodding]* Well spoken, sir. Now, we shall adjourn to refresh ourselves in the knowledge that God's will shall be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.
We bid you good day

Lights out.

ACT 3: SCENE 2

[A darkened stage representing a cell in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh The muted light comes from stage left. Sounds of dripping water in the background, with doors being bolted and distant voices moaning. On the floor lie Geilie Duncan and Bessie Thomson, in chains]

Duncan *[reaching out to caress Bessie's cheek]* Oh, ma puir Bessie, ma true freend. What have Ah brocht ye to? Ye were my good companion when we went to the schule and were brocht to our lessons by Dominie Fian, him that is long deid. We are the last o' the brithers and sisters that hae perished, though they did guid works be their healing gifts. Upon the morn, they shall come for us and lead us tae the Castlehill, where we shall be werrit and cast intil the fire.

Thomson *[sobbing]* Gelie, speak ye no' of it. Ah'm sair afeered for the morn. Ah pray tae the guid Lord that the lockman shall dae his work quickly and that we be not cast intil the fire alive. Aince as a bairn Ah wis burnt be the fire in mah mither's kitchen for Ah did fa' asleep be the fire and the coals fell at ma feet and set fire tae ma claes. Ma mither saved me, yet Ah cannae forget the burning. The picture o' the flames bides wi' me tae this day.

Duncan Why did we pay heed tae the fause words o' John Fian, him that was a man skilled in words? An' the noble man Bothwell, whae promisit much in siller, guids and vittles, yet gave none to us and oors.

Thomson We did so for he was the dominie and feered him, as we feered the man Bothwell, for he was set above us. They men used us in a way that men dinnae use women. They tak us intil their beds and hae their way. Ma mither telt me Ah wud hae tae bear. A wee pain. Tis less than what we face upon the morn.

Duncan Aye, Bessie. We were ill-used be Fian and Bothwell. A' that Ah enterprised tae dae was to comfort the seik in their beds. An' play the tromp at the meetings to please ma brithers and sisters in their merry making. The puir fowk hae little kindness in their time. Whit herm can a wee bit music dae?

Thomson Aye, the pair hae a hard life. They toil i' the fields and hae little enough to eat to succour their strength. Geilie lass, were I a wummin o' letters, Ah wad write it doon for them that come efter us. We werenae witches, we were twa wummin that cared about the folk that had naethin'. For ye ken we sprang frae the same seed.

Duncan We were fools tae pay heed to the words o' rich men and men weel versed in words. For men that are great in siller gain it be the use o' the labours o' men and wimmen that hae nae siller.

Thomson Ma faither said twas always so. *[She reaches out and touches Geilie's cheek]*. Dear lassies, Ah am rich for the kenning o' ye and the havin' o' your freendship. Ye were aye kind to me and mine. Ah am that feered tae dee but Ah couldnae dee in better company.

Duncan Let us sleep now that we may be strang tae greet the morn and the maisters that shall await us upon the Castlehill. We maun be strong, Bessie. God be wi' ye. *[Lights out]*

EPILOGUE

Francis, 5th Earl of Bothwell died in exile at Naples in 1612, still declared the King's rebel and reputed sorcerer and necromancer. He died poor but at least he lived for another 22 years after the last of his so-called coven met their end. These simple, humble people were the real victims of the first witch hunt. As many of you here tonight know, a moment in the trial of the North Berwick Witches has been impressively painted in a tableau by local artist Tom Ewing, whose work is displayed today in nearby Cuthill Park. I strongly recommend that you pay it a visit

Will you allow me a moment of conjecture? We must ask ourselves why young Geilie Duncan was kept in custody for nearly nine months after the last of the so-called North Berwick witches were despatched. It cost money to her and her friend Bessie Thomson in jail. I can but speculate on the reason. Geilie was raped by the Magistrate David Seton in Tranent. James VI and I had already voiced his extreme displeasure that Barbara Napier, one of the ringleaders of the plot against his life had been set free by 'pleading her belly' ie she was with child. It seems to me logical that the authorities kept poor Geilie in jail until she was delivered of her bairn which was brought about by David Seton's rape. And it would be logical to assume that her friend Bessie Thomson was kept alive so that she could tend to her friend. The authorities didn't want to offend James VI again by releasing a pregnant woman.