

*For all the so-called witches who got hanged with no proper burial,
for all the women who are still called witches in our place and our time,
for all the young girls who played Abigail in the school play,
And for my grandmother, Kay Keboe.*

CHARACTERS

1. Becky, (*in her mid 50s to 60s*) Our hero, descended from Rebecca Nurse on one side.
2. Bob, (*in his mid 50s to 60s*) The man she loves.
3. Gail, (*in her teens, but can be played by an actress in her 20s.*) Becky's grand-daughter, Also plays Abigail in Act 2.
4. A Witch, (*a woman in her 60s to 80s*), Plays a witch.
5. Stan, (*17 or 18 but can be played by an actor in his 20s*), a little bit androgynous.
6. Shelby, (*30s*), Has several degrees in art history.
7. The Judge /The Jailer (*man, ages 30 to 50*) Virtuoso performer, plays jailer, magistrate, creepy voices and judge

PLACE

Salem, Massachusetts.

SET

Act One:

Many places that can be indicated with one or two objects and light, without sketching in the details. For example, a bar is just a cash register on a counter. Scenes move fluidly. Subtitles might be used for scene titles to indicate location:

Bob's bar counter.

A museum with wax figures and weird historical dioramas.

Becky's living room, which might be just an old couch and a sweet old broken lamp.

A Marriot hotel counter.

A psychic's table.

Act Two:

The town jail.

A courtroom.

And the outdoors, near a parking lot and an open sky.

TIME

ACT ONE, 2016, and an imagined 1692

ACT TWO, 2017 and an imagined 1692

“You are pulling down heaven and raising up a whore.”—Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*

“I was always afraid/of the next card/the psychic would turn/over for us—Forgive me/for
not knowing/how we were/every card in the deck.”—*The Lovers*, by Timothy Liu

1. At the Museum. A Tour.

Becky Nurse at the museum where she leads a group of school children.

BECKY:

My name is Becky Nurse and I'll be your tour guide.

In the dark, a not very subtle voice comes on, possibly with creepy music underneath:

CREEPY VOICE:

Do you believe in witches? Your ancestors did... Welcome to the Salem Museum of Witchcraft.

BECKY:

Okay. I'm actually related to Rebecca Nurse—one of the so-called witches—you can see her in this wax statue.

Lights up on a weird wax statue of an old woman in pilgrim attire.

I'm like her great, great, great, great something once removed. Lucille Ball's related to her too. Fact. Mitt Romney too. Fact. Fun family reunions. Just kidding, I was never invited. Anyway, Rebecca Nurse was this old pious woman, a little hard of hearing in one ear. You might say she was put to death because she couldn't hear the judge's question.

She gestures to an invisible diorama with wax figures.

And here you'll see a wax figure of John Proctor. You must know of him from that play the *Crucible*. *(pause, a child says they haven't read the Crucible)* No—you haven't read the *Crucible*? I thought every high school kid had to read it. No?

Okay. Well, then I'll tell you the story of it. It's like our goddam Christmas pageant here in Salem.

It goes like this:

Little Betty is lying in kind of a coma. But she keeps heading to the window to fly out. Her father is concerned. So they call a doctor. Meanwhile Abigail, the niece, who is described as a "beautiful dissembler" in the play—(basically, she's an actress) comes in. So Abigail admits that she and her friends have been dancing naked in the forest. Abigail's worried she'll get in trouble for dancing naked in the forest. So she wakes up Betty. And Betty says Abigail drank blood to kill John Proctor's pregnant wife. Abigail says Shut it, Betty. We just danced naked in the forest and tried to talk to dead babies and *that's it*.

Now, in the *play*, the reason Abigail wanted to get revenge on John Proctor's pregnant wife (this is what I could never really wrap my head around) is that this young girl wants to fuck an old man--Sorry, sleep with?

You guys are in high school, you know all about this stuff. Anyway, in the play Abigail was 17 but in real life she was eleven. Fact. In the play he's like: "You whore! Stop tempting me." And I'm like, um, she's eleven. More likely that John Proctor molested—(*sees a teacher who looks disapproving*)--sorry—courted--Abigail.

Let's move on.

(She gestures to another invisible diorama.)

Now Tituba was the first woman to confess to witch-craft, which was the practical thing to do, because if you didn't confess, you got hung. It's like, some white pilgrim lady asked Tituba to do a spell and then called her a witch for doing it. Sort of like an old man asking a little girl to perform a sex act and then calling her a whore.

Now, here you'll see the courtroom where these bewitched girls started having these weird fits.

Thrashing around—it was *violent*. Like one even dislocated an elbow. And the girls start naming the women in the town as witches, like Sarah Good, a single mother without a lot of money. She was said to mutter after begging. Like she'd knock on your door and say, "Can I have a potato? Or some firewood?" And people would say no. And she'd go off muttering "You goddam selfish piece of shit." And people thought she was cursing them. Her daughter Dorcas who was 5 had to come to jail with her and poor little Dorcas went crazy in jail. I mean who puts a child in a cage with her mother?

This is a disturbing thought. Becky recovers.

Someone asks a question: don't some people say that the girls were poisoned by rye bread?

What's that? Yeah, some people say the girls' jerking around looks like rye bread poisoning. I'd like to write my own play of the Salem witch trials. I'd have a woman baking bread for half an hour. Then I'd show three girls eating it. Then I'd show them acting really strange. Then I'd show a lot of women getting hung from a tree.

I'll take you to the gift shop now.

2. Bob's Tavern. Lock her Up.

Becky at a local bar.

A bartender named Bob pours a beer for her.

A TV is on, with a Trump rally blaring.

People chant from the TV:

CROWD:

Lock her up! Lock her up! Lock her up!

BECKY:

Can you turn that shit off, Bob?

Bob turns it off.

BECKY:

Ugh, the world is so loud--

BOB:

You okay, Becky?

You tired?

BECKY:

Tired of giving tours, maybe.

BOB:

What else would you do?

BECKY:

Move.

BOB:

Leave Salem?

BECKY:

Sure, leave Salem.

BOB:

I've known you too long, Becky. You're not leaving Salem.

BECKY:

I could!

BOB:

So where would you go?

BECKY:

I don't know--Idaho?

BOB:

Who would you know in goddam Idaho?

BECKY:

No one. That's the point. No one would know me as the descendent of Rebecca Nurse, slightly deaf witch hung on Gallow's hill, which is now the site of a Dunkin' Donuts.

BOB:

Gallow's hill was not at the Dunkin' Donuts.

BECKY:

Bob, it is. Not the Dunkin Donuts on main street—the other Dunkin' Donuts.

BOB:

Bad coffee with a shitload of sugar.

BECKY:

You a snob now?

BOB:

No...

BECKY:

I'm not a coffee drinker. Too bitter.

BOB:

Sure you don't like bitter things?

BECKY:

Yeah, I hate myself cuz I'm too bitter. Ha ha.

BOB:

Well, I heard they invented coffee so Sufi poets could stay awake all night having mystical experiences and writing poetry and now we just drink it to get through the day.

BECKY:

Where the hell did you hear that Bob?

BOB:

PBS. PBS has great documentaries.

BECKY:

The point is: The postcards I sell at the museum—that scary looking tree, with evil arms pointing to the sky? It's not where they hung the witches, it's just some tree. Gallow's Hill is at the exact site of the old Dunkin' Donuts.

BOB:

Nope, not my Dunkin's.

BECKY:

THE OTHER DUNKIN DONUTS, Bob.

BOB:

If you say so. I heard it was at the Walgreens.

BECKY:

Who the hell have you been talking to, Bob? I hate that goddam Walgreens. Anyway, my new boss annoys the shit out of me.

BOB:

I love office politics. You own your own business, you got no villains. Sometimes you need a villain to get through your day.

BECKY:

So you say. But you don't have to deal with *Shelby*.

BOB:

What's wrong with Shelby?

BECKY:

Oh she's so...*(makes a face)* smug. And she's cutting jobs and putting in more videos so you don't need real people to give tours anymore. You just press the button and some creepy voice says: "Do you believe in witches? Your ancestors did." They hired her when Donna got the cancer and the board wants the museum to make money. Who ever heard of a frigging museum that turned a profit? And she wants me to follow the script all the time.

BOB:

You don't follow the script?

BECKY:

Well, the script bores me sometimes and then I deviate slightly.

BOB:

Oh—well I could see where that would be—Maybe a mild irritation for her. If your job is to follow the script.

BECKY:

I know more than Shelby about the witch trials. That's the trouble. I know too much. She

might be a professor, but if she were a good professor she'd be teaching at a college, right—not working at the Salem Museum of freaking Witchcraft. And she wears—these—*blouses*—with these little *ties*--she thinks she's better than everyone in town--she thinks Gallow's hill was down by the Walgreens because someone at frigging Harvard said so, but if you're from this town you know that Gallow's hill is at the goddam Dunkin' Donuts! In the exact spot where you eat your morning jelly roll--

BOB:

I hate jelly rolls—it's disconcerting when jelly flies into your mouth--

BECKY:

Right, fine, or your CRUELLER--Some poor woman was being hanged. And denied a burial. With her daughters watching and weeping their eyes out.

Pause.

Becky is sad.

BOB:

How is Gail doing?

BECKY:

Oh, a little better.

BOB:

When's she coming home from the hospital?

BECKY:

They won't say. Once you get in there, it's up to the shrinks when you get out.

BOB:

Right.

BECKY:

Sometimes I worry so goddam much it takes up my whole goddam life. I don't know if I was cut out to be a mother. Or a grandmother. Or whatever the hell I am.

BOB:

You were definitely cut out to be a mother.

BECKY:

Thanks, Bob. I didn't exactly succeed at it. If you judge by outcome.

BOB:

I don't judge by outcome.

BECKY:

Then how would you know?

BOB:

I can tell. From your worry.

BECKY:

Oh right from my white hairs?

BOB:

You don't have any white hairs.

Becky shows him a white hair.

BECKY:

See?

BOB:

Your hair smells good—like orange juice.

BECKY:

Thanks. I dip it in my goddam Tropicana every morning.

BOB:

You do?

BECKY:

No. I better get back to work. Lunch break's over.

BOB:

This one's on me.