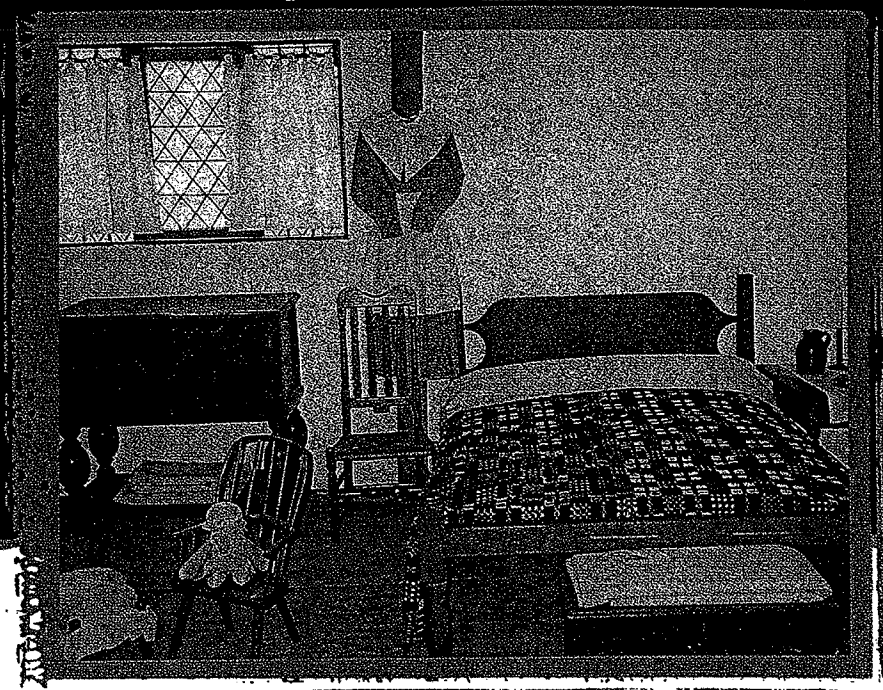


An Overture



(A small upper bedroom in the home of Reverend Samuel Parris, Salem, Massachusetts, in the spring of the year 1692.)

(There is a narrow window at the left. Through its leaded panes the morning sunlight streams. A candle still burns near the bed, which is at the right. A chest, a chair, and a small table are the other furnishings. At the back a door opens on the landing of the stairway to the ground floor. The room gives off an air of clean spareness. The roof rafters are exposed, and the wood colors are raw and unmellowed.)

(As the curtain rises, Reverend Parris is discovered kneeling beside the bed, evidently in prayer. His daughter, Betty Parris, aged ten, is lying on the bed, inert.)

At the time of these events Parris was in his middle forties. In history he cut a villainous path, and there is very little good to be said for him. He believed he was being persecuted wherever he went, despite his best efforts to win people and God to his side. In meeting, he felt insulted if someone rose to shut the door without first asking his permission. He was a widower with no interest

in children, or talent with them. He regarded them as young adults, and until this strange crisis he, like the rest of Salem, never conceived that the children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak.

Parris (*scrambling to his feet in a fury*). Out of my sight! (*She is gone.*) Out of my—(*He is overcome with sobs. He clamps his teeth against them and closes the door and leans against it, exhausted.*) Oh, my God! God help me! (*Quaking with fear, mumbling to himself through his sobs, he goes to the bed and gently takes Betty's hand.*) Betty. Child. Dear child. Will you wake, will you open up your eyes! Betty, little one . . .

(*He is bending to kneel again when his niece, Abigail Williams, seventeen, enters—a strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling.*⁹ Now she is all worry and apprehension and propriety.)

Abigail. Uncle? (*He looks to her.*) Susanna Walcott's here from Doctor Griggs.

Parris. Oh? Let her come, let her come.

Abigail (*leaning out the door to call to Susanna, who is down the hall a few steps*). Come in, Susanna.

(*Susanna Walcott, a little younger than Abigail, a nervous, hurried girl, enters.*)

Parris (*eagerly*). What does the doctor say, child?

Susanna (*craning around Parris to get a look at Betty*). He bid me come and tell you, reverend sir, that he cannot discover no medicine for it in his books.

Parris. Then he must search on.

Susanna. Aye, sir, he have been searchin' his books since he left you, sir. But he bid me tell you, that you might look to unnatural things for the cause of it.

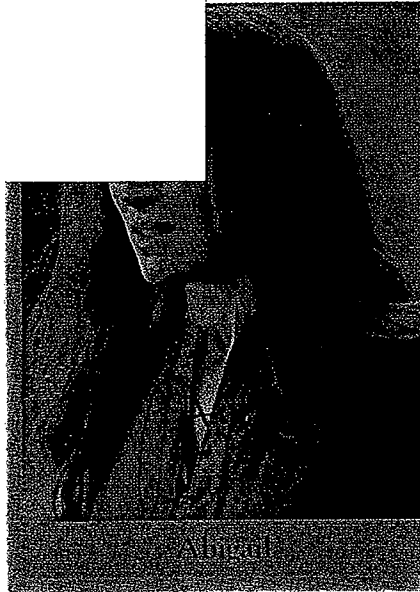
(*Reverend Parris is praying now, and, though we cannot hear his words, a sense of his confusion hangs about him. He mumbles, then seems about to weep; then he weeps, then prays again; but his daughter does not stir on the bed.*)

(*The door opens, and his Negro slave enters. Tituba is in her forties. Parris brought her with him from Barbados,⁸ where he spent some years as a merchant before entering the ministry. She enters as one does who can no longer bear to be barred from the sight of her beloved, but she is also very frightened because her slave sense has warned her that, as always, trouble in this house eventually lands on her back.*)

Tituba (*already taking a step backward*). My Betty be hearty soon?

Parris. Out of here!

Tituba (*backing to the door*). My Betty not goin' die . . .



7. injunctions (in-jūngk'shənz): commands; orders.

8. Barbados (bār-bā'dōs): an island in the West Indies under British rule until 1966.

9. dissembling: disguising the truth about something.

Parris (*his eyes going wide*). No—no. There be no unnatural cause here. Tell him I have sent for Reverend Hale of Beverly, and Mr. Hale will surely confirm that. Let him look to medicine and put out all thought of unnatural causes here. There be none.

Susanna. Aye, sir. He bid me tell you. (*She turns to go.*)

Abigail. Speak nothin' of it in the village, Susanna.

Parris. Go directly home and speak nothing of unnatural causes.

Susanna. Aye, sir. I pray for her. (*She goes out.*)

Abigail. Uncle, the rumor of witchcraft is all about; I think you'd best go down and deny it yourself. The parlor's packed with people, sir. I'll sit with her.

Parris (*pressed, turns on her*). And what shall I say to them? That my daughter and my niece I discovered dancing like heathen in the forest?

Abigail. Uncle, we did dance; let you tell them I confessed it—and I'll be whipped if I must be. But they're speakin' of witchcraft. Betty's not witched.

Parris. Abigail, I cannot go before the congregation when I know you have not opened with me. What did you do with her in the forest?

Abigail. We did dance, uncle, and when you leaped out of the bush so suddenly, Betty was frightened and then she fainted. And there's the whole of it.

Parris. Child, sit you down.

Abigail (*quavering, as she sits*). I would never hurt Betty. I love her dearly.

Parris. Now look you, child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you trafficked with¹⁰ spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it.

Abigail. But we never conjured spirits.

Parris. Then why can she not move herself since midnight? This child is desperate! (*Abigail low-*

ers her eyes.) It must come out—my enemies will bring it out. Let me know what you done there. Abigail, do you understand that I have many enemies?

Abigail. I have heard of it, uncle.

Parris. There is a faction that is sworn to drive me from my pulpit. Do you understand that?

Abigail. I think so, sir.

Parris. Now then, in the midst of such disruption, my own household is discovered to be the very center of some obscene practice. Abominations¹¹ are done in the forest—

Abigail. It were sport, uncle!

Parris (*pointing at Betty*). You call this sport? (*She lowers her eyes. He pleads*). Abigail, if you know something that may help the doctor, for God's sake tell it to me. (*She is silent.*) I saw Tituba waving her arms over the fire when I came on you. Why was she doing that? And I heard a screeching and gibberish coming from her mouth. She were swaying like a dumb beast over that fire!

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

Parris. I cannot blink what I saw, Abigail, for my enemies will not blink it. I saw a dress lying on the grass.

Abigail (*innocently*). A dress?

Parris (*it is very hard to say*). Aye, a dress. And I thought I saw—someone naked running through the trees!

Abigail (*in terror*). No one was naked! You mistake yourself, uncle!

Parris (*with anger*). I saw it! (*He moves from her. Then, resolved*). Now tell me true, Abigail. And I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for now my ministry's at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life. Whatever abomina-

10. trafficked with: met.

11. abominations: dreadful and immoral things.



tion you have done, give me all of it now, for I dare not be taken unaware when I go before them down there.

Abigail. There is nothin' more. I swear it, uncle.

Parris (*studies her, then nods, half convinced*).

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

Abigail (*with an edge of resentment*). Why, I am sure it is, sir. There be no blush about my name.¹²

Parris (*to the point*). Abigail, is there any other cause than you have told me, for your being discharged from Goody¹³ Proctor's service? I have heard it said, and I tell you as I heard it,

that she comes so rarely to the church this year for she will not sit so close to something soiled. What signified that remark?

Abigail. She hates me, uncle, she must, for I would not be her slave. It's a bitter woman, a lying, cold, sniveling woman, and I will not work for such a woman!

Parris. She may be. And yet it has troubled me that you are now seven month out of their house, and in all this time no other family has ever called for your service.

Abigail. They want slaves, not such as I. Let them send to Barbados for that. I will not black my face for any of them! (*With ill-concealed resentment at him.*) Do you begrudge my bed, uncle?

12. There be . . . my name: There is nothing wrong with my reputation.

13. Goody: short for Goodwife, the Puritan equivalent of Mrs.

Parris. No—no.

Abigail (*in a temper*). My name is good in the vil-
lage! I will not have it said my name is soiled!
Goody Proctor is a gossiping liar!

(*Enter Mrs. Ann Putnam. She is a twisted soul of
forty-five, a death-ridden woman, haunted by
dreams.*)

Parris (*as soon as the door begins to open*). No—
no, I cannot have anyone. (*He sees her, and a
certain deference springs into him, although his
worry remains.*) Why, Goody Putnam, come in.

Mrs. Putnam (*full of breath, shiny-eyed*). It is a
marvel. It is surely a stroke of hell upon you.

Parris. No, Goody Putnam, it is—

Mrs. Putnam (*glancing at Betty*). How high did she
fly, how high?

Parris. No, no, she never flew—

Mrs. Putnam (*very pleased with it*). Why, it's sure
she did. Mr. Collins saw her goin' over
Ingersoll's barn, and come down light as bird,
he says!

Parris. Now, look you, Goody Putnam, she
never—(*Enter Thomas Putnam, a well-to-do,
hardhanded landowner, near fifty.*) Oh, good
morning, Mr. Putnam.

Putnam. It is a providence¹⁴ the thing is out now!
It is a providence. (*He goes directly to the bed.*)

Parris. What's out, sir, what's—?

(*Mrs. Putnam goes to the bed.*)

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

Mrs. Putnam. Why, that's strange. (*To Parris*). Ours
is open.

Parris (*shocked*). Your Ruth is sick?

Mrs. Putnam (*with vicious certainty*). I'd not call it
sick; the Devil's touch is heavier than sick. It's
death, y'know, it's death drivin' into them,
forked and hoofed.

Parris. Oh, pray not! Why, how does Ruth ail?

Mrs. Putnam. She ails as she must—she never
waked this morning, but her eyes open and she

walks, and hears naught, sees naught, and can-
not eat. Her soul is taken, surely.

(*Parris is struck.*)

Putnam (*as though for further details*). They say
you've sent for Reverend Hale of Beverly?


Parris (*with dwindling conviction now*). A precau-
tion only. He has much experience in all
demonic arts, and I—

Mrs. Putnam. He has indeed; and found a witch in
Beverly last year, and let you remember that.

Parris. Now, Goody Ann, they only thought that
were a witch, and I am certain there be no ele-
ment of witchcraft here.

Putnam. No witchcraft! Now look you, Mr.
Parris—

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

 word about Thomas Putnam. He was a
man with many grievances, at least one of which
appears justified. Some time before, his wife's
brother-in-law, James Bayley, had been turned
down as minister of Salem. Bayley had all the
qualifications, and a two-thirds vote into the bar-
gain, but a faction stopped his acceptance, for
reasons that are not clear.

Thomas Putnam was the eldest son of the rich-
est man in the village. He had fought the Indians
at Narragansett, and was deeply interested in
parish affairs. He undoubtedly felt it poor pay-
ment that the village should so blatantly disregard
his candidate for one of its more important
offices, especially since he regarded himself as the
intellectual superior of most of the people around
him.

14. providence (prōv'ĭ-dəns): sign of good fortune.

His vindictive¹⁵ nature was demonstrated long before the witchcraft began. Another former Salem minister, George Burroughs, had had to borrow money to pay for his wife's funeral, and, since the parish was remiss in his salary, he was soon bankrupt. Thomas and his brother John had Burroughs jailed for debts the man did not owe. The incident is important only in that Burroughs succeeded in becoming minister where Bayley, Thomas Putnam's brother-in-law, had been rejected; the motif of resentment is clear here. Thomas Putnam felt that his own name and the honor of his family had been smirched¹⁶ by the village, and he meant to right matters however he could.

Another reason to believe him a deeply embittered man was his attempt to break his father's will, which left a disproportionate amount to a stepbrother. As with every other public cause in which he tried to force his way, he failed in this.

So it is not surprising to find that so many accusations against people are in the handwriting of Thomas Putnam, or that his name is so often found as a witness corroborating the supernatural testimony, or that his daughter led the crying-out at the most opportune junctures of the trials, especially when—But we'll speak of that when we come to it. ❀

Putnam (*at the moment he is intent upon getting Parris, for whom he has only contempt, to move toward the abyss*). Mr. Parris, I have taken your part in all contention here, and I would continue; but I cannot if you hold back in this. There are hurtful, vengeful spirits layin' hands on these children.

Parris. But, Thomas, you cannot—

Putnam. Ann! Tell Mr. Parris what you have done.

Mrs. Putnam. Reverend Parris, I have laid seven babies unbaptized in the earth. Believe me, sir, you never saw more hearty babies born. And yet, each would wither in my arms the very

night of their birth. I have spoke nothin', but my heart has clamored intimations.¹⁷ And now, this year, my Ruth, my only—I see her turning strange. A secret child she has become this year, and shrivels like a sucking mouth were pullin' on her life too. And so I thought to send her to your Tituba—

Parris. To Tituba! What may Tituba—?

Mrs. Putnam. Tituba knows how to speak to the dead, Mr. Parris.

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

Mrs. Putnam. I take it on my soul, but who else may surely tell us what person murdered my babies?

Parris (*horrified*). Woman!

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

Putnam. Don't you understand it, sir? There is a murdering witch among us, bound to keep herself in the dark. (*Parris turns to Betty, a frantic terror rising in him.*) Let your enemies make of it what they will, you cannot blink it more.

Parris (*to Abigail*). Then you were conjuring spirits last night.

Abigail (*whispering*). Not I, sir—Tituba and Ruth.

Parris (*turns now, with new fear, and goes to Betty, looks down at her, and then, gazing off*). Oh, Abigail, what proper payment for my charity! Now I am undone.¹⁸

15. **vindictive**: vengeful; eager to get even when wronged.

16. **smirched**: soiled; reduced in value.

17. **clamored intimations** (klām'ərd ĩn'tə-mā'shənz): nagging suspicions.

18. **undone**: ruined.

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

Parris. In my house? In my house, Thomas? They will topple me with this! They will make of it a—

(Enter Mercy Lewis, the Putnams' servant, a fat, sly, merciless girl of eighteen.)

Mercy. Your pardons. I only thought to see how Betty is.

Putnam. Why aren't you home? Who's with Ruth?

Mercy. Her grandma come. She's improved a little, I think—she give a powerful sneeze before.

Mrs. Putnam. Ah, there's a sign of life!

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

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

Abigail. Uncle, you've prayed since midnight. Why do you not go down and—

Parris. No—no. (To Putnam.) I have no answer for that crowd. I'll wait till Mr. Hale arrives. (To get Mrs. Putnam to leave.) If you will, Goody Ann . . .

Putnam. Now look you, sir. Let you strike out against the Devil, and the village will bless you for it! Come down, speak to them—pray with them. They're thirsting for your word, Mister! Surely you'll pray with them.

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

Mrs. Putnam. Mercy, you go home to Ruth, d'y'hear?

Mercy. Aye, mum.

(Mrs. Putnam goes out.)

Parris (to Abigail). If she starts for the window, cry for me at once.

Abigail. I will, uncle.

Parris (to Putnam). There is a terrible power in her arms today. (He goes out with Putnam.)

Abigail (with hushed trepidation).¹⁹ How is Ruth sick?

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

Abigail (turns at once and goes to Betty, and now, with fear in her voice). Betty? (Betty doesn't move. She shakes her.) Now stop this! Betty! Sit up now!

(Betty doesn't stir. Mercy comes over.)

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

Abigail (holding Mercy back). No, he'll be comin' up. Listen, now; if they be questioning us, tell them we danced—I told him as much already.

Mercy. Aye. And what more?

Abigail. He knows (Tituba conjured Ruth's sisters to come out of the grave.

Mercy. And what more?

Abigail. He saw you naked.

Mercy (clapping her hands together with a frightened laugh). Oh, Jesus!

(Enter Mary Warren, breathless. She is seventeen, a subservient, naive, lonely girl.)

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

Mercy (pointing and looking at Mary Warren). She means to tell, I know it.

Mary Warren. Abby, we've got to tell. Witchery's a hangin' error, a hangin' like they done in

19. trepidation (trĕp'ĭ-dā'shən): alarm or dread.

WORDS
TO
KNOW
subservient (səb-sür've-ənt) adj. acting like a servant