

Liz Duffy Adams

From *A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World*

In this play, set ten years after the Salem witch trials, Abigail Williams seeks out another of the original accusers, Mercy. Here, Mercy's servant Rebekkah is asked to recount to Abigail and two local men, Peck and Judah, the story of a play she witnessed in New York City.

PECK *(to Abigail:)*

Theater is the devil's playground, of course; we know better than to allow play-acting in New England. But this story, you shall hear, this story is a moral one, and I venture to say worthy of being told.

JUDAH

Come on, Mercy, can't she tell it?

PECK

Come now, let the girl tell it.

ABIGAIL *(curious)*

Why not?

MERCY

Why not? Why not, she asks me. *(She glares at Abigail, then abruptly changes her mind.)* Yeah, all right, you should hear it. *(Brusquely to Rebekkah:)* Go on, tell it.

(Rebekkah quickly stands center stage, as the rest settle themselves to listen. Rebekkah is transformed from her usual mouse-like affect and casts a spell, ignoring Judah's interjections.)

REBEKKAH

So okay one day in the First Indian War, there was a battle away up east. The swarthy devils swarmed out of the wilderness with the guns the French gave 'em and surprised the town. Everybody ran, but not everybody got away, and many men lay dead, women and children too, where the devils knocked 'em on the head and tore 'em to pieces and left the fields soaked in blood.

JUDAH *(a low appreciative sound)*

Woh.

REBEKKAH

But bad as it was for us, it was worse for those sooty devils, for the great Captain McDeath rode up from the town with his men and paid 'em back, shot hundreds of them and sent the rest runnin' back into their howling wilderness.

JUDAH

Oh yeah.

REBEKKAH

Now on that bloody bloody field, after the fighting was over, came three witches. They gnashed their stumpy teeth 'cause they were angry that the devils had lost, and they cast their spell. They said, Double Double, Trouble and Trouble, McDeath will be ours, his soul we will boil.

JUDAH

Oh...

(Abigail has stiffened, glancing at Mercy who looks impassively back. Abigail looks down, and goes on listening, increasingly tense.)

REBEKKAH

So then as McDeath was riding home, suddenly wham! The witches appeared to him in the road! And McDeath says, You horrible hell hags, what do you want with me? And they say, We only want to give you everything you ever wanted. You will be lieutenant-governor over all the territory, and then you will be governor, and then you will be a mighty king over the devils. And he scoffs at them, he says, I don't believe you. And so they show him a vision: a green field, and a hundred witches there, drinking and dancing, and some of them young and beautiful. And in the middle of them the devil comes up. He is a dark man in a coal-black coat and a high-crowned hat, and he bows and smiles at McDeath. He says, I will set up my own worship in this land. I will tear down all the churches, all my people will live bravely, all will be equal, there will be no day of resurrection nor of judgment, and no punishment for sin, and no shame. And McDeath says, Well, that don't sound so bad—

PECK *(a warning cough)*

Ahem.

REBEKKAH *(hastily)*

—but it is so bad, and that's the devil's snare all right, to make it sound so nice when it's so bad and wicked and will lead you to burn in hell in terrible torment forever amen.

PECK, JUDAH and MERCY

Amen.

(Peck nods, and Rebekkah goes on.)

REBEKKAH

Well so then the vision's over and then a man comes up to McDeath saying, Hey, I was looking for you, I got news. To reward you for defeating the damned devils, they're making you lieutenant-governor. Just like the witches said!

JUDAH

Woh.

REBEKKAH

So what McDeath doesn't know is, his own wife is a witch. She knows all about everything because the devil told her, so when McDeath gets home she says to him, McDeath, if you are a real man, you won't wait to get what was promised, you will take it. The governor is coming to stay in our house tonight. Kill him and become governor.

JUDAH

Noo...

REBEKKAH

Now McDeath, he's not so sure. But his witch-wife, oh, she works on him cruelly. Are you a man or aren't you? I can't love you if you're not man enough to kill for greatness. I'd kill my own babies if I had to, for what the witches promised you. McDeath was a proud hard captain, but next to his wife he was weak as water, and he says to her, Damn, woman, you should only ever have boy-babies, you are too fierce, and yes, I will do it. So then that night the governor comes to McDeath's house. And McDeath sees a knife hanging in the air for him, that the witches give him, and he takes it, and he goes while the governor is asleep and he stabs him to death!

JUDAH

Oh!

REBEKKAH

And he comes back to his wife with his bloody knife and she says, You were supposed to leave the knife with his servant, so they think he did it! And he says, I'm not going back! So she takes the knife and goes and smears the governor's blood on the sleeping servant, and comes back with her hands all bloody.

JUDAH

Then bang! Bang!

REBEKKAH

Bang bang bang! Someone's knocking at the door! McDeath and his wife run off to wash their hands! And in come men looking for the governor and they find him dead! Everybody running around, yelling, O God in heaven, who did it, what happened! Miz McDeath so false, she pretend to faint! Oh no, in my house! Swoon!

JUDAH

Swoon, hah!

REBEKKAH

So now. McDeath, he is the governor. Just like the witches promised. But he just gets worse and worse, bloodier and bloodier. And then Miz McDeath dies. It happens like this: God speaks to her in the night, saying, Why are your hands so bloody? And it makes her cry and cry. She keeps rubbing and rubbing her hands, saying, O! O! I can't get the blood off! I'm sorry now and it's too late! And it breaks her heart, and she throws herself off the roof, and she dies. 'Cause she

REBEKKAH *cont'd*

was not so hard and cold as she thought she was. And all McDeath says is, She should have died later. He says, She was a candle, now she's blown out. And nothing means anything any more. I just have to keep walking this long dusty road toward death, all alone. For nothing.

(Everyone is still and deeply moved, as is Rebekkah, who for a moment seems unaware of her audience.)

Yeah, I think underneath it all, he's sad. Now he knows that all the riches and power in the devil's kingdom won't make up for the taste of ashes in his mouth.

(She snaps out of it, and begins to build to the climax of her story.)

But it's too late. He signed the devil's book, but the devil is treacherous. The King in England sends a new governor from over the sea, and he comes with an army and fights McDeath's legions of devils and Frenchmen, and with God on his side he wins; he cuts off McDeath's head and sends his soul to hell, and chases every sooty devil back into their howling wilderness and every Frenchman all the way up to New France, and hangs the witches, and everybody's safe, hurray, amen!

PECK, MERCY, and JUDAH

Amen!

JUDAH *cont'd*

Amen, amen! Well! Amen.