

MALICE

"The Vow"

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PROSPECT PARK

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

A TEENAGE BOY AND GIRL

bend to kiss the worn, black leather cover of a BIBLE held out by an equally leathery hand. It could almost be a wedding ceremony, until we see their crudely SHAVED HEADS and IRON SHACKLES. REVEAL --

EXT. SALEM - COMMON - NIGHT

The two teens are kneeling by heavy WOODEN STOCKS. Standing before them are several black-clad men, the SELECTMEN of Salem. Their leader, GEORGE SIBLEY, holds the bible.

BOY

I, Isaac Walton, have gazed upon
the nakedness of Abigail Cooke.
And did kiss her.

SIBLEY

And --

The boy mumbles incoherently. Sibley slaps his face.

SIBLEY

And committed the sin of Self-
Pollution --

BOY

-- And committed the sin of Self-
Pollution.

Sibley nods to the Bailiff.

SIBLEY

Ten hard ones.

A LARGE CROWD looks on with a mixture of fear and fascination as the Bailiff WHIPS the boy's naked back, sending flecks of flesh into the young faces forced to bear witness front and center.

SIBLEY

(to the crowd)
This is not Sodom! But Salem! We
do not tolerate -- abominations.
(to the teen prisoners)
(MORE)

SIBLEY (CONT'D)

Nor those who commit them. You two will hang in the stocks overnight. And you, boy, shall bear the mark of your crime for the rest of your life.

Sibley pulls a heavy IRON BRAND from a grate of coals. The Boy jerks back from the heat. One of the Selectman, MAGISTRATE HALE, seems a less severe sort. He shifts uncomfortably.

HALE

For God's sake, Sibley, the stocks are punishment enough.

Sibley ignores him and presses down the brand. The boy screams in agony as an **F-shaped scar** is seared onto his forehead.

SIBLEY

(for all to hear)
Fornicator!

He glares at the pale and frightened juveniles, until he sees one face staring daggers at him --

YOUNG JOHN ALDEN

is neither pale nor frightened. His face burns with rage at Sibley -- who simply looks away with a righteous sneer.

Alden turns to find MARY, 18, in the crowd. It's clear they have a connection. Alden gives Mary a pointed nod, some sort of signal. She nods in return, tempting fate...

EXT. SALEM - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Behind a row of houses lit only the wavering light of a lantern in the hands of the NIGHT WATCH, black-clad morality police, making their rounds.

When the coast is clear, the servants' door to one large house opens a crack. A cinnamon face peers out, then opens the door wider. Mary slips past the slave girl, TITUBA.

MARY

Tituba. Promise you'll wait up.

TITUBA

(slyly)
I'm your servant. Do I have a choice?

A shared look hints the two girls are friends as Mary disappears down the alleyway...

EXT. SALEM - COMMON - NIGHT

The two teens still hang in the stocks, shivering from the cold, covered in rotten eggs, fish, and human shit.

YOUNG MARY crouches in the darkness. The houses all dark except the enormous, seven-gabled SIBLEY MANSION.

Sibley himself stands tall on the balcony, looking down over *his* town. Satisfied, he disappears inside and Mary takes off through the shadows...

EXT. SALEM - GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Mary cautiously enters the headstone forest, winged skulls, and other Puritan symbols of death. She nearly screams when she's grabbed from behind --

It's Alden, who pulls her behind a large monument. An urgent kiss between them, then Mary pushes him back.

MARY

Didn't you learn *anything* today?

ALDEN

Leviticus 20. The Lord brought us to this land of milk and honey and all he asks is that I not fuck my father's sheep. Or anything else.

MARY

Seriously.

ALDEN

Seriously? If I spend another night under the same stars as that bastard Sibley I'll kill him.

Mary kisses him again. If only to shut him up.

MARY

Sibley knows that. Someday it'll be you in the stocks.

ALDEN

No day soon.

Mary fights back tears.

MARY

You're really going this time.

Alden nods and pulls out a deerskin bag stashed behind the gravestone.

ALDEN

This town killed my mother, just sucked the air from her lungs. Don't know how my father can even look at the bastards, let alone serve with them. Me, I got a better chance against the French and Indians than Sibley and his Puritans. And I'd rather die fighting than being pissed on by the good souls of Salem.

MARY

(holding him tighter)
I'd rather you didn't die at all.

ALDEN

No man can promise that. But I'll promise you *this*: I was born here. We were some of the first. I mean to die here one day. With you.

MARY

You promise?

ALDEN

What's stronger than a promise?

MARY

I don't know. A vow, I guess.

He shows her a soft, old SILVER COIN.

ALDEN

Then *this* is my vow. Worth a year's wages. My father gave it to me, to see me through the war.

He bends the soft metal back and forth until it tears in two pieces. He hands half to Mary.

ALDEN

The war won't last a year. And this coin'll be one again, like us.

Mary kisses him like it's his last night on earth. The two slip to the soft grass behind the monument, and lose themselves in each other one last time...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE MONUMENT

The SEASON HAS CHANGED and leaves have fallen. RISE now from the gravestone to see --

EXT. SALEM - MEETING HOUSE - DAY

Part church, part town hall.

INT. MEETING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The people in the pews obey the social hierarchy of Salem: descending row by row from the very richest to the poorest.

MARY sits with her family at the end of a hard wooden pew in the middle rows. She reacts to a sudden pain in her stomach -- desperate for the REV. LEWIS' interminable sermon to end so she can get out.

And as the last 'Amen' still echoes, Mary clutches her stomach and bolts from her seat to exit --

-- Only to be forcefully YANKED back into her hard pew by her stern FATHER.

MARY'S FATHER

Wait your betters, Girl.

Mary can only grind her teeth in pain as her superiors exit first -- led of course by the Sibleys.

Mary's finally allowed to rise, helped by her family servant Tituba, who whispers into her ear --

TITUBA

Tonight.

CUT TO:

A WILD FOX

darts through moonlit trees, when -- KWAP! Snared by a steel trap. REVEAL we're in --

EXT. SALEM - WOODS - NIGHT

Tituba leads a fragile Mary through the hushed woods.

MARY

You sure this is the only way?

TITUBA

Shh.

EXT. CLEARING - A BEAT LATER

A restless wind moves the spidery branches as Tituba unbuttons Mary's gown and lays the naked Mary on the damp earth.

Tituba rubs ointment onto Mary's lips, inserts her fingers into Mary's mouth. Then begins sensuously rubbing her glistening hands down her neck and shoulders, over her breasts -- until she reaches Mary's *pregnant belly*.

MARY

(anxiety rising)

I can't do this. Please...

TITUBA

No choice, Mary. They'll hang you if they find out. You want to live? Lie still.

Tituba rubs the ointment onto Mary's swollen belly. As the glistening ointment absorbs into her naked skin, Mary turns to see the darkness between the trees filled with SILVERY EYES peering out at her. She braces herself in the earth, but the earth itself shifts and seethes around her.

SWARMS OF STRANGE INSECTS spill out of the rich, dark decay of the forest floor:

BLACK SHINY BEETLES and LONG FAT CENTIPEDES, GLISTENING SLUGS and HAIRY SPIDERS seethe up and onto her arms and breasts --

Mary's body heaves with the pain inside, but when she looks down there are no bugs on her oiled skin.

She looks up in fear to Tituba, who bends low over her, stroking her forehead.

TITUBA

Say it. This is what you want.

MARY

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Mary clenches her fist at sudden pain in her stomach and she screams louder. And then we hear a BABY'S CRY -- or was it the shriek of an animal?

The wind dies and Mary's hallucinations have gone with it and the pain. Her head falls back and her fist opens. We see she's been squeezing the silver half-coin Alden gave her.

Tituba buries a blood-soaked burlap bundle. Behind her, Mary sobs. Tituba gently kisses her and whispers:

TITUBA

All the world shall be yours in
return.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: 10 YEARS LATER

FADE IN:

THREE CORPSES

hang from a bent tree along the main thoroughfare into Salem. Birds hover and peck at the bodies. Rubberneckerers take pot shots at the swinging corpses with flintlocks while an old BAILIFF wearily waves the slow parade on:

BAILIFF

Save your powder for the Indians --
let the birds eat the damn witches.

ANGLE - TRAFFIC JAM

Horse-drawn wagons, passenger coaches, etc. Horns, cursing, road rage. One wagon carries two well-dressed women -- PRUDENCE HALE and her 17-year-old daughter ANNE.

As the wagon rounds the bend, we see the three bodies hanging from the trees: an OLD WOMAN, a ONE-LEGGED MAN, and a YOUNGER WOMAN clearly marked with what we call DOWN'S SYNDROME.

ANNE

Why that's Silly Sara. What in
God's name did they hang her for?

BAILIFF

A bill as long as your arm, Miss.
Made cows give milk clogged with
white worms. Swelled old Hutchins'
leg like a tree trunk. And she
bewitched the Reverend's daughter.

MRS. HALE

(fascinated)
Mercy Lewis? *Bewitched* by her?

BAILIFF

(nods)
Confessed to Cotton Mather she was
a witch -- said her own mother and
father brought her to the woods
where she kissed the devil's red
ass and signed his black book.
They're hanging right with her.

ANNE

Nonsense. That poor girl couldn't write her own name, how could she sign the Devil's black book?

Mrs. Hale urges the driver on.

MRS. HALE

Isaac, get us out from under these... *things*.

ANNE

People, Mother. They were people.

Mrs. Hale waves off her daughter's youthful prattle. But someone else notices Anne's bold attitude:

Another passenger -- a man in the back of the wagon -- tips up the brim of his hat.

It's JOHN ALDEN. Now a hardened veteran at 27, the bright fire in Alden's eyes has worn to a charcoal glow. He seems a little surprised, and a little impressed, by this bold girl who is making thumb sketches of the bodies in a note book.

MRS. HALE

Anne! Stop that this instant. Your father indulges your childish scribbles as a method of studying the Lord's creation, but --

ALDEN

(the hanging witches)
-- isn't *that* part of your Lord's creation? Or is he not *fully* in charge?

Anne suppresses a laugh. Mrs. Hale doesn't quite understand but can tell when she's being mocked.

MRS. HALE

(to her daughter)
We should have stayed in Boston. Cotton Mather says Witches can take on any face. They could be anyone.

She looks around -- and lands on Alden, as if to say "case in point". The Driver (ISAAC, 20's, long hair) looks over his shoulder and squints at Alden.

ISAAC

I can vouch for him, Mrs. Hale. He's a local boy. Let me introduce the late John Alden.

ALDEN

Late for what?

ISAAC

You ain't heard? You died a glorious death -- when was it, two summers ago? Battle of the Great Swamp? Believe that's what folk said. And bravely too.

Anne looks impressed by this; her mother decidedly less so.

ALDEN

Sorry to disappoint. Not dead. Not a hero.

EXT. SALEM - MAIN SQUARE - SHORT TIME LATER

Isaac's wagon rolls through Salem. The once grim little port has blossomed into a colorful, prosperous chaos.

Alden surveys all the ships lined up to unload, all the construction and rolling carts overflowing with goods -- and laughs a little bitterly. Ten years of war have been kinder to Salem than they have to him.

But Alden is surprised -- and by the look of it, pleasantly -- by the color and chaos of the crowded, colonial melting pot his hometown has become.

AT THE DEPOT

Alden notices a man wearing A PRIMITIVE SANDWICH BOARD covered in the latest one-sheet sensations -- the original Tabloid newspapers -- a few bold words and a crude woodcut:

-- One headline: **MERCY!** Above a disturbing drawing of a girl with her head turned wrong-way round, clinging to a ceiling like a spider.

-- Another headline screams: **BLACK SABBATH!** and shows a man and a woman kneeling and kissing the exposed ass of a monstrous Devil.

Alden watches the walking tabloid wobble through the throng, collecting pennies and distributing the one-sheets in return.

ALDEN

(to no-one in particular)
Hardly recognize the place.

While behind him, Anne Hale watches *him*. Paying close attention to his broad shoulders and strong ass.

ANNE

Well if you ever need a guide to
the new Salem --

Mrs. Hale yanks her daughter along before she can finish.

EXT. SALEM - ALLEYWAY - LATER

Alden carries his old deerskin bag, behind a row of houses.
He stops at the very one where we saw Young Mary sneak out
for their secret rendezvous. The back door flies open, and
for a moment Alden's face lights up --

-- but he steps back quickly to avoid the bucket of slop that
a servant tosses out the back door.

ALDEN

Does Mary Walcott still live here?

SERVANT

Never heard of her.

The door slams shut.

EXT./INT. ALDEN FARM HOUSE - DAY

Alden walks up to the porch of an old shuttered house at the
top of a hill. The door's only tied shut, so Alden cuts it
open and enters.

Sheets cover the furniture. Sheets of dust cover the sheets.
Alden opens a window to let in the air and light then walks
back out to the porch --

-- and straight into the black hole of a Matchlock rifle big
enough to down a bear.

GILES (O.S.)

Come on. One more step. Save me
the trouble of aiming.

Alden steps out to face GILES COREY, 65. He has a half a
dozen small woodland animals hung to various belts on him,
and a bloody burlap bag filled with heavier catch.

ALDEN

Seems a harsh way to say welcome
home.

The Old Trapper's eyes suddenly go from flint to flood --

GILES

Johnny? It can't be. I heard you--

ALDEN

Don't tell me. Died a hero in the
Great Swamp.

GILES

Drunk between the legs of a New
York whore, more like it.

A WEASEL lurches up from Giles' belt, still alive. He beats
it back down with the butt of his rifle.

INT. ALDEN FARM HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The reunion continues at a bare table. The two old friends
sharing Giles' clay pipe and flasks of his home brew.

ALDEN

Saw three bodies strung up on the
way into town. What the fuck is
that?

GILES

*That my friend -- depending on who
you ask -- is either a mighty blow
against the army of Satan, or a
crapulous piece of ass-foolery.
Either way it's Good Old Fashioned
Puritan Leadership at its finest.*

Giles walks to the open door, which looks out over Salem to
the SEA, or the other way to the sea of trees -- the deep
WOODS.

GILES

You know why Increase Mather *really*
picked this spot to be his New
Jerusalem -- our Salem?

ALDEN

Can't say I do.

GILES

(pointing to the sea)
What's that?

ALDEN

The sea.

GILES

(shakes his head.)
First safe open harbor between
England and the Caribbean with all
her sugar and rubber and slaves.

(MORE)

GILES (CONT'D)
(the other way, the woods)
And that?

ALDEN
Trees?

GILES
Ships. Bridges. Great houses.
Wagons. More untouched, old growth
timber than in all of England.

Giles shakes his head while taking a swig.

GILES
Precious Salem. Caught up in a
stinking Witch Panic. And who do
the big wigs send to put out the
fire? The Great Increase Mather?
No. His son, Cotton. And not even
a chip off the old block. Barely a
splinter.

The grizzled Trapper spits and repacks his pipe.

GILES
And what's Junior accomplished in
the week he's been here? One
family of idiots hanged, and the
whole town so twisted with fear
they'd hide up their own assholes
if they could find a way in.

Alden seems on the verge of asking something -- but doesn't.
Giles smiles like the old fox he is.

GILES
Who'm I kidding? You didn't come
back to hear bout this horseshit.
Or for *this* charming old man.

Alden just sips and raises his brows. Giles's grin widens.

GILES
You know you're dying to ask.
(off his silence)
Yup. She's still here. Your Mary.
Truth told, she's even finer at 26
than she was at 16 -- and she's the
richest woman in Salem. And why
not? She's Mary Sibley now.

Alden at first only registers confusion --

ALDEN

Sibley? Old Sibley didn't have a son. Or a brother. And his wife --

GILES

-- Died five years ago. Leaving him an even greater fortune than the Good Lord in his infinite Wisdom had already rewarded the sanctimonious prick with.

Giles watches it sink in.

GILES

You've been gone a long time. And Mary wasn't just the prettiest girl in Salem. She was -- and is -- the smartest.

We can almost see the cracks in Alden's granite face -- like he's just had the worst sucker punch in the world but will not show it.

GILES

So you be smart too. Keep your powder in your bag. Life is long. And someday your Mary will be the richest widow in the country.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALEM - SIBLEY MANSION - NIGHT

The old house still dominates the town. But it is not Old Sibley who surveys his domain from the balcony it's --

MARY SIBLEY

She's come far from the delirious 16 year-old girl we saw lying in the woods. She stands ramrod straight, if such curves can be called straight. As if poured into the tight black silk she wears, radiating confidence, beauty, power.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

From inside, a MAN-SERVANT discreetly coughs, calling Mary's attention from the balcony.

SERVANT

Driver's in the kitchen with some packages for you, Ma'am.

MARY

Send him in. And Nathaniel. Take
Mister Sibley with you. Time for
his bath.

The Servant steps deeper into the room, and we now see what
has become of the once proud and mighty GEORGE SIBLEY:

Immobile and obese, he breathes heavily and noisily, and with
the amphibious glaze over his eyes it's hard to be sure he's
fully conscious.

As her husband is wheeled out, Mary sits down at a desk and
picks up a piece of needle point.

Isaac the Driver keeps his head lowered, black greasy hair
over his face, as he hands two paper-wrapped parcels to the
Grand Lady of Salem.

Mary looks at the odd little fellow with genuine sympathy and
presses a gold coin into his hand. But when he looks up to
acknowledge her generous tip -- she's back to her needlework.

MARY

Now, Isaac, tell me some news of
the world.

ISAAC

A soldier hitched a ride on my
wagon. Home from the war.

MARY

Who?

From beneath his hair, Isaac watches for a reaction -- as her
long fingers move the sharp needle with almost preternatural
speed and dexterity --

ISAAC

John Alden.

-- her needle misses a stitch and plunges into her fingertip,
instantly drawing blood.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALEM COMMON - CONTINUOUS

John Alden stands by the bare stocks, looking up at the vast
seven gabled Sibley house and at the shiny black doors behind
which lies *everything* he came home to find.

His Mary. In *there*. The very last place on earth he could
have imagined her.

INT. PUBLIC HOUSE - LATER

Smoke, dust, and piss. A simple bar and old wood tables and in the corner a barber chair where the barber surgeon, HAROLD LAMB, shaves a drunken man. John Alden. He stares at the man wielding a razor over him.

ALDEN

I remember you. Lamb. My father always said you weren't an idiot.

LAMB

High praise from the Sheriff.

The door to the bar flies open: a tall man with fine, pale features, clutching a black book --

COTTON MATHER, 29, strides in, opens the book on the bar, and whips out an ingenious portable pen of his own invention. His hand shakes and spatters ink on the page.

BARKEEP

Rum, Gin, or Ale?

COTTON

(looking at shaking hand)

Yes.

The barkeep pours all three and Cotton downs them.

LAMB

(in Alden's ear)

Salem's Savior, the great Cotton Mather.

Cotton scrawls notes in the book as if the entire bar weren't staring at him. Then turns to face the room.

COTTON

I need three strong men.

ALDEN

For what?

Cotton glances down at the dirty floor -- a crumpled one-sheet showing the crude print of "Mercy" the spider girl.

COTTON

To subdue a child.

EXT. SALEM - PARSONAGE - MOMENTS LATER

REV. LEWIS leads his family in prayer as Cotton strides back with Alden, a burly ANCHORSMITH, and a ruddy INDIAN SLAVE.

HUMAN SHRIEKS -- ANIMAL NOISES from within the house. Alden looks at the second floor window, where the shadow of a child flits by. He looks back at the Reverend and his terrified family -- all this, from a child?

But then Alden notes the deep gouges around the Reverend's bloodshot eyes.

COTTON

Watch out. She goes for the eyes.

SMASH CUT TO:

MERCY LEWIS -- SCREAMING and LAUNCHING herself from her bed!

INT. MERCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cotton, Alden, and the other men try to keep the thrashing girl pinned down. Mercy latches onto the Anchorsmith and digs her nails into his skin. He screams in pain and terror. The other men shove her back down on the bed, where she struggles for several intense beats, then goes eerily quiet.

Cotton examines Mercy. Her face is covered with scratches, her lips bleed as if gnawed on, arms covered in bites.

COTTON

Mercy... who's doing this to you?

MERCY

She's... here... now.

COTTON

Who?

MERCY

The... Hag.

(craning her neck)

She's standing *right there*.

Alden looks around the room -- *nothing*. But Mercy stares in abject terror -- a terrified little girl.

Mather pulls a small sachet of white powder from his pocket, mixes it into a cup of water, and brings it to Mercy.

COTTON

A simple physic. To sleep.

Once he's assured she's relaxing into sleep, he turns and quietly ushers the other men from the room -- but he's blocked by Alden -- his very posture demands explanation.

COTTON

We call it a *spectral* attack.

ALDEN

I call it bullshit. She's clearly touched in the head, and I don't know *where* you're touched, but --

Alden walks away in disgust. Cotton attempts to restore his dignity, waves the others to precede him down the stairs.

We remain in the darkened room, alone with sleeping Mercy.

No -- not alone.

Out of the dark corner beside the tall cabinet, a deeper darkness steps.

LEPROUS LEGS crisscrossed with bulging varicose veins, ankles feet and toes so swollen, yellow, and covered in white fungus they might be made of rotten wood, slowly slide forward.

As the old naked HAG reaches Mercy's bed, we see her FACE. Hideous and covered in make-up -- rouge, eye shadow, lipstick -- caked-on and garishly applied. She's drooling and licking cracked lips with a quick-flicking reptilian tongue.

With horrific vitality for one so decrepit, the Hag LEAPS onto the bed and straddles Mercy -- deflated tits dangling, blood-rimmed eyes staring down at her. The Hag leans down and BITES HARD on Mercy's shoulder. Mercy SCREAMS.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SALEM - MEETING HOUSE - DAY

Anne Hale walks with youthful impatience, leading her mother and her father. We recognize him as MAGISTRATE HALE. Hale nods and greets his "constituents" on the way to Meeting.

Anne's about to enter the Meeting Hall when her mother unceremoniously grabs her dress, halting her --

MARY SIBLEY stares coldly, as if willing Anne to step back and make way. Anne obliges, and her mother nearly bows. Mary responds with a cool nod and enters the Meeting House followed by a servant wheeling her infirm husband.

Hidden in a throng waiting patiently for their betters to enter the meeting house, ALDEN watches all this.

COTTON (O.S.)

*Fear no man's war. For only a war
from Hell can destroy Salem.*

INT. SALEM - MEETING HOUSE - BEAT LATER

A packed and restive house listens to Mather.

COTTON

My father said that. And he was right. The Devil was never going to let a promised land be built here without a fight.

ON ALDEN

standing in a crowded corner, eyes fixed on MARY SIBLEY. She sits by her infirm husband and the other Selectmen of Salem.

COTTON

And *Witches* are the deadliest weapon in that fight, that war for the body and soul of the nation.

And Mary subtly scans for Alden. She hasn't seen him yet.

COTTON

Even a single Witch in Salem is enough to destroy everything we've built and ever hope to build here.

Suddenly something flies from the back of the room and SMASHES on the floor at Cotton's feet -- a bottle filled with curdled milk squirming with white worms.

ANGRY FARMER

All my cows still dying! Udders swollen with milk filled with worms! Y'already hung three witches and that didn't stop it --

Two militia men drag the Angry Farmer out. This ignites the crowd, who begin to shout their conflicting opinions.

COTTON

(trying to reason)
Imagine fighting a foe you barely understand, possessed of weapons unknown to us. With the ability to shift faces as we change clothes.

A loud clear voice cuts him off.

HALE (O.S.)

Then how can you ever hope to identify the *correct* culprit?

Anne's Father, Magistrate Hale, steps forward. He's matured into a self-appointed lion of liberty, a Colonial Joe Biden.

COTTON

Have you seen the child, Sir? Even now Mercy Lewis bleeds from hundreds of wounds, some *impossible* to self-inflict. She's the one who will tell us who does this.

HALE

Oh -- I see. The ravings of a poor, sick child will help you see what your reason fails to deliver.

COTTON

My Father --

HALE

Yes. Of course. Your father. Did your father, whom we all so respect, have any advice when he sent you in his stead to our aid?

Cotton is turning hitherto unseen shades of uncomfortable.

COTTON

He -- advised caution.

HALE

Caution.

Hale turns to Mary and the other Selectmen.

HALE

And we are to take three people hung as the measure of Mather *Junior's* caution? Think of what you're doing -- there could be nothing worse for us, worse for Salem, for the country, than a Witch Hunt!

A LOUD COUGHING/CHOKING SOUND silences the room.

It's George Sibley. Mary bends to her husband, wipes the foam from his lips, and bends her ear to his inaudible wet whispering. Then Mary rises -- all eyes and ears on her.

MARY

Indeed, as my beloved Husband, the head of your Selectmen, reminds me, there is something worse than a Witch Hunt. A Witch.

A voice from the back of the hall --

ALDEN (O.S.)

A witch? Sure, that's bad. But how bout an Ogre? Or a Goblin?

All eyes shift to Alden, who steps forward.

ALDEN

Why not a Dragon? Long as we're talking about Fairy Tales.

The effect on Mary is electric.

HALE

And you are --

MARY

John Alden. His father sat on this very board and served it well as High Sheriff. His family is well known to Mister Sibley. And I.
(pointed)
We all welcome Captain Alden home from his long, *long* service in our defense.

The two of them lock eyes, a volcano of unspoken emotions.

EXT. SALEM - MEETING HOUSE - LATER

The crowds of people have fallen into tight knots, discussing, arguing, even fighting over what they heard.

ANGLE ON Alden and Giles watching this and the other signs of a community beginning to unravel.

GILES

Puritans know their day is passing.
But nothing like a new Enemy, or
better yet, a new Old Enemy, to get
people behind you.

Mary wheels her chair-bound husband up as Giles walks away...

MARY

Captain Alden. Reverend Lewis
called for a day of fasting and
prayer for the recovery of his
daughter. Mister Sibley and I are
hosting a small dinner to break the
fast tomorrow night. We'd be --
honored -- if you'd join us.

Alden looks into her eyes -- even after all these years, he could lose himself. He tears his eyes from the woman who once was nearly his, to look instead at the drooling old man she married.

ALDEN

Don't know about you Mister Sibley,
but I haven't the stomach for
prayers -- or fasts. But I do
believe in dinner.

Alden looks up from Sibley's glazed, unseeing eyes to the darkly shining eyes of Mary --

ALDEN

(to Mary)
-- I'll be there.

Mary stares after him, her emotions unreadable.

But then we see her notice someone else -- someone also watching Alden.

It's Isaac. Seeing he's noticed by her, Isaac bows to Mary and hurries on his way -- while keeping a steady eye on --

ALDEN

walking across the Common, past a gaggle of CHILDREN playing a duck-duck-goose type game. The "Witch" picks her victim with an elaborately folded paper cootie-catcher and then they all explode into raucous screams as the chase is on.

It's unsettling. And somehow as the girl playing the Witch chases the other children, they all end up encircling Alden.

The Witch child shoves the folded paper into his face.

WITCH CHILD

You! It's for you!

Alden takes the dirty paper from the dirtier little hand.

ALDEN

For me? Who says?

WITCH CHILD

(giggling)

Can't tell.

And as quickly as they've circled him, the Witch girl leads the gaggle back across the Common, leaving Alden standing in the empty Common staring at the paper.

He unfolds it to find a flyer for the local Pleasure Garden, *Knocker's Hole*. All the latest attractions. Bear baiting and everything. Probably just a way of drumming up business.

Alden's about to toss it when he notices the little girl staring at him from across the Common. She grins and points her witchy finger at him.

CUT TO:

THICK BLONDE HAIR FALLS AWAY FROM SHEARS

As a woman's hands clip Mercy's hair away to the scalp.

INT. MERCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

She's awake and calm. A MIDWIFE is gently shaving the girl's head. Almost lost in the darkness of the corner, Cotton sits with his book open on his lap, taking notes as he observes. Standing beside him, Mercy's father shakes his head.

REV. LEWIS

(whispering to Cotton)

Is this really necessary?

COTTON

(without ceasing writing)
A Witch's familiars -- demons,
usually in the form of an animal.
A cat. A rat. A bird or a toad.
-- they perform all sorts of useful
tasks. As long as they're fed...

He looks up to watch the Midwife's progress as she moves from the girl's bald head to her body.

COTTON

You heard what she told us. She
was forced to feed their familiars.
She must be searched for the marks.
Teats. Where she suckled them.

Rev. Lewis seems to swallow back his queasy bile at the thought of his daughter *suckling* some demonic thing. The midwife raises Mercy's arm to shave the small patch of blonde hair there. Her father can't bear it and leaves the room.

MERCY

(re: her father)
They don't believe me. They
pretend to. But you do.

COTTON

Yes.

He watches the midwife as she gently shaves the fine blonde hairs from Mercy's calves.

MERCY

Do you want to know what it feels
like?

The midwife lifts Mercy's shift up over her hips and soaps the remaining hair in the valley between Mercy's legs.

COTTON

(tensing)
Yes.

We can't see, but we hear the soft scraping of the midwife's blade across Mercy's skin.

MERCY

Like I was flying. In a dream.
But I wasn't dreaming. I could see
my body still lying here. In this
bed. But I wasn't there anymore.

(MORE)

MERCY (CONT'D)

I was already halfway to the woods,
the air whipping my face as if I
were on a fast horse.

Cotton looks up at the midwife who's now finished the shaving
and awaits his instructions.

COTTON

Now search. With your eyes and
your fingertips.

Cotton is transfixed as the older woman's fingers glide down
Mercy's stomach and thighs. *Is he becoming aroused?* Cotton
averts his eyes, disgusted with himself. Over this:

COTTON (O.S.)

*-- Woe to the inhabitants of the
earth and of the sea!*

CUT TO:

COTTON'S FACE

flushed with lust and disgust. Repeating the Biblical phrase
like a mantra:

COTTON

*Woe to the inhabitants of the
earth and of the sea! For the Devil
is come down unto you --*

REVEAL Cotton is at full throttle, vigorously fucking a buxom
redhead from behind in an attempt to vent his sins.

COTTON

*-- having great wrath, because he
knoweth that he hath but a short
time.*

He collapses on the lightly-freckled back of the lusciously
tressed GLORIANA in the velvet love nest of an expensive room
in Salem's secret brothel. We are --

INT. DIVINING ROD - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

COTTON

(out of breath)

Revelations. Chapter 12. Verse 12.

Gloriana, glorious as her name, rolls Cotton and mounts him.

GLORIANA

I see the end of the world urges
you to greater efforts.

COTTON

Hmm, as it must us all.

GLORIANA

My old Granny used to scare us
silly with stories about Witches.
Though she said we girls had naught
to fear from them. But my brothers
she'd really terrify. Told them
Witches could steal a man's --

She snakes her long fingers between his legs.

COTTON

-- would you like that Gloriana?
Without the bother of the Man
attached?

Gloriana grinds her hips down on him, while clamping her hand
over his mouth.

GLORIANA

I can imagine the benefits.

EXT. SALEM - BECKETT AND CREEK STREETS - NIGHT

The lowest part of Salem -- in every sense. Labyrinthine
alley ways spread between the docks where the ships load and
unload. This is Salem's night town.

INT. KNOCKERS HOLE - NIGHT

Gambling den, bar, sport and entertainment venue. A kind of
17th century Vegas. Alden surveys the vast array of
distractions on offer -- from blow-jobs to bear-baiting. We
can almost see him wondering if any of them might take his
mind off *Her*.

And then it isn't distraction he's feeling -- but that old
'being watched' feeling. His wary, woods-trained eyes survey
the place anew -- not vetting distractions, but dangers.

Alden sees no cause for his unease -- until he glimpses a
half-familiar face staring at him, which quickly turns away.

It's ISAAC.

But by the time Isaac looks back where Alden glanced from --

Alden is gone.

EXT. KNOCKER'S HOLE - A BEAT LATER

Isaac steps out of the smoky passage into the alley and looks both ways. No sign of Alden.

He's about to step back in when out of the shadows a massive hand grabs him by the throat and pulls him in.

Alden slams the cowering driver against a rough stone wall. He pins him there, by the throat, at his own eye level -- letting Isaac's crooked legs dangle above the ground.

ALDEN

What do you want with me?

Small parties head in and out of Knocker's Hole -- none bothering with the large man choking the smaller man to death. It's not an unfamiliar sight.

Alden looks at the little man who can clearly do him little harm -- and opens his fist, letting him drop in a heap.

ALDEN

I don't even know you.

ISAAC

Yes you do.

Isaac brushes his long hair back from his face, off the usually obscured forehead scar. It's more of a burn -- and it's healed badly, in the unmistakable shape of the letter **F**.

ALDEN

You're Isaac.

ISAAC

(bitter rasp)

Isaac the Fornicator! Hide your wives! Hide your daughters! Hell, your sheep!

ALDEN

(not unkind)

Well I got no wives. And I got no sheep. So what do you want with me, Isaac?

ISAAC

Ain't just you. Bout *her* too.

ALDEN

(suspicious)

Her? Who?

Isaac just looks at him -- who's he kidding.

ISAAC

Only one ever called me Isaac
without adding -- you know. All
these years. Your Mary's the only
one ever done me a good turn.

ALDEN

She's not *my* Mary now.

ISAAC

Funny thing bout being a marked
man. Half the time -- it makes you
invisible. I get to watch people.
You know things that way. I know
she still loves you.

Alden does his best not to react -- given the source. But
he's still listening to the fool.

ISAAC

And I know something else.
She's in danger.

ALDEN

Danger from what?

ISAAC

Listen to me, John Alden. Coming
home to Salem to get out of a war --

Isaac picks himself up off the ground. Dusts himself off.

ISAAC

-- that's like jumping in the ocean
to get out of the rain.

ALDEN

Talk sense.

ISAAC

They're here. They're -- *Evil*.
They want Salem. And won't stop
'til they fixed us all.

ALDEN

(trying to follow)
They? Who?

ISAAC

Witches.

ALDEN

(almost relieved)

Witches? That what this is? You just another of Mather's idiots?

ISAAC

No. You don't get it. The witches are in charge.

ALDEN

In charge of what?

Isaac suddenly looks spooked. Like the night itself, and the scent of the woods on it, might be listening.

ISAAC

The witch hunt. The foxes are guarding the henhouse. And hanging the chickens along the road!

Alden just squints. Like he's really trying to understand -- then catches himself. Nonsense upon nonsense.

ALDEN

(walking away)

Night, Isaac. Been a long time. Probably gonna be longer.

But this time the crooked man reaches out his crooked hand and grabs Alden's arm.

ISAAC

Please. Don't walk out on us -- again.

We see Alden feel that. He tries to shake it off as easily as he does Isaac. He finally turns back into the darkness of Knocker's Hole for some distraction after all...

EXT. BECKETT AND CREEK STREETS - LATER THAT NIGHT

A crooked door to a crooked house opens, and Cotton leaves the Diving Rod Brothel. Behind him, the TOOTHLESS MADAME sees him out. Cotton pulls his hat low with a scowl that says he'll never be back, but the Old Bawd knows better.

OLD BAWD

See ya next time, G'vnor.

As Cotton steps out into the street, head down, he runs smack into Alden -- who is walking a bit unsteadily himself.

The two men stare awkwardly at each other.

COTTON
Just attending to the Poor. And
Poor in spirit.

ALDEN
(noting the crooked door)
Hard work. Somebody's got to.

Headed the same direction they walk together -- stiffly.

COTTON
Captain Alden, right?

ALDEN
Right or wrong.

COTTON
You know, my father knew yours. At
Harvard.

ALDEN
Your father knows everyone.

COTTON
Rather expected to meet you there
myself. Surprised to hear you'd
run off like a servant and joined
the militia.

ALDEN
Didn't think several years counting
angels on the heads of pins was
much preparation for life. Not any
life I would lead.

They've arrived where their paths diverge -- literally.

COTTON
Pity. I owe everything to my
education.

Alden about to walk away, to walk it off, but something in
Mather's tone stops him. Gets his drunken, wounded gander.

ALDEN
Taught you all about witches?

COTTON
That's more of a family matter. My
grandfathers burnt scores back in
Essex. And I've read everything
written on the subject --
(a bit defensive)
-- in eight languages.

ALDEN

Well, seeing how you are the expert then. Let me ask you. How do I know you aren't a witch?

COTTON

(a joke?)
What?

ALDEN

Like you said. Could be anyone. And I have it on very high authority -- the witches are running the whole show.

Alden steps into Cotton's personal space.

ALDEN

And seems to me, you're running the show. So I'll ask you again. How do I know you aren't a Witch?

Alden's tone, not to mention the very short distance between their noses, threatens. And then breaks in an easy smile.

ALDEN

How do I know? Cause there aren't any such things. G'night, Harvard.

And he walks away, leaving Cotton frozen for a moment at the impertinence of the suggestion -- Cotton Mather, *a witch?*

EXT. SIBLEY MANSION - NIGHT

From a high window, we can see a silhouette.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary stares into the night as she performs a strange and austerely sexy strip tease, undoing her proper Puritan dress and letting it fall to the floor.

She hears a MOAN behind her and turns to her infirm husband.

MARY

Time for your feeding.

Mary gently lifts his night shirt to reveal his pale, flabby belly, places both her hands low and central, and with abrupt violence, palpitates her husband's stomach in a kind of frontal Heimlich.

Sibley groans as she works at his abdomen, *forcing something up from within.*

Old Sibley opens his gob wider and wider, and gasp-groans as a fat TOAD stretches his throat and emerges from his mouth.

Mary forces Sibley's head back, reaching her long fingers in to ease the toad out of her husband's mouth. It makes a liquid sucking sound as it's finally clear and Sibley gasps.

But Mary pays him no attention. She sits on the edge of the bed and we notice a tiny NIPPLE-LIKE MOLE on the alabaster skin of her inner-thigh.

She brings the Toad's lips to this mark and coos as it takes the bit of skin between its wide lips and appears to SUCKLE.

With the Toad briefly out of his stomach, Sibley is slowly coming awake, as though surfacing from a great depth. He looks around with rising panic:

SIBLEY

Help me! For God's Sake, someone
help me!!

But before he can be heard, Mary roughly SHOVES the living toad back into the old man's mouth. He gags and retches -- trying to force it back out --

MARY

Don't fight it, George. You know
it only hurts more. Let him in.

He struggles -- and then submits in order to breathe, as the toad works its way back down.

MARY

You enjoyed your time as puppet
master, pulling all our strings.
How does it feel to have someone
else in charge?

As the toad descends inside, his consciousness goes with it, his vision filled with Mary's smiling face leaning over him.

MARY

You'll come to like it, George
Sibley. In time, you all will.

As she straightens up we catch sight of her rising in the ornate wall mirror -- though it is not Mary we see --

But the foul Hag.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. MERCY'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The corners of the room are lost in gloom. Mercy Lewis in her simple white shift, legs and arms bound to the posts with enough slack to raise herself up. Cotton leans over her.

COTTON

Where do the Witches meet?

MERCY

In the woods.

COTTON

How many?

MERCY

Thirteen.

COTTON

Men and women?

MERCY

Yes.

COTTON

From Salem?

MERCY

Some.

Mercy is growing distressed. Cotton presses.

COTTON

Who are they?

MERCY

I -- I can't see their faces.
Like, like they have the heads of
animals... a stag... a pig... a
wolf...

COTTON

But you know who they are?

MERCY

(beat)
Yes.

COTTON

Their names.

Mercy winces and twists her body, as though trying to break free of her restraints. Her shift falls slightly, exposing her thighs. Cotton can't help but notice.

COTTON
Why won't you tell me their names?

MERCY
They won't let me!

COTTON
Tell me!

MERCY
I can't --

Something constricts Mercy's throat, causing her to choke. Her body convulses, causing her shift to fall a little more.

COTTON
The names!

The shift falls lower, revealing her milky inner-thighs. Cotton fixes on it. Her shift drops lower, closer --

For a subliminal second, Mercy's smooth thighs are mottled with the Hag's withered, loose-hanging flesh -- and between them a large, writhing ANIMAL TONGUE that seems to taunt us.

HAG'S VOICE
*This what you want? Go fuck your
whore, Mather. This one's mine!*

Cotton reels back -- Mercy heaves up, dropping her shift back over her legs and straining her upper body towards Cotton -- gagging, retching, as if desperately trying to release the names locked in her throat.

Cotton braces the poor girl, who VOMITS A THICK TORRENT OF BENT AND BLOODY NAILS.

Mercy coughs the last of them from her mouth in wild-eyed agony before falling back onto her pillow. Cotton eyes the impossible mess staining the bed, picks up a rusted nail.

REV. LEWIS (O.S.)
It's hopeless.

Cotton turns, startled. Mercy's Father stands in the shadows, hands clenched in prayer.

REV. LEWIS
She can't tell us who torments her.
They won't allow it.

Cotton drops the bent nail into his pocket.

COTTON

Then she'll have to show us.

REV. LEWIS

How?

COTTON

Tomorrow. We will put Mercy -- and
this whole town -- to the test.
And perhaps meet a Witch.

INT. ALDEN FARMHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Alden dresses before an old MIRROR. We glimpse his naked back and chest, cords of muscle beneath sun-worn skin. But most striking are the horrific scars that cover his body.

SHOCK CUT:

Alden, naked, bound to a tree in the woods at night. Surrounded by what at first appear to be DANCING DEMONS torturing him -- but which the flickering firelight shows to be INDIAN WARRIORS in paint, tattoos, scarring, and masks.

BACK TO SCENE:

Alden pulls on his shirt and tries to comb his unruly hair.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - MARY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The brown hands of her unseen servant place the necklace around Mary's neck. Mary strokes the pendent we can't see at the end of the chain, and then tucks it into her bodice.

HALE (O.S.)

A toast. To Mrs. Sibley --

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - DINING ROOM - LATER

Mary at the head of a lavish spread, catatonic husband at her right side. A nursemaid spoons a pale green broth into his Master's flaccid mouth. To Mary's left is Magistrate Hale and Mrs. Hale and their daughter Anne.

HALE

-- who's shown us that true piety
and true beauty amount to the same
worship.

All toast to Mary Sibley. Opposite her, seated beside Alden, Cotton can barely keep his eyes off Anne.

COTTON
(staring at Anne)
Indeed. Beauty is the last miracle
allowed in an ugly, fallen world.

Hale breaks the rather awkward silence that follows Cotton's
version of a compliment.

HALE
(to Alden)
Captain, I imagine the only women
you encountered in your journeys
were covered in war paint.

ALDEN
They wore little paint -- and even
less clothes.

Mary reacts to that. Anne too -- her expression filled with
romantic fantasy.

ANNE
Indian women can be so beautiful --
so... natural.

MRS. HALE
Natural? *Unnatural*, I'd say.
Soulless heathens.

ANNE
Oh Mother.

COTTON
(patting Anne's hand)
I can assure you the Indians *do*
have souls, just as we do.

ALDEN
I'm sure the Indians will be
relieved to hear that.

Anne laughs throatily, which deflates Cotton and distresses
her Mother -- and Mary.

Mary watches the man who used to be hers attracting little
glances from the young beauty who so resembles what she once
was. And she does not like it.

MARY
And what about Witches? Do they
have souls, too?

COTTON

They do. But they've deeded them to the Devil himself -- in exchange for powers, and all they desire.

MARY

A contract?

COTTON

Indeed.

MARY

Ironic. As I believe by law we don't allow a woman to enter into a contract but through the agency of her husband.

COTTON

Not all witches are women.

ANNE

And what do you think, Captain Alden?

ALDEN

Some things just beggar belief. I guess I put Witches in that category. Like an honest Frenchman, a free-spending Dutchman... or a faithful Woman. Things I'll believe in, if and when I meet one.

The barest flicker of anger on Mary's face.

HALE

I worry far more about the town's vulnerability to French and Indian attacks than I do Witches.

Over this, Anne drops her napkin and bends to get it.

HALE

What's your opinion, Captain? Just how vulnerable are we?

Alden pauses when he sees Anne on her knees under the table, smiling seductively up at him. She puts a finger to her lips -- shhh.

Anne reaches out and begins to stroke Alden's crotch.

Alden glances up to see if anyone can see this. But when he looks back down, it's not Anne grasping at his cock but Mary. She gently nibbles at his hard-on with her teeth.

HALE

Captain?

And just as quickly, Mary's gone. Alden looks up, disoriented -- was he hallucinating?

Mary, down at the head of the table, stares directly at him like a cat who just swallowed a bird -- as though she knows exactly what odd images just invaded Alden's thoughts.

MARY

Are you all right, Captain Alden?

ALDEN

(rattled but covering)

I think so. Just... this rich food didn't agree with me.

MARY

Some fresh air might help.

Mary stands to lead the way...

EXT. SIBLEY MANSION - BALCONY - NIGHT

Alden goes out onto a small balcony that overlooks Salem. Mary follows, closing the French doors behind them. She studies him as he takes in the view.

It's the first moment these once passionate lovers have been alone together in more than ten years -- though they are not *really* alone.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - CONTINUOUS

From inside, Magistrate Hale observes Mary and Alden through the glass. He seems to be studying their body language.

EXT. SIBLEY MANSION - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

The air between them is so charged it seems they might fight or fuck right there.

MARY

I heard you were killed.

ALDEN

How long after you married Sibley?

MARY
(ignoring that)
I remember being told once that the
war couldn't last a year.

Alden realizes they can be seen, if not heard.

ALDEN
(quietly)
Wasn't up to me.

Their faces remain placid to anyone watching, but their low
voices fire with intensity --

MARY
No. But it was you who stopped
writing. Yet I waited for you.
Years and years without a word...

He hesitates, trying to keep all emotion from his face, as if
they were exchanging pleasantries about the weather.

ALDEN
I -- couldn't write.

Mary's smile belies the anger in her voice.

MARY
Of course. Too busy saving the
country.

ALDEN
Not exactly. I was captured.

Alden is almost unable to get the words out, and his lips
barely move as he does.

ALDEN
I only recently -- escaped.

He looks down and she follows his glance -- to his open palm
at the worn silver half-coin lying there.

ALDEN
(coolly -- quietly)
Mashkawi-ikido. That's what their
priest man called it. Wouldn't let
the others take it from me. Said
vows were sacred. And the universe
itself kind of a fabric of vows.
Breaking them carries consequences.
And causing others to break 'em was
nearly as bad.

(MORE)

ALDEN (CONT'D)

Course, might just be a half a silver coin. And you got no shortage of coins *now*...

Mary holds her smile in place but her eyes flood, as Alden's stone walls of emotional reserve suddenly burst --

ALDEN

(now quietly fierce)

Come with me. Now. Tonight. Take nothing but yourself. I have some money from my service. In a bank in New York. We can be together -- *anywhere* -- anywhere but here.

MARY

Here. Where we were born. Where you said we'd die...

ALDEN

Together. Without you it's nothing to me. Unless you aren't -- you -- anymore.

While Mary's heart battles her head, her arms reach out of their own accord towards him --

MARY

(a quiet torrent)

You don't understand -- You can't -- I can't -- It's so complicated -- I don't know where to begin --

She looks at him and for a second we see something we've yet to see in the adult Mary -- a hint of fear -- even desperation.

MARY

He'd never let me. They'd --

Before she can finish, she catches movement out of the corner of her eye --

Magistrate Hale opens the French Doors -- putting the dagger in Alden's moment.

HALE

Even you, Mrs. Sibley, have no right to monopolize a guest like Captain Alden. I've brought him a rare, wondrous thing -- a ceegar of tobacco all the way from Guyana to smoke over some brandy.

Alden smiles stiffly and shoves the coin into his pocket.

ALDEN

I'm afraid all this civilized eating and drinking has laid me out, Magistrate. A smoke and I'd have to steal Mr. Sibley's wheeled chair to get home.

He looks to Mary, and leaves it an open invitation --

ALDEN

Best if I get going...

-- a last light of hope hidden in his eye. For a split-second we sense that Mary might just leave with him -- but her expression goes cold.

MARY

Goodnight, Captain Alden. I hope you enjoyed your homecoming.

-- a light we see blown out as Alden swallows his rising emotions and steps back inside.

Hale casts an arched eye at his hostess, but sees only perfectly composed features.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary weeps at a small table by the window, beside a glass bowl filled with water and floating carnations.

Her beautiful stoic face is streaked by tears -- a decade's worth of pain resurfacing.

And as that pain resurfaces, we see a strange thing: the vivid red and white carnations floating in the water beside her begin to wither and rot.

And as her emotions rise, the water in the pool begins to ripple, the glass itself vibrates until the glass EXPLODES just as Mary rips a chain from around her neck and throws it across the room.

Her servant silently bends to collect the chain, at the end of which hangs -- Mary's half of the silver coin.

The silent servant turns and we finally see her face --

TITUBA

Stop your weeping, Woman. That boy
don't deserve those tears.

It's TITUBA, the cinnamon-skinned girl slave. Impossibly, she hasn't aged a day since we last saw her ten years ago. A creepy maturity belies her appearance.

MARY

They aren't for him. They're for
the girl I was.

TITUBA

That girl belongs to somebody else
now.

She begins to run a fine tortoise shell comb through Mary's
tresses -- a bit roughly.

TITUBA

Somebody mighty jealous.

That desperate fear flickers across Mary's face --

TITUBA

(softer now)

Was it he left you to the wolves?
No, Child. It was he that saved
you from the wolves. And raised
you up. Up where you belong --

As Tituba speaks, Mary draws herself up, straightens her
shoulders and regains her regal bearing.

TITUBA

Now dry your eyes. Leave your
anger and pain with the *Kenaima*,
let him feed on it. Has he not
been true to his vow? Are not your
enemies now your slaves? Do you
not have everything you desire?

MARY

Almost everything.

As if on cue, the sound of BOOTS on STEPS outside. Mary
glances out the window in time to see a broad-brimmed hat of
a man stepping to their door --

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - DOWNSTAIRS - A BEAT LATER

Mary pulls open the heavy door, but it's not Alden. It's
Giles Corey. Smiling through his missing teeth.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - PARLOR - NIGHT

Mary sits, trying not to cringe at the stains that Giles' blood and mud-stained deerskin is leaving on her furniture.

GILES

I had a small farm. First it broke my heart and then my back. As you and I both know, the heart heals.

He looks at her pointedly, earning a wintry smile.

GILES

But the back never do. Took up trapping. A meagre living. Ruined the Indians and it's ruining me.

He pulls a small bottle from his coat pours a dollop into the tea cup. Something menacing in his manner keeps Mary from objecting -- or interrupting.

GILES

Thing about trapping is, your good catch comes at night. But by morning, it's someone else's meal. Me -- I stay close to my traps.

MARY

Fascinating Mister Corey, bu--

GILES

That's why I was there.

MARY

Excuse me?

GILES

The night you did it. You and your Cinnamon Girl.

A chilling silence. She knows exactly what night he's talking about.

MARY

You waited a long time.

GILES

Nobody's business 'til now. But that was John Alden's baby you buried out there.

She doesn't deny it.

GILES

The way he feels about you, he has
a right to know. Now you going to
tell him? Or am I?

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDEN FARM - NEXT MORNING

Alden shoulders his deerskin bag, and at the edge of the road
he looks back at the empty house, storing a last look.

EXT. SALEM - GRAVEYARD - MORNING

Moving past the gravestones -- stopping finally before a wide
stone with twin sets of stone wings and two names:

John and Sarah Alden.

Born in the County of Essex in England and died in the town
of Salem, Massachusetts. Alden bends down over his parents'
grave. A quiet moment as he pays his respects.

Odd sounds break the moment -- SCRAPING, then BRITTLE
SNAPPING, and a string of BLASPHEMOUS PROFANITY.

Alden peers over a nearby tombstone to find Anne Hale --
who's snapped a charcoal making a grave rubbing onto a large
notebook. He looks down at a rather fine, and for the day
ultra-realistic, sketch of a horse.

ALDEN

You're good.

Anne looks up, pleased by the sight of him.

ANNE

Reverend Lewis says drawing is
Idolatry. Like worshipping nature
or something.

ALDEN

There are worse things to worship.

She reaches out and takes his big chin in her small hand,
turning his head to catch the light.

ANNE

I'd like to draw you. Especially
your scar.

ALDEN

No time to sit for a portrait, I'm
afraid. I'm on my way out of town.

ANNE

So soon? Afraid of Witches? Or
being taken for one?

Just as he feels the sweet heat radiating from Anne, Alden gives her a little smile and moves off.

Anne studies him as he walks away, then gathers her broken charcoals and steps out from around the old Mausoleum --

-- only to step straight into Mary. Anne's startled.

MARY

I didn't mean to frighten you.

ANNE

I wasn't frightened. Just surprised.

MARY

Yes. Of course. A girl brave enough to rub gravestones.

ANNE

I'm not afraid of death.
I'm afraid of not living.

MARY

That's because you know nothing of death. And less of life.

Mary's hand strokes Anne's long, loosening chestnut hair -- a charged movement that takes the young girl by surprise.

MARY

I can teach you. About life. And death. And many things in between.

Anne's like a deer in the lamp. Unable to move or breathe.

MARY

Let me teach you a first lesson.
Know what killed nearly every woman buried here?

Mary gestures at the stone skulls and skeletal angels adorning the graves.

MARY

Love. Most died in childbirth.
You see, Love is to a woman what War is to a man. The most deadly thing they'll do.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Only a fool runs quickly to War.
Or love. Best watch yourself.

ANNE

Thank you, Mrs. Sibley. I can only
aspire to your happy wisdom.

She clutches her pad tightly and walks off. Mary watches what could almost be her younger self walking proudly away -- then glances down at her own hand -- and *the long chestnut hairs* wrapped around her finger. Anne's hair.

Mary hides her hand, and the hairs, in her lace hand-warmer.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALEM - MARKET - DAY

Buzzing with farmers, fishermen, and every kind of ware seller. A sudden commotion in the crowd as people move out of the way to let a WAGON rattle through the market. And sitting on the back of the wagon --

MERCY LEWIS

All eyes in the market on Mercy, with a rope around her waist, the other end held by Cotton. Mercy looks around at her former friends and neighbors. And they instinctively shrink back from her. Her taut, rigid face almost smiles at the power. We see flies crawling on and around her mouth.

COTTON

Though she cannot name a name, or
point to them. She will show us.

Cotton leads her through the crowd like a customs officer might lead a contraband-sniffing dog. Mercy's movement is stiff and spasmodic, like a broken doll, and is accompanied by odd creaks and scrapings from inside her joints.

People turn away from her gaze, but quickly look back as she passes -- fascinated and terrified at the notorious girl.

Mercy almost seems to enjoy her twisted fame -- this power to make people cower and move just by looking at them.

But then, her eyes lock on someone -- someone who doesn't look away -- and suddenly she's on a bee-line.

As people back away from her, we can see she seems to be heading straight toward --

MARY SIBLEY

By a stall selling expensive imported glass. Mary doesn't turn away -- she continues to look right into the girl's impossibly black eyes.

Suddenly Mercy's head pivots 180 degrees, nearly snapping her own neck, she SCREAMS an inhuman screech and walks as rapidly as her contorted and constricting limbs will allow -- toward a booth where still-bloody furs hang from a wooden frame.

Mercy falls to her knees and begins to convulse, shoves her fingers in her mouth and bites down hard.

Before Cotton can stop her, she chews off the tip of her little finger and SPITS it out -- hitting a man in his back. She screams again and now the crowd is screaming too.

She points at the man. Every eye in the place turns to look at the owner of the stall, the man at whose very feet Mercy has fallen:

Giles Corey.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SALEM HILL - DAY

Alden takes a last look back at the town he once planned to die in -- and walks away.

The sound of horse and wagon, and the sure knowledge of the dust to follow, makes Alden step out of the road. But the wagon stops -- leaving the dust cloud to pass over Alden --

ISAAC (O.S.)
Need a ride, Captain?

As the dust clears, Alden sees Isaac with the reins in one hand, and a flintlock pointed straight at him in the other.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALEM - COMMON - DAY'S END

As the sun sinks behind one of the seven gables, the shadow of the Sibley House rolls cross the Common like spilled ink.

And at the apex of that shadow, almost pulling it like a royal train behind her, Mary Sibley walks past gangs of people exchanging rumors and anxieties as word has spread: *They've caught the Witch! Burn the Witch!*

Mary ignores them and steps into --

INT. SALEM GAOL - CONTINUOUS

A tense scene: Giles Corey flanked by militia men, Cotton Mather getting nowhere interrogating.

MARY
Is this him? The Witch?

COTTON
(flustered)
I think so. All the books say, if the victim--

MARY
Never mind your books. Is this the witch?

COTTON
(uncertain)
He won't plead either way.

Mary turns her cold eye on Giles, with no acknowledgement of their last meeting.

MARY

Is that so?

GILES

Won't dignify the accusation. If you can call a young girl's fit an accusation.

He's a brave man. A proud one. And a crafty one.

GILES

Only thing I have to say I'll say to Captain John Alden.

He directs this comment at Mary, as though to say "don't fuck with me". Mary ignores him, looks to Cotton.

COTTON

I've sent men for Captain Alden, but I'm told he's left town.

It's news to her. And by the look of it -- not good news. But she stays focused.

MARY

Just obtain a plea.

COTTON

And if he remains silent?

MARY

You've been granted power. Use it. Press him for an answer. Let the same devil that holds his tongue hold the stones.

She sweeps out of the small, dirty Gaol. Behind her, Cotton nods to the two militia men who each take one of Giles' old, sinewy arms.

COTTON

Mister Corey, *How do you plead?*

GILES

Done toldja. Got nothing to plead. Just find me Captain Alden and I'll have plenty to say.

EXT. DAGON WAY - LATER

A dirt road off the main Old Salem Road that cuts around Mt. Dagon and skirts the deep woods. Isaac's in the wagon, flintlock pointed at the back of Alden's head as he drives.

ALDEN

(hitting another rut)
You know Isaac, the road's seen better days, and a flintlock's a touchy thing. Mind putting that down or pointing it someplace less -- vital?

Isaac keeps the gun trained.

EXT. SALEM - SIBLEY MANSION - NIGHT

Tituba opens the door even before Mary climbs the steps.

TITUBA

Hurry -- you'll be late.

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - MARY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tituba applies a salve to Mary's soft skin and daubs her lips and dips into her mouth.

Tituba removes a rounded piece of wood from a velvet bag. Like a thick, short broom handle, polished smooth with years of rubbing with oils. We don't see what Tituba does with this stick -- *but it sends ripples of pleasure through Mary.*

Her entire body seems to be alight by a charge through her spine. Her back arches in response to Tituba's movements, her eyes roll back, her hair is visibly blown back by an unseen wind --

And at the peak of this orgasmic movement, in mid-writhe on the bed, mouth open, eyes wide and white, Mary freezes, without even a breath's movement -- a living statue of herself.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

The old dirt road doesn't so much end as taper down to a foot path where Isaac leads Alden on foot into the deep woods.

ALDEN

What are we doing here Isaac?

ISAAC

First time I saw them, I thought I was dreaming.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

So I cut myself -- to test.

(shows ugly scab on palm)

Weren't no dream. I know people think I'm touched. Shit -- if you had a fucking F burned in your forehead you'd be a little touched too. But I ain't stupid. I know things. And I can follow the Moon and stars. So I came back. Night after night. And what do you know? 28 nights later, the Dark of the Moon, same place, same time -- well, some things just got to be seen to be believed.

These deep woods at night are dark as a cave.

ALDEN

Say you managed to convince me witches exist. What makes you think I'd give a shit?

ISAAC

Because I know you, John Alden. And I remember -- when the whip tore into my back -- I looked out and saw your face. No fear, no lust, not even plain relief that it wasn't you up there. No, all I saw in your eyes was an angry fire -- fire of Justice. And fire like that don't go out.

Alden ignores this -- reaches his hand out and feels a tree in front of him.

ALDEN

If your Witches meet here, they got better night eyes than I do.

Isaac crouches and waves at Alden to do the same.

ISAAC

They don't need night eyes. The night *is* their eyes. Look at this.

He beckons Alden to squat down and see -- a thick patch of strange mushrooms growing out of the black mulch of the forest floor. These aren't your usual mushrooms -- but cauliflower-sized excrescence of milky fungal flesh which seems to glisten a translucent oily red.

Isaac pokes the end of the flintlock into the weird fungous and slowly pulls it out -- strands of sticky fluorescent goo connect it to the earth.

ISAAC

One night, I seen 'em cover their
whole naked selves in this shit.

In lieu of an answer, Alden swiftly flattens Isaac's nose with his fist and grabs the flintlock from his hand. Isaac drops to the ground, dazed. Before Alden can check to see if another blow is necessary --

-- he sees an approaching GLOW. He takes cover. A HORSE goes by -- the human-shaped rider has the head of a PIG. Pigman holds a lantern in one hand as he goes. Alden moves to follow unseen --

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Pigman rider dismounts.

Alden tries to get closer in the shadows, crouches behind an enormous BLACK TREE, gnarled branches reaching into the night. And from each of these branches hangs small bundles of dried sticks and mud, like crude little dolls.

Beyond the tree, the Pigman hurls the lantern into a clearing -- WHOOSH -- it hits the ground and sets a BONFIRE alight with the effect of a FLASH BOMB.

Alden's knocked to the ground by it.

As he recovers, we begin to hear MOANS from somewhere in the darkness. Alden stays low, crawls forward on the dark earth, trying to see who's back there without himself being seen.

A SCUTTling on the ground in front of his face -- a lizard freezes and looks at Alden -- with eyes sewn shut.

The blind lizard scuttles off. Alden raises up on his elbows and as his eyes adjust to the dark, it's clear these are not MOANS of pain -- but *pleasure*...

The Pigman's FIRE burns in a circle around a large darkness from which the liquid moans of ecstasy rise. More than a dozen naked men and women in a kind of natural, shallow, black mud bath.

Touching, licking, stroking, kissing, sucking, fucking. A dozen people having the most intense orgy since the reign of Caligula.

Alden can't believe his eyes: Each couple intensely, even infinitely, absorbed in their own pleasure, as they also reach out all around them to touch and connect with the others, coupling, now tripling and beyond...

...and as the slippery bodies intertwine, *the warm, viscous, velvet black fluid is rising around them*, making their sliding and thrusting, their penetrations and tangles, all the wetter in the flickering, shiny darkness. Until, it's impossible to tell where one body ends and another begins.

As Alden peers into this erotic vortex it takes all his will not to fall in. From the wet, sex-soaked black pit, eerie whispers rise:

CHANTING VOICES

*Walpurgisnacht. Pestilentia.
Maleficarium. Cruor Innocentia...*

And as the words rise, so rise THIRTEEN WITCHES, male and female, all naked and dripping with black ichor. Each wears a SEVERED ANIMAL HEAD -- wolf, stag, pig, etc.

Just as Mercy Lewis described.

Twelve of them have hands all joined in the middle, all holding something together. And though they all drip with the black ichor they rose from, the thing which they hold is spotless -- a large WHITE DOVE. Wings spread by twelve of the witches. Its little heart visibly beating beneath the white feathers.

The thirteenth witch -- her beautiful body dripping black, face masked by the head of a Stag -- presses a long, sharp fingernail into the breast of the white bird.

Until with a spurt of RED ON WHITE, the nail suddenly penetrates the dove's breast --

At that terrible moment, they sense Alden and turn, as one, directly toward him.

And then twelve of the thirteen VANISH into thin air -- the man with the head of a swine is the only Witch left. Alden reacts to the impossible sights, takes aim with his pistol.

ALDEN

Stay back!

Pigman rushes him. Alden FIRES, hitting him in the ear. The Witch squeals horribly and disappears --

-- leaving Alden alone in the deepest part of the woods, made all the darker by the roaring bonfire behind him...

INT. SIBLEY MANSION - MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The living statue of Mary suddenly comes alive with a sharp gush of breath. Tituba rushes to her side.

TITUBA
What is it?

MARY
The circle was broken.

TITUBA
By who?

Mary's face is unreadable. Did she see Alden?

EXT. THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Alden's eyes adjust to the darkness and he sees he's by the black tree -- the one with all the little *dolls* hanging from the gnarled branches.

Standing beneath them now, in the flickering bonfire light, he can see them more clearly. They are not all the same, but each unique. A tiny patch of cloth, or some artifact to identify them -- the end of a cigar, strands of hair, etc.

For a mad moment it seems this blackened tree contains little ragged dolls of all the people of Salem. And the words of Isaac come back to him --

ISAAC (V.O.)
They want Salem. And won't stop
'til they fixed us all.

ALDEN
Isaac.

Alden looks around in the darkness for the driver he knocked unconscious nearby.

In the fading light of the bonfire he finds him. He's rolled onto his stomach. But there does seem to be some movement -- is he breathing?

Alden reaches out and gently turns Isaac over --

-- but he is the human equivalent of a rotten hollowed log -- and that movement was not breath but the heaving mass of bugs, grubs, and beetles that have impossibly devoured him.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. SALEM - COMMON - NIGHT

In the center of town, the Witch Panic is in full-swing. An ever-growing crowd gathers around Giles Corey, who's been tied and staked to the ground. Cotton Mather stands over him. The bailiff and two militia men lift HEAVY STONES from a cart.

The atmosphere is beyond tense. Many not happy to see one of their fellow citizens dragged like a roped bull into the Common. Others want blood. A palpable sense of people on the edge of becoming an altogether different beast -- a mob.

COTTON

Please. I don't want to do this.

GILES

Then don't.

COTTON

Just plead. It's not a difficult question. Are you guilty or not?

Giles doesn't respond. People are yelling insults, arguing. A small fight breaks out.

CROWD

Set him free! Hang the Witch! You can't make him answer! Let 'em go to Hell! etc.

Cotton kneels down beside Giles -- practically *begging* him.

COTTON

Be reasonable, man. I have the power to *press* you for an answer. Just say the words, guilty or not guilty. And we can stop all this.

Cotton gestures at the deadly carnival atmosphere, and the clot of stout men who stand by the pile of stones.

GILES

If I say I'm guilty you'll hang me before dawn. If I say I'm not, I throw my fate in the hands of you cocksuckers. I'll hold my peace and trust in the Lord.

He winks at Cotton. And actually draws some laughs and hoots from the crowd.

Cotton won't be humiliated. He nods to the stout men. And the first lot of stones are placed on the board atop Giles' grey-haired chest.

Giles looks stoic, but the weight audibly forces all the breath out of him. And must hurt like hell. He looks to Cotton.

COTTON

Have you something to say?

Giles nods. Cotton bends down.

GILES

(defiant whisper)

More stones.

EXT. SALEM HILL - NIGHT

On the highest point Alden can see Salem below -- some kind of crowd in the Common. He looks down the road away from town. And at the dark woods where he saw -- all he saw.

Isaac was right. He can't walk away this time.

EXT. SALEM - ROAD - CONTINUOUS

As Alden comes over the hill toward the Common, he hears shouts and jeers. Something is happening and, by the sound of it, something ugly. He takes off running.

EXT. SALEM - COMMON - A BEAT LATER

Cotton stands frozen as the strange and terrible scene rages around him. Alden runs into view, starts pushing through the crowd.

ALDEN

What's going on?! Giles!

A Militia Man moves to block his way but Alden shoves him back. The men continue to pile stones on Giles' chest. The wood platform creaks under the weight.

ALDEN

Get off him!!

He races for Giles, frantically pulling stones off his friend -- but it's all too late. With a horrible wet crunch, Giles's chest finally gives way and he's fatally crushed beneath the weight.

TIME SEEMS TO SLOW DOWN:

Blood spatters onto Cotton's face. He wipes it away then stares in horror at his hands -- and his shirt -- realizes he is covered in Giles' blood.

He looks up at the high window where Mercy Lewis squats in a window box, staring down with an idiot grin at Cotton covered in Giles' blood.

Cotton falls to his knees.

Alden, mad with rage as he attempts to pull his friend from the rubble looks up from the crushed body wildly -- as if searching for *who* is responsible -- and sees -- Cotton.

ALDEN

Sonofabitch!

Alden goes for him but gets held back by two militiamen. He struggles for a beat, then tenses, as if feeling a familiar chill behind him. He turns to face the looming bulk of the Sibley Mansion that lords over Salem --

-- to the balcony where Mary Sibley surveys the horrific scene below. Mary sees Alden staring at her and they lock eyes.

EXT. SIBLEY MANSION - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Mary loses all her breath. To see the man she loved -- still loves -- look at her with such unbridled hatred is devastating. Her cool demeanor begins to fracture...

Then a shadow from behind falls across her as Tituba steps onto the balcony to bring her *mistress* back inside.

As Mary turns to go in, her placid mask is firmly back in place, though Tituba studies her closely as they enter --

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- only to be assaulted by the sound of a door SLAM. They turn to see Magistrate Hale, Anne's Father, livid with rage.

HALE

Do you have any idea what you
backwoods muskrat bitches have
done? You're going to expose all
of us!

Hale's ear is bleeding from a gunshot wound where Alden shot the Pigheaded witch -- and he's wearing the same clothing.

MARY

(coolly dismissive.)

The Reverend's Daughter belongs to me. I decide what names come from her lips, and at whom she points her finger. Something *you* would do well to remember.

HALE

The arrogance! You've brought a *witch hunt* to our very door!

MARY

Exactly what I vowed I would do. Gotten the slack-souled citizens of Salem -- God's very Chosen people -- to do what we could never succeed in doing: spill innocent blood. *Cruor Innocentia*. Do you know what that means, Mister Hale?

By the look on his bloodied face, he's beginning to -- the scornful rage he wore is slowly fading.

MARY

Perhaps you Old World witches, born in the burning times, are simply too scared -- or too scarred -- for this New World.

She studies Hale with a condescending eye.

MARY

For hundreds of years Witches dreamt of performing the *Grand Rite*. But so much blood is needed. It's been impossible to do without being caught -- until now.

She turns back to the near-riotous scene below.

MARY

Now the good citizens of Salem are doing it for us. And they'll keep shedding Innocent Blood in their fear, their trembling, their -- *panic* -- until the *Grand Rite* is achieved.

HALE

A mighty vision. I salute you. But the mightiest visions are the most fragile until achieved. *Someone* interrupted us tonight.

(MORE)

HALE (CONT'D)

(then)

Did you see who it was?

Mary hesitates at this. Tituba watches closely.

MARY

No. But every shadow in town
conceals eyes and ears that belong
to me. There's no place to hide in
Salem.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIVINING ROD - LATER THAT NIGHT

The Old Bawd is turning away a crowd of men young and old.

OLD BAWD

Sorry gents. All full up.

FRUSTRATED SAILOR

C'mon Maud. You got at least a
dozen dollymops in there.

OLD BAWD

All the Girls are busy. Guess it's
true. Death makes people horny.

INT. COTTON'S LOVE NEST - CONTINUOUS

All the girls are busy, though there's only one customer --
Cotton. At the moment he lies face up amidst a pile of
writhing, warm female pulchritude. Yet he seems to be taking
no pleasure. Or already taken too much, perhaps in futile
attempt to stop his churning, guilty mind.

A flame-haired Beauty rises from the tangle of nude limbs.

GLORIANA

Lost your lust for life? Don't
tell me that you are full up.

COTTON

No -- some holes cannot be filled.

She crawls towards him, offering her own places to be filled.

GLORIANA

Really my Lord? Which holes are
those?

COTTON

The ones we dig for ourselves.

LOUD SHOUTING from the hallway outside, POUNDING FEET, followed by a SPLINTERING DOOR. Cotton jumps to his feet.

As the door BURSTS OPEN:

Alden stands there, a pistol in his hand and fire in his eyes.

The whores scatter, leaving the naked Cotton backed wide-eyed against the bed. We fear for a moment Alden is there to exact revenge for the death of his friend. He levels the flintlock at Cotton.

ALDEN

If Giles Corey was a Witch then you were born a girl.

(flintlock aims lower)

Or you're gonna die as close to one as this flintlock can leave you.

COTTON

(rattled)

I'm sorry about your friend. Perhaps he *was* innocent. But you must understand, I gave him every opportunity to plead --

ALDEN

(cutting him off)

I saw them. Just like you said Mercy Lewis described them. Animal heads and all.

Cotton stops at this, listening now.

ALDEN

I don't know what they were. But I know they were real. I shot one of them. They bleed like you or I.

(beat)

Get dressed.

COTTON

To what end?

ALDEN

Though it pains me more than I can say -- I need you. You have the moral compass of a meat ant, but you know something about Witches.

COTTON

I don't know *what* I know. I know there's evil.

ALDEN

You ain't the first man to tell me
so tonight.

COTTON

But how do you wrestle evil when --
(at his own nakedness)
-- it's already in you?

ALDEN

My father did me the great service
of living a life of quiet
obscurity. A good man. But not
exactly a hard act to follow.

Alden puts his hand out and pulls Cotton to his feet.

ALDEN

There are no bigger shoes in the
whole damn country than the ones
everyone expects you to fill. Your
grandfather founded this place.
Your father still runs it. But I
don't give a flea's fuck what your
name is, or who your father is...

(then)

If you're right -- if there really
is a war on in Salem -- I only care
about one thing. Whose side are
you on?

EXT. SIBLEY MANSION - NIGHT

Candlelight shines from the master bedroom.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A fine glass cake top -- the very one Mary was holding at the
market -- sits on her small dressing table. Only it doesn't
hold a cake, but a mouse, a bird, and several black beetles.
All very much alive. Small glass bowls contain oils, wax,
deep-hued powders.

And, most curiously, all this is arrayed around a small pile
of sawdust and several thick strands of hair.

Mary sits before this weird array HUMMING almost inaudibly.
As her humming rises, the sawdust on the table begins to
vibrate, as though reacting to her voice.

Mary spits thickly into the pile of dust and hair. She bends
low over the table and blows ever-so-gently into the
disgusting pile. With a curious, almost whistling sound the
wet dust and hair seem to CONGEAL.

Mary reaches beneath the glass top and snatches up the little mouse, feeling its softness and its rapid pulse in her hand before she crushes it in her fist and lets its liquefied essence drip onto the congeal on the desk.

She follows this with sprinkle of fresh-crushed beetles.

Mary wipes her hands and takes up needle and thread. Only the bird remains under the glass. It flutters its wings with concern. Mary uses the horrid mixture of dust and hair and spit and dead things as the stuffing for a homespun DOLL.

She sews up the button-eyed doll, humming quietly, stitch by stitch...

EXT. SALEM COMMON - NIGHT

Cotton and Alden cross the Common towards Rev. Lewis' house.

COTTON

One could almost feel sorry for them. Persecuted for centuries. Exterminated like rats. Driven from every country on the continent...

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - A BEAT LATER

Alden ascends the stairs behind Cotton. A candle on the wall spreads flickering shadows like distorted faces watching them. Inhuman moans and creaks echo from a door down the hallway.

COTTON

Don't you see? They got here just as we did. Probably on the very same boats.

Cotton pauses before Mercy's door.

ALDEN

But what do they want?

COTTON

A country of their own.

He opens the door and gestures for Alden to look into --

INT. MERCY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alden stares in silent horror at Mercy Lewis tied to the bedposts -- her body LEVITATING off the sheets. Cotton waves Alden to come closer. Against the strong opinion of every muscle in his body, Alden complies.

COTTON

Go on. See if you can.

Alden puts his hands on Mercy's shoulders and tries with all his strength to push her back down to the bed. To no avail.

COTTON

I read of a case in Marburg. Back in the '60s. Child remained above her bed for thirty days.

ALDEN

What finally brought her down?

COTTON

Finding, and *burning*, the Witch.

INT. ANNE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anne at her sketchbook, draws by candlelight a rather fine impression of the rather fine profile of Captain John Alden.

She's seated on her bed, a small pile of childhood dolls and stuffed animals behind her. But the candlelight through her sheer gown shows she's far from a little girl.

Her door CREAKS open a bit -- with a hint of movement as though a cat just slipped into the room.

Anne studies her work -- decides the scar isn't quite right -- bends to erase it and try again.

A SHUFFLE of movement behind her as something comes onto the bed.

ANNE

Go away, cat. You'll ruin my work.

She turns to shoo the cat off the bed, but there is no cat there. She looks about the room --

Then shrugs it off. As she returns to her drawing we see behind her a new addition to the pile: the Button Eyed Doll we saw Mary Sibley make. Its black eyes stare straight ahead, creepy in their deadness.

Until they shift to stare right at Anne's back.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT