

THE WITCHES OF WINDSOR

CAST

Satan
Hypatia

Mother Elizabeth Stile
Mother Dutton (cook)
Mother Devell (healer)
Mother Margaret (midwife)

John Knight, constable
Luke, his son
Thomas Rowe, jailor
John Griffith, ostler

'Father' Rosimond ('wiseman' or wizard)
His daughter Anne
Queen Elizabeth I
Dr John Dee, astrological and scientific adviser to the Queen
Sir Henry Neville (Prosecutor)

Citizens

Scene 1

WINDSOR 1579.

FATHER ROSIMOND, A LOCAL 'WISEMAN', MAGICIAN, WIZARD OR SORCERER IS PRACTISING BLACK MAGIC IN HIS HOUSE WITH THE HELP OF HIS DAUGHTER, ANNE. HE IS STANDING IN A CIRCLE OF MAGIC SIGNS AND SYMBOLS. HE IS WEARING A LONG BLACK FUR-LINED CLOAK AND A BLACK BERET-LIKE HAT. HE IS HOLDING A LONG STICK OR WAND. ANNE IS HOLDING A BOOK OF SPELLS FROM WHICH HE IS SOLEMNLY CHANTING SOME MUMBO JUMBO

Rosimond So hear me then
 From one make ten,
 And let two be,
 The same with three
 The four is nix,
 From five and six
 The witch can mix
 A seven and eight,
 That's got it straight!
 From nine make one,
 And ten is none.
 That's the witches' one times one (*from Marlowe's Faustus*)

THERE IS A SUCCESSION OF LOUD KNOCKS AT THE DOOR. ROSIMOND FREEZES.

Rosimond Go to the door, daughter.

SHE MAKES TO GO, BUT THEN HESITATES.

Go to the door!

Anne Father, I.....I am afeared.

Rosimond Go! Do not open the door. Ask who it is.

EXIT ANNE

Anne (OFF) Who's there? Hello. Who's there? Who knocks?

ANNE RE-ENTERS

No answer, father.

Rosimond Ah.

THE KNOCKING STARTS AGAIN

Anne Shall I open the door, father?

Rosimond No, wait. He will come. To him all doors are open.

Anne You mean you have summoned the.....?

Rosimond Of course. What do you think we've been doing for the past hour?

ENTER SATAN IN BLACK-TIE MODERN DRESS. ROSIMOND SINKS TO HIS KNEES AND GESTURES ANNE TO DO THE SAME.

Satan Hello, anyone at home? Ah, Rosimond. Get up man. Fine time to call me. I was enjoying a roasting of stuffed bankers. Yes, indeed. And at one of Hades' finest grills.

Rosimond Forgive me Master, but the situation here needs your urgent attention and presence.

Satan And where, pray, is here?

Rosimond Windsor, Master.

Satan Windsor. Ah yes, last time I was here the town was burning

three so-called martyrs or heretics at the stake. Now what?

Rosimond It's the Queen, Master.

Satan Queen Elizabeth. You mean you're burning the old girl too?

Rosimond No Master. She's nearby in Windsor Castle. She is ailing. She and her courtiers think that witches are plotting to kill her. Some waxen female figures have been found with pins stuck in their hearts.

Satan Hm. I've never been very fond of image magic myself. All much too primitive. Why should I bother with such trivia?

Rosimond Master, it's not just the use of image magic. It means that anyone who practises a bit of honest magic, wizardry or witchcraft is being accused of treason. I fear a witch-hunt.

Satan A witch-hunt, eh. Well, what do you want me to do about it?

Rosimond We need you, Master, to use your power to stem the tide of hysteria against witches and to protect your followers against charges of treason.

Satan What's in it for me?

Rosimond Master, you surely do not wish to be implicated in treason against the Queen.

Satan Well, I've got nothing against the old girl personally. Hell knows there's enough devilry going on in the court without me making a personal appearance. Now then, I need a drink while I think.

Rosimond Anne, get the Master a drink. What would you like? We have chicken blood, toad's blood and I think there's some bull's blood.

Satan Why does everyone think I only drink blood? If that's all you've got I'll have a glass of bull's blood, er, with a slice of lemon.

EXIT ANNE

So, I notice that you call yourself Father Rosimond. But you're not a man of the church, are you?

Rosimond No, Master, not now.

Satan You mean you were?

Rosimond I was ordained a Catholic priest.

Satan Were you – how shall I put it – unfrocked?

Rosimond They discovered I was doing magic, Master.

Satan Ah, well that's nothing new. All priests do magic, don't they, with their talk of miracles and holy ghosts and turning bread and wine into flesh and blood. Christians are very good at that. I sometimes wonder if Jesus himself wasn't just a very good wizard.

Rosimond Perhaps, Master, perhaps. I have abandoned my Christian beliefs, but people in the town still call me Father

ENTER ANNE WITH DRINK

Satan Thank you, Mistress Anne. Now then, to business. Clearly, we must attack the idea that witchcraft of any kind means treason. But we must go further and pillory the superstitious fear that people have of witchcraft. I don't mean the ludicrous notion of night-flying witches on broomsticks. I mean the widespread tendency to blame witches for any misfortune – like if your pig dies or if your cow stops giving milk or your child dies of the plague and so on. All the baseless fantasies in other words that give witchcraft a bad name.

Rosimond But Master – I don't know quite how to put this – won't witchcraft always have a bad name as long as it is associated with you?

Satan I note what you say, Rosimond. I'm quite happy to be associated with genuine witches, or wizards like you. What gets my goat is all this superstitious rubbish about proving if someone is a witch. Ducking some poor woman in the river to see if she sinks or swims, pricking a suspected witch on her warts to see if she bleeds. I can hardly believe that humans are capable of such complete bullshit.

Rosimond I agree Master. I am sure that many of the people who are accused of witchcraft are not witches.

Satan Well I must get back to my roast bankers. Keep me informed about developments here. Meanwhile I will send you someone to fight the local hysteria and superstition.

Rosimond You have someone in mind, Master?

Satan

Yes. I cannot reveal who it is until I have consulted her. But she is famous for using her reason to combat unreason. I will send her here on the next full moon. Well, thanks for the drink. Keep up the good work. You have a lovely daughter. I'll see myself out.

EXIT SATAN. ROSIMOND FALLS TO HIS KNEES.
ANNE WRINGS HER HANDS AND RUNS OFF.

Scene 2

EVENING. OUTSIDE THE ALMSHOUSES IN WINDSOR.
THE SOUNDS OF A WOMAN IN LABOUR PAINS ARE HEARD FROM NEARBY.
ENTER HUSBAND, JOHN KNIGHT, LOOKING PANICKY. HE GOES TO MOTHER MARGARET'S DOOR AND BANGS ON IT. THE NEIGHBOURS, MOTHERS STILE, DUTTON, AND DUELL, COME OUT TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON.

John Knight

Hello! Mother Margaret! Hello! For the love of God, where are you?

M. Margaret

(HALF OPENS DOOR) Who's there?

Knight

Constable John Knight. My wife's in terrible birth pains. You'd better come quickly. She's screaming for you.

M. Margaret

(COMING OUT SLOWLY ON A CRUTCH)
Well, John Knight, I am an old woman and I cannot move quickly. My knees are stiff and painful. Give me your arm. How long has your wife been having the pains?

Knight

Since sunset.

M. Margaret

Hm. You have left it late to fetch me. A midwife likes to be with the mother well before the birth. I hope we are not too late.

THEY EXIT

M. Stile:

That John Knight. Just because he's a constable he thinks he can order people to run around after him.

M. Dutton

Be fair, Mother Stile. Any husband whose wife is about to give birth would be shouting for help.

M. Devell

(SINGS) Oh how is your wife Mr Knight, Mr Knight
Come buy up my herbs for her birth pangs tonight
Give her hissop, and rosemary and marjoram too
To make sure her baby will come when it's due.

M. Stile She'd soon need your herbs if she knew what he gets up to on his night rounds.

M. Dutton I'm sure *you* do, Mother Stile.

M. Devell Go on – tell us.

M. Stile I've seen him – creeping out of harlots' lodgings.

M. Devell Harlots!

M. Dutton Harlots – in Windsor?

M. Stile Oh yes. I know where they live.

M. Dutton Well, if he wants to visit harlots on his rounds he's not breaking the law, is he?

M. Stile He's deceiving his wife, though, ain't he? And he's picking up diseases.
(A LOUD SCREAM FROM NEARBY)
Aha, it sounds as though Mother Margaret has brought another baby into this miserable world.

M. Dutton Oh Elizabeth Stile, what a misery you are. Let me give you one of my hot meat pies to cheer you up.

M. Devell And I'll make us some herbal tea.

M. Stile You can keep your herbal tea for your customers, Mother Devell. The last one you gave me made me vomit all night, and as for your hot pies, Mother Dutton, I think you must fill them with rotten offal.

M. Devell How dare you insult my pies! I use only best quality meat.

M. Dutton And my herbal tea is the best in town. It doesn't make people sick – it cures them.

ANOTHER SCREAM, FOLLOWED BY SHOUTING

Look, here comes Mother Margaret.

ENTER MARGARET WITH BLOODSTAINED RAGS.

M. Margaret I was too late.

M. Dutton Too late. You mean....

M. Margaret

The baby was born dead.

ENTER JOHN KNIGHT

Knight

You killed my baby, you evil old woman!

M. Stile

Be off, John Knight. You slander the best midwife in Windsor.

Knight

You stay out of this you ugly old crone. This midwife is a witch. A bloody witch! She took my baby's blood for her black magic

M. Margaret

Calm yourself, Mr Knight. The baby was born dead. There was nothing I could do. I'm sorry.

Knight

Sorry! You put a curse on the child. You wanted its blood for your foul work with the Devil.

M. Margaret

Nonsense, man. Go home and see to your poor wife.

Knight

You will hear more about this. Something evil is at work in this town. And it's disgusting old women like you who are to blame. We will hunt you down and destroy you – like rats. EXIT

M. Margaret

That's what you get when you try to help folk have babies. They blame you if things go wrong.

M. Dutton

You're no longer a wise woman. You're a witch – especially if you're old like us.

M. Margaret

And if you seem a bit odd.

M. Stile

And you're ugly.

M. Margaret

Like the Queen.

M. Dutton

But no one calls *her* a witch.

M. Stile

She'd have your head cut off if you did.

M. Margaret

Well, neighbours, we must stick together. That John Knight could make a lot of trouble for us, especially as he's a constable.

M. Stile

Curse him!

M. Margaret

But that's just what we must not do. That's what our enemies want to accuse us of – that we put curses on

people.

M. Stile Ah, but that gives me the only power I've got – making people fear me for my curses.

Margaret But if people fear you, they will hate you too.

ENTER FATHER ROSIMOND

F. Rosimond Ah, the wise women of Windsor. Good evening ladies. I trust you are all well.

M. Devell I think we are, sir. Would you like some herbal tea?

F. Rosimond I thank you, but nay, Mother Devell. I have come to invite you all to take part in a celebration tomorrow.

M. Margaret A celebration? What kind of celebration?

F. Rosimond A celebration to welcome a visitor from another world.

M. Dutton You mean a spirit – a ghost?

F. Rosimond Well.....you will see.

M. Margaret Sir – I have heard of your so-called celebrations. They say you and your daughter get up to black magic, and that the visitor you speak of is the Devil himself.

F. Rosimond You should not believe such idle chatter, Mother Margaret. No, this visitor is coming to help us rid the town of fear and superstition. Mother Stile, you will come, I'm sure.

M. Stile Aye, where is it to be?

F. Rosimond In the pits behind Master Dodge's cottage. At sunset. If you come I will of course contribute a handsome sum towards your upkeep.

M. Margaret (ASIDE) That's the Devil's temptation.

M. Dutton I will bring some of my pies.

M. Devell (SINGS) And I will bring herbs to drive off the flies
That pester old people when daytime dies.

F. Rosimond Good, good. You always have a rhyme for us Mother Devell. Farewell, till sunset tomorrow. (EXIT)

M. Margaret Have you all lost your wits? That man is the Devil's wizard. If anyone sees you go to this thing tomorrow, they will say you took part in a witch's Sabbath, and that will set off more witch-hunting.

M. Stile Ah what's the harm in a little magic? Our lives are dull enough and will be even duller if we keep away.

M. Devell And he has promised to give us some alms-money.

M Dutton. I'm off to cook some pies. Father Rosimond says they're the best in Windsor.

M.Margaret *Father* Rosimond indeed! A wolf in sheep's clothing more like. If you must go tomorrow, make sure you wear disguise. I will hide nearby to keep an eye on you all.

 SHOUTING AND JEERING IS HEARD.

Voices There they are! The old witches. Let 'em have it!

 MISSILES ARE THROWN AT THE WOMEN.

M. Stile You drunken cowards! Leave us alone.

M. Margaret Get indoors, quickly. They will soon go away. Oh dear, this is just what I was afraid of.

 THEY ALL EXIT

SCENE 3

A CHAMBER IN WINDSOR CASTLE. AN UNWELL QUEEN ELIZABETH IS LANGUISHING ON A DAY BED, BEING ATTENDED BY TWO LADIES IN WAITING. A MINSTREL IS PLAYING SOFTLY ON A LUTE. ENTER DOCTOR JOHN DEE, ALCHEMIST, ASTRONOMER AND ASTROLOGER TO THE QUEEN. HE HAS A LONG WHITE POINTED BEARD.

Queen Ah, Doctor Dee. Welcome. I have to thank you and your astrology for fixing an auspicious date for my review of the fleet.

Dee I am very pleased it sent off so well, Your Majesty.

Queen I hear you have been talking with the angels.

Dee Er, yes Your Majesty, that is my intent. I have not yet succeeded in communicating with them.

Queen Is that a suitable occupation for a wise man like you?

Dee Your Majesty, I believe it would bring immeasurable benefits to the human race.

Queen Hm. Never mind the human race. Will it benefit me?

Dee I'm sure it will, Your Majesty. You will be the first to read the angels' message when I receive it.

Queen If you do manage to speak with them, you might ask them this – how long will I live? After all the uncertainty I have lived through it would be a welcome certainty.

Dee I will, Your Majesty.

Queen We will wait and see. Meanwhile I would like to call on your skills in the occult.

Dee I am at your service.

Queen I have a request which may seem strange or perhaps even unearthly. As you may have heard, certain malignant people have been sticking needles into images of me in an attempt to hasten my death. This is ruining my health.

Dee I have been informed about this evil treason, your Majesty.

Queen You will know then that some of these effigies have been found here in Windsor.

Dee Indeed yes.

Queen Now, I need you to protect me from this image magic. I want you to seek out those responsible and to use your magical powers to defend me from any further attacks of this kind.

Dee I regret the distress this is causing you, Your Majesty.

Queen Distress indeed! I am in torment. I cannot sleep, my head is burning, and my bowels are unspeakable

Dee Your Majesty is sure that these ailments stem from the image magic?

Queen My dear Doctor Dee, I do not think it is just a coincidence. I will reward you well if you can remove the cause of my pains, whether

it is magic or not.

Dee As a Christian, I am sure I will be able to overcome any supernatural forces that are hostile to Your Majesty. I will also seek out herbal treatments that will ease Your Majesty's discomforts.

Queen Well then, go to it. And hurry. Don't spend all your time with the angels.

Dee As you wish, Your Majesty. As you wish. EXIT

Queen Set a witch to catch a witch. (TO LADIES IN WAITING) Ah! Here it comes again. (HOLDING STOMACH) Quickly now, take me to the side room. Curse this affliction! Curse it !

EXEUNT

Scene 4

NIGHT IN WINDSOR, AT THE PITS. MOONLIGHT, BUT THUNDER IN THE DISTANCE.

A BRAZIER IS BURNING CENTRE STAGE

ENTER FATHER ROSIMOND AND HIS DAUGHTER ANNE.

Rosimond Is everything ready?

Anne Yes father.

Rosimond If Satan keeps his promise we will be meeting someone very interesting tonight. The moon is full, so the time is right.

Anne Will it be someone raised from the dead?

Rosimond Satan has the power to do so.

Anne That is a terrifying thought.

Rosimond Satan will deliver someone with the skills of reasoning and diplomacy, given that she will have to deal with superstition and hysteria.

Anne How will we know who it is?

Rosimond We will soon see. I am intrigued that Satan said it would be a woman. Ah, here come the old ladies.

ENTER MOTHERS STILE, DUTTON AND DEVAL, CONCEALING THEIR FACES IN COWLED CLOAKS. MOTHER MARGARET CONCEALS HERSELF BEHIND BUSH.

Rosimond Welcome ladies. You can show yourselves now. There is no one here but Anne and myself. Where is Mother Margaret?

M. Stile She is off delivering a baby somewhere. So, Father Rosimond, is this some kind of witches' Sabbath you've dragged us to?

Rosimond No, not at all. Come, let us sit together and join hands. I'm sure our guest will soon be here. All I know is that it will be a woman.

M. Dutton I thought you said this would be a celebration. Here, have a pie. They are all freshly baked.

Rosimond Well, it's really more a reception – a welcoming party.

M. Devel What, for this woman?

Rosimond Yes. She is er.. she is returning from the dead to be with us.

M.Stile What, you want us to welcome a maggoty old skeleton?

M. Dutton Or a ghost. Lord save us!

M. Devel This is no place for our Lord.

A LOUD CLAP OF THUNDER

Let's be off before hell breaks loose. THE WOMEN RISE TO GO

Rosimond No, wait. Look there where she comes!

A FEMALE FORM IN WHITE EMERGES SLOWLY FROM THE MIST. THEY ALL RECOIL IN AMAZEMENT.

Hypatia Oh hello. Are you the welcoming party?

Rosimond Indeed we are. Welcome back from the dead. May I ask.....?

Hypatia My name is Hypatia. Hypatia of Alexandria. Philosopher, Freethinker, Astronomer, and so on. Who are you?

Rosimond I am Father Rosimond. These ladies are from the town of Windsor and are here at my invitation.

Hypatia Well, it is quite nice to be brought back to life. To tell you the truth I was getting a bit bored with eternal life. There are no books to read, you know, in the celestial kingdom – if that's where I've been for the

past two thousand years. It's wonderful to see the moon and stars again. They haven't changed much since I last looked at them. Now then, what can I do to help? They've given me the status of temporary angel, and I've been given only seven days to sort things out here before I have to go back.

M. Dutton Are you really an angel?

Hypatia If you believe in angels, yes. I never did when I was an earthling. I used to upset the Christians with my pagan views.

Rosimond Well, Miss Hypatia.

Hypatia Just call me Hypatia please.

Rosimond Hypatia. I take it you know about the situation here in Windsor.

Hypatia Yes, I hear that the town is on the verge of a witch-hunt. Some of the Christians in Alexandria used to call me a witch. They thought it unnatural that a woman should be a philosopher and study the heavens. So they set a mob on me and sent me to my death. You ladies aren't witches are you?

M. Stile Certainly not. But some of the townspeople think we are.

M. Devel Just because they dug up some images of the Queen with pins stuck in her.

Rosimond And that's the problem. They are looking for a scapegoat. And because these old ladies are sometimes a bit crabby and eccentric...

M. Stile Who are you calling crabby and eccentric?

Hypatia Wait, now. I am here to wage war on superstition. My weapon is Reason. I will need to see the Queen herself to persuade her to be an ally. And there is a certain Doctor Dee, I am told, who carries some influence with her.

Rosimond There is. He is an astrologer and astronomer. You and he should have much in common.

ENTER MOTHER MARGARET

M. Margaret Listen. I come to warn you. You were followed. On my way here I saw two men watching you from behind a bush. One of them was John Knight.

M. Stile That wretch will say we were having a witches Sabbath.

M. Dutton Margaret, we have been talking with an angel.

M. Margaret I didn't see any angels.

Rosimond Mother Margaret, let me introduce you toAh she has gone.

M.Margaret We, too, must go home quickly. The men may return to persecute us.
Rosimond – I knew nothing good would come of this.

EXIT OLD WOMEN

Rosimond Wait and see. This Hypatia has the power to stop the witch-hunters.
Anne, make sure we have left nothing here that could be used against us.

EXIT

SCENE 5

A ROOM IN WINDSOR CASTLE. DR. DEE IS SEATED AT HIS DESK PEERING INTO A CRYSTAL BALL AND MUTTERING SOMETHING UNINTELLIGIBLE. ENTER HYPATIA WHO WATCHES WHAT HE IS DOING.

Hypatia Hello.

Dee Oh, who are you?

Hypatia Perhaps I am an angel.

Dee You don't look like one.

Hypatia Well we don't all go round with wings and harps.

Dee Hm. Look, I don't know who you are – and I'm very busy.

Hypatia So I see. Have you communed with any angels yet?

Dee How did you know what I'm doing?

Hypatia Well, I know you're Doctor Dee and that you're a famous mathematician who has occasional aberrations like this.

Dee Aberration – how dare you? And who are you?

Hypatia My name is Hypatia – the philosopher from Alexandria.

Dee You're either joking or you're mad. That Hypatia was living in the fourth Century.

Hypatia Well, you Christians talk about being reborn. Why shouldn't pagans like

me be reborn too? And if you want to talk with angels why not talk with me? I've read all your books you know. Believe it or not, you're still struggling to come to much the same conclusions as I have already come to.

Dee Such as?

Hypatia Such as the ellipse the earth makes as it goes round the sun.

Dee Goes round the sun! Show me your maths!

Hypatia Very well. I have it all set down on this scroll. Take a look.

Dee (READS) Good heavens – that is extraordinary. Of course, no one will believe it.

Hypatia Everyone is still bewitched by circles, that's why.

Dee An ellipse – that explains so many mysteries.

Hypatia So there you are – it pays to talk to an angel, doesn't it.

Dee I must be dreaming.

Hypatia Tell me, why are you scrying for angels with this crystal ball? You're surely a man of reason rather than divination?

Dee I am a Christian searching for the fundamental verities of the universe. The angels, if we listen carefully, can tell us how we can live in a universal brotherhood of mankind.

Hypatia I thought Jesus Christ had already done that.

Dee Do you believe in Christ?

Hypatia As a philosopher I have to question everything I believe.

Dee Weren't you condemned as a witch and stoned to death?

Hypatia Yes, by a Christian mob who had forgotten what their saviour said in the sermon on the mount. They called me a witch because I'm a woman, a philosopher and teacher who believes in the power of thought and reason over superstition.

Dee So why are you here?

Hypatia I've been sent to fight this town's superstitions about witchcraft.

Dee Sent? Who sent you?

Hypatia Let's just say I was sent for. Perhaps we can work together.

Dee Perhaps. The Queen herself believes her ill health is caused by image magic and witchcraft.

Hypatia I shall have to go and have a word with her.

Dee Have a word! What impudence!

Hypatia Oh, I'm used to advising the high and mighty. They always suspect that someone is plotting against them. Witches are an easy target. I believe you burn them now instead of stoning them to death. I suppose that's some kind of progress. It has been good to meet you, John Dee. You can now claim truly that you have communed with an angel – albeit a part-time one.

Dee You don't happen to know when the Queen will die, do you? She keeps on asking me.

Hypatia Hm, that's classified information. Anyway, what good would it do to know that?

Dee Oh, I don't know. She is getting old and odd in her ways. Well, come and see me again. It is rare I have the chance to meet a fellow mathematician on my own doorstep.

Hypatia I believe you have a very fine library. May I see it?

Dee Of course. Let me show you. You had a superb library in Alexandria, didn't you?

Hypatia Yes, until the Christians destroyed that too.

Scene 6

OUTSIDE THE ALMS HOUSES. ENTER MOTHER STILE. THEN ENTER JOHN GRIFFITH, AN OSTLER, WHO TRIES TO AVOID HER.

Griffith Oh, good day, Mother Stile. I didn't see you there. I see you are of good cheer, as usual.

M. Stile None of your cheek, Master Griffith. Could you spare some alms so that an old woman can eat a few scraps to keep her body and soul together.

Griffith Times are hard Mother Stile. Times are hard.

M. Stile If they are hard for you, think what they like for me.

Griffith I wish I could give you something, but my wife is ill and I have no work.

M. Stile Come, come, I know you have just sold a horse.

Griffith I had to because my family would starve otherwise.

M. Stile What have you got in that purse there, then?

Griffith Not much. Oh well, here's something for you. But don't you come begging round me again until I find work. And so, farewell. EXIT.

M. Stile That's not enough to buy a pin. Curse you John Griffith! May your wife Have the plague. May your children's limbs become crooked. May your horses become lame. And you – may you have boils and sores and piles that fester and ooze pus for the rest of your mean, worthless life. May you.....

ENTER MOTHER MARGARET

M. Margaret Stop that at once, Mother Stile. I told you it will get us all into trouble if you're heard cursing like that.

M. Stile Well he deserves to be cursed, the mean villain.

M. Margaret Calm down. Look, I've brought little Jenny to see you. (SHOWS KITTEN)

M. Stile He's looking as hungry as I am.

M. Margaret He'll soon be as big as mother Devell's cat Gillie.

M. Stile Both black. Suitable for the use of witches.

M. Margaret Oh don't say that. I think cats are more lovable than your pet rat. What's his name?

M. Stile I call him Phillip. Did you know that Mother Dutton's got a pet toad?

M. Margaret Ah well, perhaps she'll turn him into a handsome prince.

M. Stile Talking of magic, what's become of what'sname – the woman Father Rosimond summoned up to help us?

M. Margaret You mean Hypatia – I don't know. She'd better hurry up. I fear the witch-hunters are closing in on us.

M. Stile But why? We've done no wrong.

M. Margaret I know. It's what they think we've done that make us their quarry. I must go and alert our neighbours to the danger. Remember now –

no more cursing. EXEUNT

Scene 7

THE QUEEN'S APARTMENT – SHE IS ASLEEP AND ALONE.
ENTER HYPATIA.

Hypatia: Your Majesty.

Elizabeth: (WAKING) Who are you? A ghost? (CALLS) Guards!

Hypatia: They cannot hear you. Do not be afraid. Doctor Dee sent me.

Elizabeth: Doctor Dee?

Hypatia: Yes. I am one of the angels he has been talking to. I suppose an angel is a kind of ghost.

Elizabeth: You don't look like an angel.

Hypatia: No more, if I may say so, than you look like a Queen. You haven't got your wig on.

Elizabeth: If you are an angel, you're a very rude one. Why have you come to see me?

Hypatia: To strike a bargain with you.

Elizabeth: What kind of bargain?

Hypatia: I understand you would like to know precisely when you will die.

Elizabeth: Dee told you that I suppose. Well yes I would.

Hypatia: I can tell you – on one condition.

Elizabeth: Surely it's not very angelic to make conditions. Well, what is it?

Hypatia: That you condemn the witch-hunting that is taking place in this part of your realm.

Elizabeth: Look here. I am still suffering from an attack of witchcraft on my health. That is treason.

Hypatia: That, if I may say so, is not treason but unreason. Do you really believe that your ill health is caused by some idiot sticking pins into a wax doll? I thought you were that rare thing an educated woman.

Elizabeth: Well, as Master Shakespeare says in his new Hamlet play, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Hypatia Well said. But let us use reason to discover the true causes of your malady, not unreason or superstition.

Elizabeth I detest witchcraft or magic in any form – it should be cut out like canker.

Hypatia: The bigger canker is the fear of witchcraft. Innocent women are being burned, hanged or drowned because of it. Even here under your nose in Windsor, four women are being accused of witchcraft for the most flimsy and nonsensical reasons. You can save them if you declare yourself against it.

Elizabeth: This is a very one-sided bargain you are asking for. However, if my health improves I will consider your offer. Come back to me after a few days and I will give you my answer. Now let me sleep.

Hypatia You will awaken tomorrow to find yourself fully recovered. And so, dear queen, good night. (EXIT)

Scene 8

ENTER BOY WITH PITCHER. HE PUTS IT DOWN, LOOKS ROUND, PICKS UP A STONE AND THROWS IT AT MOTHER STILE'S DOOR. MOTHER STILE COMES OUT IN A FURY.

M. Stile: You, boy. Did you throw that stone?

Boy: What if I did?

M. Stile: That was a wicked thing to do!

Boy: Well you're a wicked witch.

M. Stile: A what?

Boy: A wicked witch. My father says you are.

M. Stile: Why does he say that, boy?

Boy: He says you make spells and feed a rat with baby's blood.

M. Stile: Lies, evil lies. Curses on you.

Boy: Here comes my father, Master Knight. (CALLS) Father!

ENTER JOHN KNIGHT

Knight: Come here, son. What's she been saying to you?

Boy: She's putting a curse on me. Ow, ow, my hand!

Knight: What's the matter?

Boy: My hand. Ow! It hurts.

Knight: Let me look. Good God, it's curled back. Can't you straighten it?

Boy: No, Ow!

Knight: Here, let me bend it back.

Boy: Ow, Ow!

Knight: Ah, this is your work, you old witch. Look everybody. Look what she's done.

M. Stile: Why don't you all go away and leave an old woman in peace.

1st Man: Because you are a menace to this town.

2nd Man: You wicked old crone.

1st Woman: Where's your broomstick?

2nd Woman: Where's your rat?

1st Woman: She calls it Phillip.

1st Man: She ought to call it Beelzebub.

2nd Man: Let's take her down to the river. See if she sinks or floats.

All: Aye, come on! Grab her! Let's throw her in.

Knight: No! Stand away. Elizabeth Stile, I arrest you under the powers vested in me by the Witchcraft Act of 1562. Come with me.

M. Margaret: Wait. What is the charge?

Knight: The charges are that she took part in a Witches Sabbath. That she did put a curse on the ostler, and that she did put a curse on this boy that deformed his hand.

M. Margaret: Surely not. How can that be?

Knight: Stand aside, woman, lest I arrest you too as an accomplice. EXIT

ENTER ROSIMOND

Rosimond: Let me see that hand. Here, let me take it in mine. Now, please be quiet everyone. (HE APPEARS TO PRAY SILENTLY) There, now you can straighten it.

1st Man: Heavens be praised! You are a healer like Christ himself.

Rosimond: Have faith and you can move mountains, my son. Now let us go in peace.

M. Margaret: Just a moment, Master Rosimond.

Rosimond: Father Rosimond, please, Mother Margaret.

M. Margaret: Like Christ, indeed Sir! You are the biggest fraud in Windsor. I know you for a witch who consorts with Satan himself.

Rosimond: Take care, woman, lest your tongue gets you into trouble. I am a wise man, a healer, not a witch.

M. Margaret: Why did you not act to help poor Mother Stile?

Rosimond: She is a stupid woman. She should have been more sparing of her curses.

M. Margaret: You just want her to be sacrificed to direct the witch-hunters away from you.

Rosimond: That is a foul aspersion. You will need my help before long. You will not get it if you abuse me like this. (EXIT)

M. Margaret: I must collect Mother Stile's things and take them to the jail for her. Where's this Hypatia? If she was sent to save us from superstition, we need her now. (EXIT)

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2.....
Scene 1

A PRISON. MOTHER STILE IS IN CHAINS, WHIMPERING AND TALKING TO HERSELF. ENTER THE JAILOR, THOMAS ROWE, WITH FOOD AND WATER.

Rowe: Good day to ye, Mother Stile. I've brought you some breakfast.

M. Stile: Who are you?

Rowe: You know who I am. Thomas, Thomas Rowe. I'm the prison keeper. Some call me the jailor, but I don't like to be called that.

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Rowe: Eh? What key?

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Rowe: You mean the key to your cell?

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Rowe: I've got lots of keys here. Look.

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Rowe: (REALISING SOMETHING'S WRONG) There, there, my dear. You just sit down and rest.

M. Stile: Who are you?

Rowe: I just told you. Thomas.

M. Stile: Thomas.

Rowe: That's right. Now you just eat your breakfast. (KNOCKING)
Hello, we have visitors. (EXITS THEN RETURNS WITH MOTHER MARGARET) You've got five minutes.

M.Margaret: (TO ROWE) Haven't you got something better to do?

Rowe: I have to stay. Orders.

M. Margaret: We're not going to cast any spells, if that's what you're worried about.

M.Stile: Who are you?

M. Margaret: You know me. I'm your neighbour Margaret.

M. Stile: Margaret. Oh yes.

Margaret: Look, I've brought your clothes and things. And I also have my little Jenny with me. Here, take him.

M. Stile: Oh Jenny, you naughty little kitty. Ow, she scratched me, the little Devil!

Margaret: That's better. That's more like the Mother Stile I know. How are you?

M. Stile: I'm frightened. They torture you here you know.

Margaret: Torture. What, torture an old woman?

M. Stile: They said they would torture me if I don't confess.

Margaret: Confess? Confess to what? You haven't done anything wrong.

M. Stile: They say I am guilty of witchcraft. Don't let them torture me.

Margaret: (To Rowe) How could you think of such a thing?

Rowe: I'm no torturer. I just have to show her the instruments.

Margaret: What! You mean you would threaten her with them to make her confess?

Rowe: Most folk confess when they see the instruments of torture. If they don't we have to get a man in to put them to use.

Margaret: A man or a devil?

Rowe: Time's up. Say goodbye.

ENTER JOHN KNIGHT WITH MOTHERS DUTTON AND DEVELL

Knight: Ah, Mother Margaret. I'm glad to see you here. And it's here you will be staying. You are under arrest on suspicion of being an accomplice in witchcraft – along with your two neighbours here.

Margaret: No! On what evidence?

Knight: On the confession of Mother Stile here.

Margaret: Mother Stile is this true?

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Rowe: Her brain is confused again.

Margaret: You have frightened her into telling lies against us. A poor confused old woman.

M. Stile: Where's the key?

Knight: (TO ROWE) Take them to their cells and chain them up.

Rowe: Can she keep the kitten?

Knight: Yes, it's proof she consorts with the devil.

Rowe: Come with me – ladies.

M. Stile: (SCREAMS) Where's the key? Where's the key?

Scene 2

A CHURCH PULPIT. ENTER FATHER ROSIMOND WHO PREACHES TO THE AUDIENCE.

Rosimond: Among the punishments which the Lord God has laid upon us, for the manifest impiety and careless contempt of his word abounding in these our desperate days, the swarms of witches and enchanterers are not the last nor the least. For that old serpent Satan, suffered to be the scourge of our sins, has of late years greatly multiplied the brood of them and much increased their malice. Nay, the fondness and ignorance of many is such that they succour those devilish imps, have recourse to them for the health of themselves or others, and for things lost, calling them by the honourable name of 'wise women'. Wherein they know not what honour they do to the devil. For it is Satan that plagues with sickness, that maims, murders and robs. The witch bears the name, but the devil dispatches the deeds – without him the witch can contrive no mischief. If then by the law of the Lord of life witches and enchanterers are accounted unworthy to live; if by the law of this land they are to be done to death, as traitors to their prince and felons in respect of her Highness' subjects – whosoever thou be, beware of aiding them!

Scene 3

OUTSIDE THE COURTHOUSE. A CROWD GATHERS, AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE FOUR ACUSED WOMEN. HYPATIA IS PRESENT, IN DISGUISE. ALSO ROSIMOND AND HIS DAUGHTER.

Man 1: Burn the witches!

Man 2: Whores of Satan!

Man 1: The Bible says witches must be slain Exodus 22:18.

Woman 1: Send 'em to hell!

Man 2: Amen to that, good mistress.

Woman1: Look, here they come.

THERE IS SILENCE AS THE FOUR OLD WOMEN ARE LED IN BY THOMAS ROWE AND JOHN KNIGHT.

Hypatia: Poor old things. Look at them. They need our mercy.

Woman 1: You sound like an accomplice.

Hypatia 2: No, just a woman like them.

PEOPLE START TO THROW MISSILES AT THEM.

All: Witches! Kill the witches!

Knight: Stand back.

A MISSILE HITS MOTHER DEVELL, WHO STAGGERS AND FALLS. THE CROWD CHEERS

Hypatia Hold hard! For shame. Is this your British justice? They are not in the pillory yet. Wait for the verdict of the court.

Knight God's bones, who are you, woman?

Hypatia: I have come from her majesty the Queen. I am to represent her at the trial.

Man 1: She's lying!

Knight: How do I know you are not an imposter?

Hypatia: I bear the Queen's seal. Look.

Knight: Oh. Beg pardon, Ma'am. May I escort you inside? Stand back

everyone.

(EXEUNT)

Rosimond: So, Hypatia has entered the fray.

Anne: How did she get the Queen's support?

Rosimond: Who knows? But she is very persuasive.

Anne: Will she defend those poor old women?

Rosimond: Perhaps. She has to be careful.

Anne: Will you witness for the defence?

Rosimond: I too have to be careful. Satan is watching us.

Anne: Father, you must help them.

Rosimond: Do not tell me what to do, daughter.

Anne: You have made a pact with the devil to fight superstition and witch-hunting. Surely this means you must defend the accused old women.

Rosimond: I do not want to be dragged in as an accomplice. Come let us see what Hypatia will do in court.

Scene 4

THE COURTROOM, PEOPLE TAKING PLACES. ALL STAND WHEN THE PROSECUTOR, SIR HENRY NEVILLE, ENTERS.

Knight: All be upstanding.

Neville: Call the accused, if you please Constable.

KNIGHT SUMMONS THE FOUR ACCUSED WHO TAKE THEIR PLACES.

Man: Witches! (HISSES).

Neville
Constable Silence! If you call out again I will have you thrown out. Now
Knight, will you point out Mother Elizabeth Stile.

Knight: Yes, sir. Mother Elizabeth Stile – stand up.

M. Stile: Where's the key? Where's the key?

LAUGHTER IN COURT

Neville: Silence! Constable Knight, is this woman out of her wits?

Knight: Sir, she repeats these words when she is frightened.

Neville: (PUTTING ON TONE USED BY AUTHORITY WHEN TALKING TO ELDERLY PERSON) Mother Stile, can you hear me? Do not be afraid. I simply want you to tell the truth. Now, tell me, did you make a confession to Master Thomas Rowe while you were in prison?

M. Stile Eh?

Neville Did you make a confession in prison

M. Stile Confession? Oh yes.

Neville And is this your confession, signed by you?

M. Stile They said I had to sign it or else they would put me on the thumb-screws.

LAUGHTER

Knight: Silence in court!

Neville: In your confession you name your three neighbours standing there with you as witches. Mother Dutten because she keeps a fiend in the likeness of a toad and feeds it with blood that she makes to bleed from her own flank. Is this true?

M. Stile: A toady toad that lives in the herbs in her garden.

Neville: Mother Devell because she has a spirit in the shape of a black cat that helps her in her witchcraft, and she feeds it daily on milk mixed with her own blood. Is this true?

M. Stile: A black cat called Jill.

M. Devell: Lies! I never fed it with my own blood.

Neville: Be quiet woman. And, thirdly, Mother Margaret who goes with two crutches and feeds a kitten or fiend named Jenny with her own blood.

M. Margaret Am I a witch because I go on crutches and keep a harmless kitten?

Neville: Silence! Is this true?

M. Stile: Oh yes. I have a rat called Philip.

Neville And in your confession you say you feed this wicked spirit with blood from your right-hand wrist.

M. Stile: That's right. Look I have marks on my wrist.

Neville: Members of the jury, the Prosecution has thus established that all four of the accused have that essential manifestation of witchcraft – the possession of pets or familiars that link them to Satan himself.
And now, members of the jury, let us consider how this coven of witches has met together, in a possible case of a witches' Sabbath. Elizabeth Stile has confessed that they met in the pits at the back of master Dodge's house, and that they there committed all kinds of heinous and villainous practices. Constable Knight, you witnessed one of these meetings.

Knight: I did Sir. On the night of June 15th I saw all four witches consorting with the Devil in the pits.

Mother Margaret: That was not the Devil. That was Father Rosimond who had lured us to his devilish meeting. He is the real witch, not us.

Rosimond: That is a vile slander on a Christian healer and wise man.

Mother Margaret: He is no more Christian than my behind. How many more filthy lies are we going to hear in this so-called court of justice?

Neville: Order! Woman, I will have you restrained if you do not behave. Now Constable Knight, will you read the list of other charges against these women.

Knight
Item, that by their devilish art they killed one Master Gallis, former Mayor of Windsor.
Item, that by their sorceries and enchantments they did despatch a farmer named Langford, dwelling in Windsor by the Thames side.
Item, that they caused the death one of the said Langford's maids.
Item, that they also murdered a butcher named Switcher.
Item, that Mother Dutten in league with the others made four pictures of red wax for each of the four said victims and did stick a hawthorn prick against the left sides of the breasts of the images, and thereupon the said four persons, being suddenly taken, died.

Neville Thank you constable. I understand that you personally have

suffered from the witchcraft of these women.

Knight Indeed I have Sir, on two occasions. My wife was attended by Mother Margaret when she was midwife to our baby. The baby was stillborn and I believe she wanted its blood for the her foul work with the Devil. The second time was when my son Luke had his hand turned backwards after he had offended Mother Stile. Then it was cured by the wiseman Father Rosimond.

Neville Father Rosimond, will you take the stand? I understand you are known as a wiseman.

Rosimond: Yes, sir.

Neville In her confession, Mother Stile accuses you and your daughter of witchcraft. She states that you can transform yourself into the shape of an ape or a horse.

Rosimond Those are simply sickly delusions. Mother Stile is not in her right mind, sir.

Neville She also accuses you of consorting with the four accused in a form of witches' Sabbath.

Rosimond I brought them together at the pits behind Master Dodge's house because I felt we should discuss new ways of improving the health of the Windsor community. Unfortunately it became clear that the four women were more interested in their own welfare than in the community's.

M. Margaret You lying toad! You were in league with Satan to bring someone back from the dead. That person is present with us in this court today, either in body or spirit or both.

(CONSTERNATION)

Neville Silence! If this person is here I demand they stand forward.

ANNE – ROSIMOND'S DAUGHTER – COMES FORWARD

Rosimond Anne – sit down, you silly girl!

Anne/Hypatia I am Hypatia, back from the land of the dead to save Windsor from all this witch-hunting hysteria. I am speaking through Anne, who, despite her father's jiggery-pokery, seems to me the most sensible person here,

Rosimond Sir, my daughter is possessed by a spirit. She knows not what she says. (To Anne/Hyp) I command you, spirit, leave

this body and restore it to my daughter Anne.

Anne/Hyp

No, not yet. I'll do it later, but not before I've spoken out against this travesty of a trial. Where is justice? She has flown. Where is reason? She has been overwhelmed by superstition. Where is truth? She has been murdered by fear. Where is mercy? She has been silenced by brutish hatred.

Neville

A pretty speech, but if you are a spirit you are not qualified to take part in this trial.

Anne/Hyp

Not qualified? Look, I have the Queen's seal and I represent her in this trial. Her Majesty wishes me to ensure that justice is secured and that superstition and fear and hatred is not allowed to exclude reason, truth and mercy.

Neville

Very well. This is unprecedented, but you may proceed, provided you are brief.

Anne/Hyp

Members of the jury, you look to me like reasonable men, not easily swayed by prejudice or blinded by groundless accusations. If you are Christians, I am sure your faith is strong enough to withstand the evils you perceive at work around you. Look on these four old women. They are here because one of them, admittedly somewhat of a curmudgeon in her old age, has been frightened into making a confession of a great list of malefactions that her captors have imagined for her signature.