

THE WITCH OF PUNGO

Written by

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A Historical Drama Inspired by a True Story

FADE IN:

**EXT. BARNES CABIN - DAY**

SUPER: 1696 PUNGO, VIRGINIA

Light smoke wafts from the chimney on the mild autumn breeze. SOMEONE plows a field with oxen behind the cabin.

**INT. BARNES CABIN - MAIN ROOM - DAY**

MARAH BARNES, mid- 30s and homely, a woman of unearned narcissistic entitlement, cheated by life, grinds rye into flour with firm arms and bitterness. Rye grains with numerous potent BLACK ERGOT GRAINS fill a wooden bowl.

SERIES OF SHOTS - RYE BREAD MADE/SUPPER EATEN

- A) A mound of BLACK-SPECKLED DOUGH PLOPS on an oven peel and is slid into a stone oven.
- B) A butcher knife SLAMS into a hunk of dried, salted meat and chops it into edible chunks.
- C) A ladle dips out the last bit of meat into a bowl held by a male's hand.
- D) Marah's hand picks crumbs and bread off a pewter plate.
- E) A male's hand drops a fork in a bowl of stew juices, pushes it away and leaves. BURP.
- F) Marah's hand reaches, sops juices from the abandoned bowl.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

**EXT. BARNES CABIN - NIGHT**

The front door flings open as Marah drops to her hands and knees and vomits her supper of bread, soppings, and cider.

**INT. BARNES CABIN - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

A dark room. A single oil lamp burns.

Beneath a quilt on a bed, feeble moans escape.

A sweat-drenched Marah slams upright. Deranged. Stiff.

The closed bedroom door SHAKES and SHUDDERS.

MARAH

No. No. No!

BLACK SMOKE invades through the keyhole. Flashes of strange LIGHT bounce off the walls and rafters.

LAUGHTER and SCREAMS echo in the air.

Marah slides backward on her bed. The bed frame RUMBLES.

The smoke descends and materializes into a hissing BLACK CAT.

Marah, her back against the wall, is petrified.

The Black Cat grows and morphs into a cloaked DARK FIGURE.

Glowing CAT EYES occupy the hooded void until...

Lightning FLASHES. Marah GASPS at what only she sees from beneath the cloak.

MARAH (CONT'D)

You!

The Dark Figure clutches Marah's throat.

Marah flails and thrashes about the room, slammed into walls and furniture by the translucent Dark Figure. The oil lamp smashes onto the floor and ignites Marah's shift.

MARAH (CONT'D)

Help! Anthony, help me!

## **MAIN ROOM**

ANTHONY BARNES, 38, a man of little height and some girth, henpecked for life by his wife Marah, sits at the table and whittles a stick near the fireplace.

He picks up and bites into a piece of the black-speckled bread left from supper, only to spit it out. Anthony smells the bread and chucks it into the fire.

The house lies silent but for the crackles of the flames. The bedroom door behind Anthony sits mum.

## **BEDROOM**

A CRACK OF THUNDER dissolves the Dark Figure back into Black Smoke and departs through the keyhole from which it came.

Anthony bursts through the same door into the undisturbed room and rushes to Marah's side.

Marah heaves and murmurs on the floor beside the bed in her sweat-soaked yet clean shift.

Anthony grabs the oil lamp to reveal A BROKEN GLASS of cider across the floor. Marah shivers atop the shards.

Anthony rolls his wife over and cradles her feverish body. Her hands and face bleed. Her body quakes.

Marah gasps for air.

MARAH

She was here! The witch was here...

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - GRASSY OPENING - DAY**

GRACE SHERWOOD, 36, a renaissance woman of stature, rugged beauty, and unapologetic brashness, strides from the firewood area clad in men's britches with an armload of tinder, her red mane screams "controlled rebellion" with every step. Prefeminist badass.

GRACE

Supper be ready by sundown.

**EXT. FIREWOOD AREA - DAY**

JAMES SHERWOOD, 37, the strapping, self-assured husband of Grace, drips with every axe stroke as he splits cordwood in the Virginia heat. His flintlock stands nearby.

JAMES

Aye, Love.

**GRASSY OPENING**

A sly smile peeks from Grace's face as she marches.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Grace drops the bundle of wood beside the hearth. Pots steam of food and broth as she adds to the fire.

Grace's concentration is interrupted by the sound of FAST-APPROACHING HOOVES. Grace moves toward the door to inspect.

Grace is met full-on by a flying, kicked-in door and her neighbor Anthony Barnes.

At entrance, chairs, table, utensils scatter and crash as Anthony grasps Grace by an arm, plants his other forearm across her throat, and drives her into the wall, pinned.

**EXT. FIREWOOD AREA - CONTINUOUS**

James starts at the noise and notices a lone horse outside. He drops the axe, grabs the flintlock, and scrambles toward the cabin.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE**

With eyes wild, snarled hair, Anthony's face crowds Grace's.

ANTHONY

You ever visit my dwelling or send  
your specter to my Marah again,  
it'll be the last!

GRACE

(between gasps)  
I never be visiting... your  
cabin... in all my days!

ANTHONY

My Marah would say otherwise.

GRACE

Mister... Barnes!

ANTHONY

She is bedridden still!

Grace's eyes dart upward to the near rafters and spots a HATCHET hidden in secret.

James bursts through the open door.

JAMES

What in the name--

ANTHONY

This witch will make you a widower,  
Sherwood! A widower, I swear it!

James raises his rifle.

JAMES

Release her, Anthony.

ANTHONY

Not everything, everyone is as they appear, Sherwood.

James pulls back the cock--CLICK!

JAMES

Remove yourself Mr. Barnes--now!

Anthony glances over his shoulder at the sound of the COCK.

Grace bolts into action--knees Anthony in the groin, grabs the hatchet, and kicks the bent-over Anthony in the face and onto the floor by the flaming hearth.

In one motion, Grace dives and introduces the hatchet blade to Anthony's jugular, his head mere inches from the fire.

Anthony struggles and Grace presses harder, draws BLOOD.

Eyes of fear meet eyes of determination. Silence.

James lowers his rifle a short bit.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Grace.

Nothing but Anthony's heavy breath, wide eyes, and frail whimper.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Grace!

Grace relents with a shove.

Anthony scrambles to his feet, wipes blood from his neck.

ANTHONY

Crazy bitch! She's gonna burn, Sherwood! One day she'll burn!

JAMES

Leave now or I will remove you.

Grace, eyes fixed on Anthony, steps toward him.

ANTHONY

Come not near me, you Jezebel!

James raises the rifle again.

Anthony backs out the door and rushes away.

Grace breaks her stiff posture and gasps for air as James moves to check on her. She waves him off.

**EXT. VIRGINIA WOODS AND WATERWAYS - DAY**

A view aloft in and out of early-morning fogged tobacco fields, cattail-lined waterways, and foreboding forests.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Many years ago, there be a lowly woman of misfortune. A woman not understood, yet she struck fear in a myriad of hearts. Of little self desire, she be shunned by most and loved not, by many. Accused of sorcery, she be known as the Witch of Pungo.

A new and mystical pre-colonial horizon opens below as an eagle SCREECHES.

CUT TO BLACK.

Garbled GRUNTS and unintelligible WORDS echo.

UNDERWATER BUBBLES churn.

**EXT. MURKY UNDERWATER DIMNESS - DAY (DREAM)**

Grace's face jolts awake at the sound of a second eagle SCREECH.

AIR BUBBLES race upward as clouds of brown SILT billow.

Bound hands and feet struggle as faint sunlight glints through nebulous water.

Frantic fingers wrestle with ankle bindings.

Grace struggles, as a YOUNG GIRL, 8, suspended in the underwater with face obscured, watches and hovers just out of reach, as if a calm, willing witness.

Grace's MOUTH opens and a submerged, hysteric SCREAM is expelled--and cut short.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Auburn hair matted to her sweaty brow, Grace lies frozen and prone in her bed.

Her eyes open and dart about with a gasp and quickened breath. A covered lump slumbers next to her. Sleep has left.

Grace, shaken, rises and dons men's pants.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - DAY**

MONTAGE - GRACE WORKS THE FARM

- A) Horse Barn--Feeds chickens
- B) Open Field--Plows with an ox
- C) Kitchen Garden--Picks vegetables
- D) Muddy Creek--Washes clothes
- E) Cabin Hearth--Cooks a meal

END MONTAGE

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - DAY**

Grace talks with meager FEMALE NEIGHBOR.

Grace's boys, JOHN, 15, COBY, 14, both tall and muscular, and RICHARD, 8, small and runt-like, load several bushels of corn into the back of a wagon.

James arranges and secures the baskets.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Early on, the young maiden was of favorable repute. A helpful friend, gifted farmer, skilled midwife.

Grace speaks forthright to her neighbor.

GRACE

If you be needing more, you come back.

FEMALE NEIGHBOR

You are a blessing, Grace. I hate to burden you. Times have been--

GRACE

Times always be hard. Return without a thought.

The Female Neighbor pulls the wagon away as Grace watches.



JAMES  
 (to their boys)  
 Back to your chores.

**EXT. BARNES FARM - EDGE OF FIELDS - DAY**

Anthony scans his sick and dying tobacco crop. He stares across a rock fence in disgust as the Sherwood's tall and vibrant tobacco plants.

Marah steps out from behind their brown plants and stands next to her husband.

The Sherwood family harvests nearby.

ELDERLY WOMAN  
 Yet over the years, a vile whisper  
 did waft from the rising swamps of  
 jealous hearts. Failed crops,  
 sickly beasts, and children lost,  
 brought suspicion upon the  
 mistress, who never knew such  
 calamities.

Anthony spits juice and heaves his tobacco wad in the direction of the Sherwood Farm and slinks away. A sour Marah glares as Grace and James embrace.

**EXT. CABIN/KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY (FLASHBACK SEQUENCE)**

YOUNG GRACE, 9, strawberry red hair, pets a tiny BLACK KITTEN. Young Girl/YOUNG MARAH, 8, from Grace's dream, self-centered and bratty, is enamored with the cat.

YOUNG MARAH  
 Oh, can I hold her?

With care, Young Grace hands over the helpless kitten.

Young Marah holds the kitten near her face.

YOUNG MARAH (CONT'D)  
 Come on, purr. Purr for me!

Young Marah shakes the kitten which in turn hisses and slaps Young Marah's cheek.

YOUNG GRACE  
 Marah!

Young Marah drops the kitten and touches her hand to her cheek. She pulls her bloodied fingers away.

Young Marah is incensed and kicks at the kitten, misses.

YOUNG GRACE (CONT'D)

Marah, stop!

Young Marah covers her cheek with one hand and snatches the kitten by its scruff with the other and hurls it into a barrel cistern nearby. SPLASH!

Young Grace flashes to the cistern and fishes out the kitten and wraps it in her apron.

YOUNG GRACE (CONT'D)

What be wrong with you? It's just a small scratch!

Young Marah checks her bleeding face again.

YOUNG MARAH

Anyone who hurts me, I hurt them!

**EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY**

A YOUNGER JAMES, 20, strong and rugged, faces the TEENAGE MARAH, 18, plain and unalluring, under a large tree.

Teenage Marah holds a dark red rose as she searches Younger James' troubled face for an answer.

Younger James meets Teenage Marah's eyes as she moves in to kiss him. He steps back.

YOUNGER JAMES

Marah, I'm sorry. I can't.

Younger James hurries away. Teenage Marah is stunned. Her body stiffens with rage.

Teenage Marah's hands white-knuckle the thorny rose stem. Blood flows between her fingers.

**EXT. PARISH CHURCH - COURTYARD - DAY**

A FIDDLER plays an upbeat TUNE. TEENAGE GRACE, 19, in a simple white dress, dances and spins on the grass and reveals her partner, Younger James, with faces aglow. Wedding GUESTS surround the couple.

From behind Younger James, a hand taps his shoulder. Younger James turns with the dance and stops in his tracks. Teenage Marah staggers up too close.

TEENAGE MARAH

How about one dance James? For us.

Younger James pushes her back.

YOUNGER JAMES

The hell you're here!

TEENAGE MARAH

Me? I wouldn't miss this for--

YOUNGER JAMES

You're grogged and a damn fool.

Teenage Marah lurches in close to Younger James and tries to kiss him.

WHACK! With a right cross, Teenage Grace decks Teenage Marah. The music stops.

Teenage Marah hits the ground with a bloody lip and is gathered up by a few shocked Guests. She fights them off.

TEENAGE GRACE

You best be on your way.

TEENAGE MARAH

Have I to take orders from you?  
You'll both pay for this. You'll  
all pay for this!

Teenage Marah stumbles away as others look on shocked.

The fiddle strikes up again and after a beat, the married couple dance, though the atmosphere is strained.

Marah, from a distance, stops and stares at the couple.

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - EDGE OF FIELDS - DAY**

Marah maintains her stare at Grace.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Soon would come a time of lasting  
offense... though it grows and guts  
the very souls of neighbors near.

Grace and James end their brief embrace and pick up basketfuls of tobacco. Grace spots Marah.

Grace's brief glance is met with a cold fixation, held until the Sherwoods disappear.

MARAH  
 (to herself)  
 Scorcerin' bitch.

**EXT. KEMPS LANDING CANAL - MARKET AREA - DAY**

James Sherwood barterers with local PATRICK JOHNSON, 50, grey-bearded and wary.

JAMES  
 Three bushels at Fall's end, but  
 not a leaf more.

Patrick Johnson hands a seed sack to James, looks him over.

PATRICK JOHNSON  
 Word has it you had a tussle with  
 the Barnes.

JAMES  
 Oh?

PATRICK JOHNSON  
 A little bird mentioned it.

James ignores.

PATRICK JOHNSON (CONT'D)  
 You best rein in your wife.

James freezes.

PATRICK JOHNSON (CONT'D)  
 They won't stand for it. They'll  
 burn you both.

JAMES  
 Birds. Gossiping birds.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - CORN FIELD - DAY**

Under an autumn sky, LUKE HILL, mid-30s, lanky, stand-offish, and James chat, while the Sherwood boys and several INDENTURED SERVANTS harvest ears of corn.

Grace inspects corn nearby as Luke steals glances at her comely, pants-clad figure.

LUKE HILL

I'm a proud man, but my corn crop  
is paltry. Yours thrives. Is my  
soil so much worse?

JAMES

The soil's the same. What you do  
with it isn't.

GRACE

Our dirt be rough and full of roots  
like yours.

Luke is caught off-guard by Grace's interjection.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You have to plant above it and feed  
the sprouts. James, make me a  
mound.

Luke eyeballs James' non-reaction to Grace's requests. Grace  
walks over to Luke's horse.

James uses a field tool to rake an anthill-like structure at  
Luke's feet. Luke watches James make a deep indentation into  
the top.

Grace reappears behind Luke and holds up a handful of  
steaming HORSE MANURE. Luke steps back in surprise.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Plants be needing more than just  
water and sun.

Luke glares at Grace.

LUKE HILL

Who in the hell are you to speak to  
me as if you were a man?

James shakes his head as Grace continues and plops the manure  
into the indentation in the mound.

GRACE

I be desiring to help you, Mr.  
Hill.

LUKE HILL

I need no help from a mere woman.

GRACE

And yet your crops be dead.

With her clean hand, she drops three kernels of corn on top and covers the seeds and manure with dirt.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You be needing my help more than you know.

Grace stands and wipes her hands on a field rag as Luke Hill stands aghast.

GRACE (CONT'D)

If this were Spring, by June you be having a stalk as tall as you and a dozen ears. Just casting seed on the ground is for birds and fools.

LUKE HILL

You dare lecture me--

COURT SERVANT (O.S.)

Is there a Grace Sherwood present?

Through the corn rides a COURT SERVANT, 20s. He sits tall and official atop his mare.

GRACE

I be Grace Sherwood.

The Court Servant reaches to hand Grace a PARCHMENT. James intercepts.

COURT SERVANT

Grace Sherwood, you are hearby ordered to appear in the Court of Princess Anne County two weeks henceforth.

GRACE

Reason be?

James lowers the paper from his eyes.

JAMES

Anthony and Marah Barnes have brought suit against you for suspicion of witchcraft.

Luke Hill takes a step back.

Grace snatches the parchment, glances at it and rips it into several pieces.

GRACE

This be a shameful waste of our time. Mr. Barnes has no--

COURT SERVANT

Mistress Sherwood, appeal to the court.

The Court Servant turns his horse and trots away.

Luke Hill doesn't linger, points toward the fresh mound.

LUKE HILL

I see what this is, I've heard the rumors for years. You're trying to entangle me in your sorcery, no doubt as you have Marah Barnes.

Luke Hill retreats to his horse, mounts it, and keeps his eyes on Grace and James.

JAMES

Luke, listen to what she's--

LUKE HILL

I'll not grow corn in shit! You'll not poison my family with this black magic.

Luke Hill gallops away as Grace slings the wadded parchment shreds to the ground.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

Magistrate COL. EDWARD MOSELEY, 40s, weary, yet regal and sure of what he wants and determined to get it, listens with disdain to a FEMALE FARMER.

Col. Moseley is flanked by SEVEN JUSTICES.

Grace Sherwood sits in the Box of the Accused while James and Anthony sit at separate tables.

FEMALE FARMER

After Mistress Sherwood passed our cornfield, dressed as if she were a man, the lot withered and died. A spell she did cast on it!

The GALLERY gasps as Grace bolts up out of her seat.

GRACE

I. Do not. Cast spells. Your cornfield was already dead.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Sherwood!

The Gallery chatters to each other. The SHERIFF, stout and in control, steps forward.

SHERIFF

Order!

Grace continues to stand in challenge to her accuser.

COL. MOSELEY

And you heard with your own ears this spell cast by Mistress Sherwood?

FEMALE FARMER

She said it... But I heard it not.

The Gallery murmurs, the Sheriff POUNDS his staff louder.

COL. MOSELEY

I've seen my fill of this. Gentlemen approach the bench.

James and Anthony creep forward.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Other than your own wives, after hours of testimony, neither of you have yet to present a credible witness to the actual crime or in your own defense.

JAMES

Sir, if I may?

Col. Moseley gives a terse nod.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I wish to raise a countersuit of slander against Mr. Barnes and his false witnesses.

Low mutterings emerge. Col. Moseley leans in.

COL. MOSELEY

Mr. Sherwood, I highly advise you to reconsider your proposed action or it will cost you.



JAMES

I will not allow my good name to be publicly dragged through the mire.

COL. MOSELEY

Very well.

Col. Moseley, exasperated, surveys the Justices, who all nod in agreement. Col. Moseley SLAMS his gavel.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

It is the judgement of this court that neither Mr. Barnes nor Mr. Sherwood have presented a worthy case. Therefore this court rules to dismiss both suits.

A loud din arises. Sheriff pounds the floor.

JAMES

Your Honor, my counter--

COL. MOSELEY

Mr. Sherwood, the court rules that you shall pay the sum of five shillings silver each for the cost of attendance of all witnesses.

Col. Moseley SLAMS the gavel as he stares at James.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Court adjourned.

James Sherwood steams as Anthony storms out.

Grace stands alone in the Box of the Accused.

**EXT. LYNNHAVEN INLET - MOMENTS LATER**

In their skiff, James rows down the waterway.

At the stern, Grace stews.

GRACE

Why tell the judge you wanted to sue the Barnes? Spitful it made the judge. Five shillings each!

JAMES

I was defending you!

GRACE

You be defending me or defending  
your pride?

JAMES

Watch your tongue, Grace Sherwood.

GRACE

I speak the truth as I see it.

James stops his oars and goes adrift.

JAMES

They accused you of witchcraft.  
Have you forgotten the stories of  
Salem not half a score ago?

GRACE

Defend ourselves, yes. But to  
counter sue? We should have turned  
the other cheek.

JAMES

Turn the other cheek? Is it not  
your martyr's pride that's in the  
way? We must oppose every  
accusation in court. To do any less  
admits guilt. I will not sacrifice  
because of someone's rabid  
hysteria. I and the boys need you.

James rows again.

GRACE

But our neighbors--

JAMES

I don't care who it is! You will  
not be burned at the stake.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - MUDDY CREEK BANKS - DAY**

A perfect sky. Scant puffy clouds. Grace works a wooden staff  
in a large cauldron. She stirs a steamy potion and lifts wet  
clothing to check.

A small cauldron simmers beside.

Dingy white shirts, stockings hang from standing sticks.

Sweat rolls off Grace's brow as if she were a hardened  
servant. She draws a ladle from the small cauldron.

Grace smells the brew but notices a change in the wind.

Grace stands and takes notice of the clouds and breeze.

PING! The ladle hits the ground.

GRACE

Boys, get to the fields where the sheep be! Bring them into the pen!

#### **ADJACENT FIELD**

The boys contest.

JOHN

Papa, there is nary a cloud--

JAMES

Do as she says. Richard, help your brother with the sheep. Coby, get the asses from the far field.

The boys stare at each other frozen.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Now! The time may be short!

#### **HORSE STALLS**

Grace vaults onto their horse, spurs to full gallop.

GRACE

Hah! Hah!

#### **ADJACENT FIELD**

James works a yoke as Grace makes a clod-flying stop.

GRACE

I be headed to the Capps' farm.

JAMES

Beware old man Capps... and your tone.

Grace slaps her ride. Sod and dust float behind her.

**EXT. CAPPS FARM - PLANTING FIELD - DAY**

RICHARD CAPPS, 40s, wiry, bearded and a personality to match, with four INDENTURED SERVANTS, works a team of horses and plow.

A cloud of dust announces Grace's approach.

CAPPS  
What in the...

Capps spits out a string of brown tobacco juice.

CAPPS (CONT'D)  
Lord have mercy.

Grace, winded, pulls her horse up short of Capps.

GRACE  
Take your sheep and cattle to the  
ridge lest they spook and drown.

CAPPS  
Spooked by what?

GRACE  
The storm that be coming.

Capps examines the sky, views his servants, and snorts.

Capps strolls up to Grace, grasps the bridle, and inspects the horse. He scans Grace's pant-clad, muscled legs and thighs that straddle her horse.

CAPPS  
Mistress Sherwood, I see no storm  
approachin'. You come hightailin'  
it over here just to scare my  
servants?...

Capps leans in close.

CAPPS (CONT'D)  
... Or to fornicate with me?

Grace recoils at Capps' vulgar suggestion.

GRACE  
I be here only to warn. Your flocks  
will spook at the thunder and drown  
themselves in the creek. There be  
time to pen them an spare yourself  
suffering.

Grace attempts to yank the bridle from Capps' grasp.

Capps hold the bridle tight and pulls Grace and her ride in close. He presses all of himself against her leg.

CAPPS

You hear me Grace Sherwood...

Capps spits another string of tobacco juice to the side. Juice catches, drips from his beard as he gives Grace one more "look over." He glides his hand up her leg.

CAPPS (CONT'D)

I won't be listenin' to any bitch  
tell me how to run my farm or move  
my stock. Get the hell off my land  
and don't come back, lest you come  
back to copulate, with me.

A smirk spreads on Capps' lips. WHACK! Grace's riding crop connects with Capps' face.

Grace and Capps share a glare as Capps releases the bridle, wipes blood from his cheek, and punches the horse's flank.

The spooked horse reels and Grace struggles to control.

GRACE

You be an abomination and a fool.

Grace glares, swivels her horse and gallops away.

CAPPS

(to himself)

Damn whore.

**EXT. NASH FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Grace flies full gallop to the dwelling.

PAUL NASH, 30s, chiseled and stout, works the ground in his garden as BARBARA NASH, 20s, small-framed and pregnant, nurses their INFANT BOY nearby.

Paul straightens up at the sound of HOOVES.

PAUL

Grace! Is everything all right?

GRACE

There be a storm something evil  
coming. Move your livestock.

Paul searches the sky.

PAUL  
How can you tell?

GRACE  
I can feel it in me bones.

BARBARA  
You sure, Grace?

GRACE  
As sure as you be standing there.

The Nash's share a glance and nod.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Do you need help?

PAUL  
No, no. I can handle our animals.

Grace spins her horse to leave.

BARBARA  
Grace! Thank you!

Grace nods and dashes away.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - HORSE BARN - MOMENTS LATER**

Dark clouds quicken across the sky.

Windblown pine needles swirl around Grace and her ride.

Grace leaps from her horse, hands the bridle to Richard.

GRACE  
Put him away and come in quickly.

RICHARD  
Yes, Mama.

Sheep cower and BLEAT in the corner of their pen.

A FLASH of lightning, THUNDER CLAP. The horse WHINNIES and dances about.

**EXT. CAPPS FARM - PLANTING FIELD - MOMENTS LATER**

Ominous clouds roll over with wicked haste.

Chaos strikes the Capps farm as they struggle to unhitch their team of horses in sheets of rain.

CAPPS

Unhitch the damn yolk. Pull! Pull!

Servants struggle with the unnerved horses.

POP! The hitch breaks.

One horse runs free into the field, chased by the servants.

Lightning FLASHES and the second horse SHRIEKS and rises up on two feet.

Capps tries to maintain control.

CAPPS (CONT'D)

Seeds! Get the seeds before they soak!

MALE SERVANT #1

What about the sheep?

CAPPS

Damn the sheep. Leave them be!

Capps sloshes in the plowed muck, directs traffic. Lightning, loose horses, servants scramble.

Everything around him goes to hell in an instant.

CAPPS (CONT'D)

Damn it!

**EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT (DREAM)**

Grace stands alone. Slow-motion, wafting weeds dance about the ground.

Green lightning FLASHES through a murkiness with muffled THUNDER.

Grace jerks open her eyes and awakens inside her own dream, looks about.

Sheep graze nearby.

Grace chokes and gasps out large air bubbles. She is in an open field--underwater!

Lightning FLASHES from above the surface, muted THUNDER.

Young Marah suspends mere feet away as Grace reaches for her. Opposite Young Marah is Col. Moseley suspended, arms crossed. The sheep struggle as they float upward. Grace tugs on a large stone tied to her feet. Red-faced and out of air, Grace reaches and SCREAMS.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

RAIN and WIND pound the cabin as lightning BOOMS near the bedroom window.

Grace chokes awake and gasps as she rolls over.

James comforts and holds Grace.

JAMES  
Another nightmare?

Grace shivers and heaves, wide-eyed and awake.

**EXT. CAPPS FARM - SHEEP FIELD - MORNING**

The horizon glistens orange off the wet fields. Downed trees and branches litter the landscape.

**EXT. CAPPS FARM - MUDDY CREEK BANKS - MORNING**

A BLACK LAB wades in the shallow overflow of Muddy Creek. He alerts his master.

Capps, followed by Male Servant #1, slogs through mud and water to where the dog waits, proud of its find.

A drowned and bloated SHEEP floats in the knee-deep water.

CAPPS  
Shit!

Capps' eyes probe past the one dead sheep. Shrouded amongst the reeds, cattails, and Muddy Creek banks, float the rest of Capps' drowned flock. A faint BLEATING rises above the thick reeds near the bank.

A lone baby LAMB staggers out, caked in mud.

MALE SERVANT #1  
Mistress Sherwood said to--



CAPPS  
Cursed! She's cursed us all!

**INT. SHERWOOD FARM - HORSE BARN - LATER THAT DAY**

Grace brushes her horse as a BLACK CAT saunters around the horses feet. She sets aside the brush to investigate distant SHOUTING.

**EXT. SHERWOOD PLANTING FIELD - DAY**

Capps clashes with James as John, Coby, and Richard watch. He points at James and toward the farm.

CAPPS  
And because I didn't believe her lunatic ravings, she curses everything.

Grace strides towards the confrontation.

CAPPS (CONT'D)  
Should she show her face on my place again--

Capps catches a glimpse of Grace as she marches towards. He cuts the encounter short and scales his horse.

CAPPS (CONT'D)  
I'll kill her myself.

JAMES  
For what?

CAPPS  
Bewitching and slaughtering my flock.

JAMES  
And I'll come for you.

CAPPS  
You best harness your wife.

Capps spurs and hauls ass past Grace as she nears.

GRACE  
(to Capps)  
In a hurry Mr. Capps?  
(to James)  
What torments Richard Capps to tell you to "harness" me?

JAMES  
His flock drowned in the storm.

GRACE  
I warned him of such.

JAMES  
Be that as it may, he threatens to  
kill you if he finds you on his  
place again.

GRACE  
I was helping the fool.

JAMES  
Says you put a curse on his sheep  
when he rejected your warning.

Grace glares in silence.

GRACE  
That man's debauched lust be a  
curse unto himself. I should have  
cursed him.

JAMES  
You would do no such thing.

Grace spins and marches away.

**INT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCH - DAY**

A dozen AFRICAN SLAVES worship in the balcony; below, four  
dozen white CONGREGANTS sing the last of a HYMN.

Grace, James, and their three boys sit as REV. SAUNDERS  
enters the pulpit.

Grace feels the steady glare of BERTHA THOMAS, 35, plain and  
pregnant, across the aisle as Marah, in the pew behind, leans  
forward and whispers to Bertha.

REV. SAUNDERS  
Before today's sermon, be it known  
that some in our congregation are  
suffering from the storm of two  
days since. The Wilson's lost a  
roof and the Capps lost their flock  
of sheep to drowning. If you be  
obliged...

Rev. Saunders speaks as Grace and James notice gazes of  
several other couples. Eyes meet.

**EXT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCH - COURTYARD AREA - LATER**

Congregants fellowship on the church grounds and prepare Dutch ovens for serving.

Grace perches beneath a willow tree, ringed by children.

**WILLOW TREE**

Grace mesmerizes with a melodramatic Bible story.

GRACE

And then, a storm, from the devil himself be bearing down on the tiny boat. The disciples feared of life itself. Just then, a ghostly figure come walking across the water towards their presence.

**CHURCH GROUNDS**

Marah, Bertha Thomas, SARAH NORRIS, 20s, thin and weak, SUZANNA CUMMINGS, 30s, ruddy and pregnant, and ELIZABETH HILL, early 30s, dark and maternal, chat and notice Grace's theatrics and the attention she commands.

BERTHA

I'm not sure I'm a liking this.

SARAH NORRIS

I've never seen so many little ones sit so still.

**WILLOW TREE**

Grace continues.

GRACE

Then Peter, his own feet he sees on the water - PLOOP! Down he goes!

The children jump and laugh at Grace's exclamation.

**CHURCH GROUNDS**

The women continue to gaze.

ELIZABETH HILL

It's as if she has a spell on them.

MARAH  
Perhaps she does.

Elizabeth ponders Marah's suggestion.

BERTHA  
That conjurer shalt not taint my  
girl.

Bertha and Sarah move to "save" their children.

SUZANNA CUMMINGS  
Wait, have you not been listening?  
She's telling them Bible stories.

BERTHA  
It's not what she tells them, but  
how.

MARAH  
Her sway is not of God.

SUZANNA CUMMINGS  
But--

The two women march. Marah, Elizabeth, and Suzanna watch.

#### **WILLOW TREE**

Grace has their full attention.

GRACE  
Then Jesus, the Lord Almighty  
Himself, reached down--

Bertha disrupts the group.

BERTHA  
This nonsense is over. Come.

All the children's eyes shift to Bertha. Sarah Norris motions  
for her children as does Bertha.

GRACE  
There be something amiss?

Bertha's daughter, FAITH, 5, and Sarah Norris's young BOY and  
GIRL drudge up to join their mothers.

BERTHA  
My children shall no longer be  
listening to this gibberish.

GRACE

The gospel be gibberish?

BERTHA

Coming from the likes of you, it's not the gospel.

James notices the fray and moves to join Grace as she stands and steps toward the women.

GRACE

And exactly what be "the likes of" me?

SARAH NORRIS

You know what you are. All of Pungo knows exactly what you are.

GRACE

With all the kindness and good deeds I have served you both...

The three peer at each other as James eases in behind. Bertha Thomas and Sarah Norris walk away. Grace pursues.

GRACE (CONT'D)

For you Bertha Thomas, I helped tend your cattle when Mr. Thomas be bedridden. And I fashioned a salve for your she-rash at a time when the itch could not sit you still for more than a blink.

Bertha clenches as she and Sarah stop.

Some church members' eyes widen at Grace's candor.

GRACE (CONT'D)

And you Sarah Norris. I helped you deliver the very child who's hand you be holding. Breech she was. You would both be dead.

Bertha and Sarah gather their children close and leave.

James touches Grace's shoulders. She pulls away.

**EXT. NASH FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

A full moon highlights a cabin as two windows glow with a warm golden light. SCREAMS pierce the night air.

SCREAMING WOMAN (O.C.)

Ahhhhh!

A newborn lets out a WAIL.

**INT. NASH FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Several oil lamps illuminate the small bedroom.

Grace takes the BABY NASH in her arms with a cloth, studies it, and wipes it down. Two INDENTURED FEMALES attend Barbara Nash, exhausted from her labor. Paul enters the room.

PAUL

I heard a baby's cry.

Grace holds the baby up to face Barbara and Paul.

GRACE

Say hello to your perfect daughter.

Grace hands the swaddled baby to a marveled Paul.

PAUL

(to baby)

Say hello to your namesake, little Grace.

Grace is confused.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(to Grace)

We decided that if it were a girl, we would name her Grace.

Grace, touched, caresses the baby's face.

**EXT. SHERWOOD/CAPPS FARM FENCE - DAY**

Grace carries a basket of herbs by the ROCK FENCE line.

A BULL sprawls, collapsed outside Grace's farm.

The animal sees Grace, bellows out and struggles to get up, its legs paralyzed.

Grace continues to walk. The bull shrieks louder.

Grace stops and listens. Moved, she scales the fence and slides up to the beast.

Dozens of engorged TICKS are attached to the bull.

Grace pulls ticks off the bull's head as if on a mission.

**EDGE OF WOODS NEAR OPEN FIELD**

Capps trots his horse out of the woods.

Capps notices Grace bent over his bull a hundred yards away. Capps spits and spurs his horse into high gear.

**SHERWOOD/CAPPS FARM ROCK FENCE**

Capps screams at Grace as he approaches.

CAPPS

Get your hellbent hands off my  
bull! What have you done to it?

Capps arrives, jumps off his horse and pulls his knife all in stride.

GRACE

I be trying to keep him from dying.

Capps bends over to examine the bull and kicks him.

CAPPS

Get up!

GRACE

He'll not get up 'til those blood  
suckers be off his head.

CAPPS

What do you know, woman?

Capps glares at Grace and points his knife at her.

CAPPS (CONT'D)

If this bull dies, I hold you  
accountable.

GRACE

If you remove the ticks and let him  
rest a spell, he'll regain his  
movement. But if you--

CAPPS

I didn't ask for help from a witch.

GRACE

You don't know what you be doing.

Capps stands and steps toward Grace

CAPPS

I told you once before - Get off my plot.

Grace and Capps stare at each other in a battle of wills. Grace is unyielding. Capps is unable to step further.

Grace strides back and crawls over the fence. Capps slings his knife into the dirt. He stoops and feels his bull's labored breathing and stiff legs.

Capps stares at Grace as she tramps away.

**EXT. FARM - TOBACCO FIELD - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)**

PAPA, a Scottish crop master, spits tobacco and pulls the precocious red-headed YOUNG GRACE, 6, in close to a tobacco plant.

YOUNG GRACE

Yes, Papa?

PAPA

When the leaf be bendin' like so, she be ready. Aye?

Papa bends a yellow leaf over on itself.

YOUNG GRACE

Aye, Papa.

Papa gives Young Grace a wink, moves to the next plant.

Young Grace brushes her cheek with the leaf and sniffs.

**INT. TOBACCO BARN - DAY**

Silhouettes of a mother and daughter string tobacco leaves on racks. Sunbeams stream through the smokey air.

SUSAN WHITE, 40s, a firm but loving English woman, coaches Young Grace in the finer points of curing.

The mother and daughter's eyes meet for a moment and Susan's linger.

SUSAN WHITE

Grace, always be willing to help others.



Young Grace nods with a slight smile.

YOUNG GRACE  
Always, Mama.

Susan gives Young Grace a gentle kiss.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

In bed, Grace stirs and mumbles.

GRACE  
Mama. Mama.

Grace rolls over on her side. A tear traces down her cheek.

**EXT. HORSE BARN - DAY**

James files the horse's hooves. Grace and Richard brush.

GRACE  
(whispers to the horse)  
Oh, how you be, yeah?

Richard, a bit bored, looks about as he brushes.

RICHARD  
Papa, buzzards are circling over  
the Capps farm.

Grace ignores, as James looks up for a moment.

JAMES  
I'm supposing that be Richard  
Capps's bull. I heard it was ill  
the other day.

Grace pauses with a knowing look, continues.

RICHARD  
Do you think it died?

JAMES  
Richard Capps never met a crop, nor  
an animal, he couldn't kill.

GRACE  
Richard Capps be a fool. I showed  
him how to help his bull.

JAMES  
You went to his farm?

GRACE  
His bull be by our rock wall.  
Covered in ticks.

JAMES  
And Mr. Capps saw you?

GRACE  
Aye. But he wouldn't listen. He  
thinks I hexed it.

James raises his voice, perturbed.

JAMES  
Did I tell ya not to go there?

GRACE  
James, the animal be right there,  
not two arms' length from our wall,  
suffering. I wanted only to help  
the beast.

JAMES  
But Grace, Capps doesn't want our  
help. He's threatened to kill ya!

Grace locks eyes with James and continues to brush.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - SHEEP PEN - DAY**

Coby and Richard work the pen as James and John shear individual sheep. Indentured Servant #1 and INDENTURED SERVANT #2 help.

James unties and releases a bare naked ewe as Indentured Servant #1 picks up sheared wool and stuffs it in a toe sack held by Indentured Servant #2.

James rests and waits for Coby to bring another sheep. The two servants talk to each other.

INDENTURED SERVANT #1  
(in broken Creole)  
He sheep be drowned and he bull up  
and dead.

INDENTURED SERVANT #2  
(in broken Creole)  
And he be blamin', "She do it."

James catches part of their exchange and approaches.

JAMES  
What's the nature of your talk?

INDENTURED #1  
Oh, no talkin', Master.

JAMES  
I heard you mention dead sheep and  
a bull. Who you speaking of?

The two servants glance at each other, afraid to answer.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
You will answer me right away or I  
will take matters into--

INDENTURED SERVANT #2  
Master, we be just gossipin'.

JAMES  
You will tell me presently.

INDENTURED SERVANT #1  
Only repeatin' stories from  
servants on neighbor farms. They be  
all lies I swear.

JAMES  
What are these lies?

INDENTURED SERVANT #1  
That Mistress Grace be a vexin'  
witch of sheep and cattle.

JAMES  
Who spreads these lies to others?

The two servants peer at each other wild-eyed.

INDENTURED SERVANT #2  
Master Capps.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

Col. Moseley and the seven Justices sit in judgement at the  
head of the room.

JAMES  
... Mr. Capps has spread lies to  
many neighbors about my wife.

COL. MOSELEY  
What lies, Mr. Sherwood?

JAMES  
That my wife cursed his sheep to  
drown in a recent storm and that  
she also cursed his bull to die.  
He's been telling all who will  
listen that Grace is a witch.

COL. MOSELEY  
Is your wife a witch, Mr. Sherwood?

JAMES  
These are blatant lies. Grace can  
be bullheaded at times, but she is  
no conjurer.

Grace shoots a dagger stare at James as Col. Moseley and  
several Justices smile and commiserate.

COL. MOSELEY  
Being as the defendant has chosen  
not to represent himself with his  
presence, I have no choice but to  
rule in the plaintiff's favor. Case  
closed.

The Sheriff slams his staff on the wooden floor.

**EXT. KEMPS LANDING CANAL - DAY**

Tall Dutch ships keep watch over the bustling canal port as  
tobacco farmers barter hogsheads of tobacco.

Anthony and Marah Barnes stop their wagon, full of fall  
vegetables, to speak to a LOCAL.

Marah notices James and Grace struggle to unhitch their  
hogshead from their own horse-drawn contraption.

Grace and Marah's eyes meet. Marah seethes.

Paul Nash appears between the stares, unaware and in a hurry  
to help.

PAUL  
Need a hand neighbors?

JAMES  
Much obliged, Mr. Nash.

Paul pulls on the barrel hitch with Grace and frees it from its yoke.

Grace nods to Paul and gathers the yoke ropes with James.

Marah continues her stare as Anthony pulls his wagon away.

GRACE

You be at market with your leaf?

PAUL

No, no. Mine will be ready next week. I'm just testing the rates before I bring a load.

JAMES

The Dutch are bartering lower this season. Always wanting a bargain.

GRACE

How be the children?

PAUL

The prince and princess are growing faster than the weeds in my fields.

GRACE

I trust Barbara is well.

PAUL

She is, but very tired. She's not the physical stature of most farm women.

GRACE

I'll visit her next week. I might have something to help.

PAUL

Very well. I must be getting on. I've got much to prepare.

Paul leaves as a DOCK BARTERER approaches.

**EXT. KEMPS LANDING CANAL - ACROSS THE STREET - MOMENTS LATER**

Paul passes by several LOCAL FARMERS, including BAZEL CUMMINGS, 40s, thin, bald, and half-lit, with several DUTCH SEAMEN who loiter on the corner.

The group of men laugh and comment as they watch James and Grace.

DUTCH SEAMAN #1  
Is that a lady dressed as a man?

BAZEL CUMMINGS  
That's no lady, but a caster of  
spells.

Paul overhears the comment and stops to listen.

BAZEL CUMMINGS (CONT'D)  
I blame her for blighting my  
tobacco last year.

DUTCH SEAMAN #1  
Whatever she is, she wears trousers  
better than any of you men.

The men chuckle.

Righteous anger rises on Paul's face.

BAZEL CUMMINGS  
Well, my Dutch friend, if it not be  
for my little woman at home and a  
certain curse from this devil-  
woman, I'd "chamber" that witch  
myself...

The Dutch Seamen and Local Farmers let loose with laughter.

Pissed, Paul moves in on Bazel Cummings.

POW! Paul decks him.

With a SPLAT, Bazel Cummings smacks the mud and cobblestone  
hard.

Seamen struggle to hold Paul back.

Stunned, Bazel Cummings's lip drips blood as he stands.

BAZEL CUMMINGS (CONT'D)  
What in the--

PAUL  
Grace Sherwood is not what you say.  
You would do well to keep quiet  
with your ignorant opinions and  
drunken delusions.

A throng presses in.

Cummings steps towards Paul and spits blood. Teeth red.

BAZEL CUMMINGS

I know you. Paul Nash. I know your Pungo farm too. Those in league with witches tend to burn with witches.

Paul lunges at the threat, held back by others.

PAUL

Come "visit" anytime you like.

The two men glare.

Paul breaks free and dashes away.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Light creeps from the fireplace through the cracked door onto the bed where James and Grace sleep.

A KNOCK at the front door echoes. No one stirs.

**MAIN ROOM**

A lantern appears through the front window. A hand TAPS on the blurred glass.

**BEDROOM**

Grace stirs and sits up stiff, awake. She listens.

GRACE

James. James!

BANG! BANG! The rap on the window pane alarms James.

James flings to his feet and scurries from the bedroom followed close by Grace.

**MAIN ROOM**

A SHADOW crosses the window as James grabs the flintlock and motions for Grace to get the door as he loads.

JAMES

Who is it and what do you want?

Silence. James braces himself and shoulders the gun.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
 Answer me now!

Nothing. James nods to Grace.

James moves his finger to the TRIGGER.

Grace, with a nod, flings the door open in a flash.

James steps forward about to blast.

**INT/EXT. FRONT DOOR**

The end of the flintlock barrel reveals the wide EYES of ANGEL CUMMINGS, 12, thin and dressed in a muddy nightgown, lit by her lamp.

James lowers his weapon, scans for others as Grace races out the door and embraces the child.

GRACE  
 Dear Jesus, what be you doing out here?

Angel breathes heavy, traumatized.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
 It's good. You be safe.

A tear tracks down the child's cheek as Grace pulls back.

ANGEL CUMMINGS  
 My papa told me not to come, but my aunt sent me out the back. My ma needs you bad, Mistress Grace.

GRACE  
 You be the Cummings girl?

The child nods as she cries.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
 How did you get here?

ANGEL CUMMINGS  
 I ran.

**EXT. HORSE STALLS - MOMENTS LATER**

Steam fires from the horse's nostrils as John steadies the steed and James helps Angel on, behind Grace.



Grace holds reins in one hand and a lamp in the other.

JAMES  
Be careful, Grace.

GRACE  
(to Angel Cummings)  
Hold tight, lass.

With a kick, the trio of animal and riders disappear, swallowed by the darkness.

**EXT. CUMMINGS FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

Grace lowers Angel from her mount and hands her the lamp.

GRACE  
You go in the back. You need not  
pay for my presence.

ANGEL CUMMINGS  
Yes, ma'am.

**INT/EXT. CUMMINGS FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

Bazel Cummings, sweaty with whiskey bottle in hand, leans into the bedroom door where a flurry of FEMALE FAMILY MEMBERS all but drown out MOANS of a female in labor.

A KNOCK at the door snaps Cummings out of his stupor.

Cummings opens the door to a silent Grace.

CUMMINGS  
Who the hell told you to come?

Grace appears like a statue, only her eyes watch the ruckus behind Cummings. Angel hides in the shadows.

CUMMINGS (CONT'D)  
Our midwife is coming.

From the bedroom barges MARGARET, 30s, large and in charge sister-in-law. She pushes past Cummings, grabs Grace's hand, and leads her into the house.

MARGARET  
(to Cummings)  
Your midwife is nowhere to be  
found.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(to Grace)

This way.

Margaret leads Grace past Cummings' stare and into the bedroom.

CUMMINGS

That demon cannot be in this house!

**BEDROOM**

Family Members attend to Suzanna Cummings, pale, wet, and delirious. She slithers in her bed unable to get comfortable. Her MOANS are incessant.

Margaret whispers to Grace.

MARGARET

The baby's early, breech, one foot out, and blue. Just save my sister.

Grace squats at the foot of the bed and raises the sheet.

A discrete tiny BLUE LEG protrudes.

Grace brushes the bottom of the blue foot - movement!

Grace swings into action and retrieves a white apron from her cloth bag and dons it.

GRACE

(to Margaret)

We must get this foot back in and the baby turned or she'll tear.

Grace grabs a rag.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Keep it bent at the knee as I push.

Margaret reaches in and winces as Grace pushes. Only the SCREAMS of Suzanna can drown out the WET FLESHY NOISES.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Both hands!

Margaret reaches in, forced to watch.

SUZANNA CUMMINGS

My God! My God!

GRACE

In! Hold your hand there. I've got to turn it.

Margaret positions herself and pushes like she'd rather die herself. She turns away and vomits.

Grace hurries to Suzanna and massages her stomach. She attempts to reposition the baby. Other Family Members pin Suzanna.

SUZANNA CUMMINGS

Out. I have to get it out!

GRACE

Not yet. Don't push!

Uncontrollable, Suzanna screams and pushes.

MARGARET

Grace! Oh my God!

Grace moves back to the bed's end.

GRACE

No Suzanna. Don't--

SUZANNA CUMMINGS

Ahhh!

Grace catches the newborn. Not breathing! Grace turns the baby over and pats it on its back. Suzanna continues to scream and moan in the chaos.

The baby coughs and lets out a wail. Short lived relief.

Grace scans downward. A POOL of blood flows to the floor from the bed and Suzanna.

Grace grabs the nearest rag, thrusts it under the sheet.

Suzanna takes a deep breath as Grace grabs the hand of nearby COUSIN #1 and shoves it under the sheet.

GRACE

(to Cousin #1)

Hold this firm. Margaret, the baby.

Grace hands the baby to Margaret, dashes to Suzanna, leans in, and pats her cheek.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Suzanna. Suzanna. Awake. Awake!...  
Dear Jesus, help me.

Grace eyes Cousin #1. She holds the rag firm.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
She still bleeding?

Cousin #1 glimpses and shakes her head. Grace's forehead leans on Suzanna's forehead.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Come back, Suzanna. Come back.

Grace whispers a faint prayer.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Lord Jesus, grant thee thy  
servant's life and breath. Return  
her to her body present. Grant thee  
thy mercy and grace, oh Father...  
Dear Jesus, please.

Grace pulls away to reveal Suzanna's eyes fixed wide open and her mouth agape.

The muted room echoes the new baby's cries.

Angel rushes in and hugs her mother's body.

ANGEL CUMMINGS  
Ma, wake up. Ma!

Sobs fill the room as the baby settles.

Grace's bloody hand wipes tears from her shocked face.

With bottle, Bazel Cummings staggers in and takes notice of the mess, his lifeless wife, his daughter's sobs.

Grace, covered in fresh blood, stammers back, distraught.

Cummings turns to Margaret and points at Grace.

CUMMINGS  
You have brought this pestilence  
into my home. You went aside me and  
did this.

Cummings turns his gaze to Grace.

CUMMINGS (CONT'D)  
And you, you have put a curse upon  
my family. Get out!

GRACE  
Mr. Cummings, your baby--

CUMMINGS  
Get. Out.

Grace grabs her cloth bag and slips away.

As she holds her mother's body, Angel gazes at Grace.

CUMMINGS (CONT'D)  
All of you get out. Leave us.

Cummings drops to his knees and sobs as the empty bottle falls and rolls on the floor.

Family Members shuffle out. Angel moves and holds her father.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - BANKS OF THE MUDDY CREEK - DAY**

Grace stares over the creek and wooded frontier. James steps up beside her and surveys the same sight.

JAMES  
What troubles you, Grace?

Grace stands silent.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
You can't save them all.

GRACE  
Am I a witch? Be I a curse? I save one--I be normal, sane. I lose one, or a crop dies, or a herd drowns-- then I be to blame.

JAMES  
Those who know you know not a sorceress.

GRACE  
But does anyone know me?

JAMES  
Grace--

GRACE  
Yesterday I be blessed. Today I be a scourge. Tomorrow, which one I be?

Grace's eyes well up. She turns to James and hits him about the chest.

GRACE (CONT'D)

So hard! Why is it so hard? We be truly blessed yet hedged by hatred. Accused of being the Devil's own right hand.

James pulls Grace to his bosom.

JAMES

I love you because you are strong. We know well who you are, who we are. That is all that matters--all that matters.

**EXT. NASH FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY**

Barbara Nash, on her knees, pulls weeds. Grace trots up on horseback and hops off her ride.

GRACE

Barbara, I promised Paul I be paying a visit.

Barbara keeps her back to Grace.

BARBARA

Today is not good.

Grace scoots around the garden towards the front of Barbara.

GRACE

Never you mind. I be not long.

As Grace approaches, Barbara keeps her head down and turned away.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Barbara?

BARBARA

Grace, I can't--

Barbara raises her head, her face wet and swollen, hideous, unrecognizable.

GRACE

Sweet Jesus.

**INT. NASH FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER**

Grace places a damp cloth on Barbara's forehead.

GRACE

Rest.

Grace joins Paul who holds vigil in the doorway. Paul's SON, 2, and DAUGHTER GRACE, 6 months, play on the adjacent room's floor.

PAUL

She complained yesterday of her arms, legs, fingers not bending proper. Last night a fever. This morning bloated like a carcass.

Grace pulls a sachet from her cloth bag.

GRACE

Mix powder and water. Each time she awakes, rub the paste into her joints for pain. A cold cloth for fever.

PAUL

I sent for my sister to come. I've the livestock and farm to work.

GRACE

Let the farm go. Stay with her. I be back tomorrow early.

Paul turns his attention to Grace.

PAUL

I can't lose her, Grace.

Grace hears Paul's desperation.

GRACE

Don't leave her side.

**EXT. THOMAS FARMHOUSE - PORCH - DAY**

Bertha Thomas, PHYLLIS COCKER, 30, short and stocky, and Marah shuck corn and gossip.

BERTHA

He caught them both in his tobacco barn being familiar, wearing no more than what God made them with.

PHYLLIS  
That's scandalous!

MARAH  
I heard he whipped them bloody.

The women pause their gossip.

PHYLLIS  
A pity about Mistress Cummings.

MARAH  
And her Angel, so young, losing her  
ma.

BERTHA  
I heard the witch cast a spell on  
the whole lot and tried to choke  
the baby in the womb.

MARAH  
Grace Sherwood is not one to trifle  
with. She's a witch not afraid to  
ride a horse instead of a broom.  
She can cast a spell close at hand  
or her specter from afar.

PHYLLIS  
Let us stop this talk or I will  
have bad dreams.

The women stop their chatter for a moment and concentrate  
upon the task at hand.

The women jump at the SNAP of branches and RUSTLE of leaves  
from the side of the farmhouse.

A horse and rider emerge from the thicket.

The three women freeze, eyes wide upon Grace and her horse.

Grace slows her horse to a walk and notices their stares.

GRACE  
Ladies, pray you for Barbara Nash.  
She be gravely ill.

Answered with silent stares, Grace pauses, nods, and  
disappears into the thicket.

BERTHA  
Oh dear God, we be cursed! Can  
witches hear beyond their presence?



Phyllis murmurs and rocks back and forth.

PHYLLIS  
(whispers)  
Our Father, who art in heaven...

MARAH  
Is the house protected?

BERTHA  
Horseshoe, witch's bottle, witch's  
balls, amulets. Oh Jesus.

MARAH  
Then all you need is the hand of  
God to cover you.

Phyllis murmurs louder to herself as she runs through the  
Catholic Rosary. She repeats and crosses her chest.

PHYLLIS  
... but deliver us from evil. Amen.  
Hail Mary, full of grace--

BERTHA  
Phyllis, you're not Catholic.

PHYLLIS  
I care not. Lord protect me from  
nightmares tonight... The Lord is  
with thee. Blessed art...

**EXT. PATRICK JOHNSON FARM - SAME DAY**

Patrick Johnson points a judgmental finger.

PATRICK JOHNSON  
Tell me what you see, Mr. Sherwood.

JAMES  
Cotton plants.

PATRICK JOHNSON  
Blighted cotton plants. Across  
there are my blighted potato  
plants. That there is my blighted  
garden.

JAMES  
Have you asked me here to help, Mr.  
Johnson or to listen to you grouse?

Patrick Johnson takes a step towards James and pokes his finger in James's chest.

PATRICK JOHNSON

You can help me by having the witch leave my crops alone.

James has heard enough and mounts his horse to leave.

PATRICK JOHNSON (CONT'D)

You speak not, because you know the truth.

JAMES

I speak not, because the truth is, you do not know how to farm or water your crops.

PATRICK JOHNSON

The real truth is your wife has put a spell on mine and half the crops in Pungo.

JAMES

Your blight is of your own ignorance. You've grown tobacco in these very same fields for five seasons straight. It's a wonder weeds will grow.

PATRICK JOHNSON

Careful Mr. Sherwood. The ropes still swing in Salem.

James eyes Patrick Johnson, whips his horse around, leaves.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

James, Grace, and their three boys eat stew from a pot.

GRACE

I fear for Barbara if her swelling does not depart.

JAMES

What's brought this about?

GRACE

It be not familiar... I've never seen it before.

RICHARD

Is Mistress Nash going to die?

GRACE

I pray not.

(to James)

Did you visit old man Johnson?

JAMES

That I did. And I shall not see him again until in a court.

GRACE

Court? What did he say?

JAMES

He is of the mind that a spell has been put upon his and half the crops of Pungo, while ours remain pristine.

GRACE

And I was to blame?

James glances up but does not answer.

COBY

Mama, why does everyone hate us?

JAMES

Everyone doesn't hate us, son.

COBY

But people say Ma casts spells, ruins other's crops. I hear it at church from the other boys. They say you kill babies.

Grace POUNDS the table with her fist and bolts up.

GRACE

Enough!

The three boys and James freeze in their seats.

GRACE (CONT'D)

People, even God's people, tell lies when they know not the truth. They need someone to blame when they be afraid and can't blame themselves.

Surprised at her own anger, Grace gathers herself and sits.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We must forgive fools and try to turn the other cheek.

Everyone hesitates and eats, except for Richard.

RICHARD

Papa doesn't turn the other cheek.  
He takes them to court.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - DAWN**

Sunbeams shoot through the misty fog of Muddy Creek.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - HORSE BARN - DAY**

From the thick fog Grace appears with two buckets of water on a shoulder yoke as Coby tightens the saddle on the horse. The BLACK CAT follows Grace from the fog.

COBY

She's ready Ma.

Grace takes the reins and pats the horse on the neck.

Grace pulls her cape hood over her head and mounts the horse.

GRACE

Finish with the hogs for me, feed  
the chickens and check the nests  
for eggs.

COBY

Are you going to get blamed for  
this too?

Grace contemplates.

GRACE

I be back from the Nash's soon.

The Black Cat startles as the horse gallops past.

**EXT. THOMAS FARMHOUSE - MORNING**

Birds SING as fog floats between the trees.

Pregnant Bertha Thomas struggles to split wood. Her daughter Faith, with dirt-smudged face, dawdles in the open doorway in front of her.

Bertha swings and sticks the axe in a piece of wood.

Faith's EYES widen and lock.

The birds go silent.

Bertha frees the axe and sees her frozen child stare past her, mouth agape.

Bertha rises and tightens her grip on the axe handle. She spins as if she expects a cougar.

Bertha gasps, glares upward, and staggers backward.

A cloaked figure, likened to the Grim Reaper, towers high upon a horse over Bertha.

Bertha stumbles and sits hard onto the splitting stump.

The hooded Grace pulls her cover back.

GRACE

Mistress Thomas, you be well?

Bertha's heart races, her hand holds her stomach.

BERTHA

Dear God, woman! You spooked me half to death!

GRACE

Forgive me, I just be on my way to care for Barbara. Would you come?

The invitation shocks Bertha.

BERTHA

Ah, no. I'm sorry. I cannot. But I may be along later this morning. Give her our love and prayers.

Grace nods, CLICKS her mouth and trots her horse away.

Bertha stares slack-jawed into fog-silent woods. Faith steps up beside her.

FAITH

Mama, was that the witch?

**EXT. WOODED TRAIL - DAY**

Grace walks her horse. Her vision blurs. She stops, doubles over, and vomits, followed by violent dry heaves. She senses an old but familiar feeling with her hand on her stomach.

GRACE

How can this be?

**EXT. NASH FARM - MORNING - LATER**

Grace and her steed approach the farmhouse at a canter.

Grace hurries off her ride and scurries towards the house.

Paul stands in a barren field with his back to the house. Grace sees Paul and stops. She treads into the field.

GRACE

Paul?

Paul, in his own world, doesn't respond. Grace takes a step towards the human statue.

PAUL

I think she would like this spot.

GRACE

Pardon?

TEARS and RED EYES cloud Paul's stoic face.

PAUL

I will bury her here. She loved seeing deer graze in the mornings.

Paul surveys the barren field.

GRACE

But Paul, Barbara's--

PAUL

Gone. She's gone. I've lost her.

Grace's feet stagger as he drops to her knees at the loss.

Paul hangs his head.

Grace is stunned.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - REMOTE TREELINE - SAME DAY**

James, John, Coby, and Richard work downed trees in a bog.

Sweat rolls off James as he squats between a downed pine and an OX. He ties a rope around the trunk's girth.

John secures the rope's other end to the ox harness.

Coby and Richard trim branches from the trunk as John steadies the beast.

From underneath a rotted trunk a TIMBER RATTLESNAKE slithers out unnoticed and silent.

The rattlesnake creeps between the ox's legs. The ox stomps at the snake.

James notices a tug.

JAMES  
Hold her steady, John.

John grabs the harness, steadies the beast.

RATTLE, coil, STRIKE! The snake lands a venomous bite on the ox's foreleg. The ox jumps.

JOHN  
Ho! Ho!

RICHARD  
Snake! Snake!

The ox stomps and tugs forward; the trunk lunges.

THUNK! James's chest is SLAMMED by the log. The impact SLAPS him back, flat into the bog.

COBY  
Pa!

JOHN  
Ho! Ho!

STRIKE! The snake punctures the ox's leg again.

The ox charges forward, unhindered by the log.

James holds his chest, sits up as the trunk rams forward.

WHOMP! The trunk bludgeons James in the neck and head, as the rope SNAPS.

The trunk crashes on top of James' chest.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Pa! Pa!

John and Coby run to James's side.

Richard rushes the snake with a flurry of axe swings.

James's face is bloody, battered, torn.

John and Coby attempt to pull the trunk from James's chest –  
immoveable.

COBY  
Richard, help us!

Richard lands beside his brothers. The three attempt to heave  
the log.

James gasps for breath, coughs up blood.

JAMES  
Get your ma... Nash's.

**EXT. THOMAS FARMHOUSE - DAY**

SPLASH. A bucket of WATER runs over the head of a gutted and  
blood-drained pig that hangs upside-down from a tree.

Bertha Thomas, her white apron covered in RED BLOOD, sets  
aside the empty bucket.

Marah welds a carving knife on a nearby table covered in  
BLOOD and pig INNARDS.

Phyllis Cocker packs a second pig in a tub of salt. Blood  
covers everything.

BERTHA  
She appeared out of nowhere. I  
almost gave birth right there!

Marah stabs the knife into the wooden table and moves to help  
Phyllis salt pack the second carcass.

PHYLLIS  
You didn't hear her horse at all?

BERTHA  
She just appeared, I tell ya.

Marah washes her hands in a second bucket.

PHYLLIS  
How can that be?

MARAH  
When you're a witch--

The SNORT of a horse interrupts.

The three women twirl and GASP to see Grace stand before them  
beside her horse.



Marah slides back to the table and takes the knife to her side.

Grace's swollen eyes and fresh tears betray her empty stare.

GRACE

Barbara Nash has left us.

The women react in shock and suspicion.

BERTHA

What? How? But so quickly.

GRACE

In the night. It seems be some swelling disease.

MARAH

Paul and the babies--

The women startle again as Richard breaks into the clearing from the thicket.

RICHARD

Ma, come quick! Pa's hurt bad!

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - REMOTE TREELINE - MOMENTS LATER**

Grace and Richard gallop upon the scene. John prepares to pull the log off James with the injured ox.

Coby wedges another log to help slide the crushing log.

Grace and Richard bound off the horse.

Grace grabs the log to help push it off James.

COBY

Pull!

JOHN

Forward! Forward!

The crippled ox pulls the log off as James lets out a long heave and cry.

Grace plops in the muck next to James. Richard holds back.

Grace scoops James's head and chest into her lap. Blood pours out the side of James's head.

John and Coby gather around. Richard stands behind.

James fights to breathe and speak. His bloody hand grips Grace's cape as his eyes lock with Grace's.

JAMES

Grace, you're strong. Take care--

GRACE

James. James! Hold on.

JAMES

Take care of the boys.

GRACE

Stay, James! Stay!

JAMES

Grace--

James's eyes focus beyond and through Grace as his fist drops and his last breath bubbles out.

John and Coby's heads drop.

Grace lets out a guttural cry.

GRACE

No, God. No! Don't. No!

Richard backs away, holds his hands to his ears and cries like a child.

Grace and Richard's wails echo through the field. Grace rocks back and forth as she holds her husband's body.

The snake-bitten bull collapses.

**EXT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCHYARD - GRAVEYARD - DAY**

A lone BAGPIPER plays a Scottish DIRGE a hundred feet from the graveyard. He slow marches in time toward the grave. Surreal.

SERIES OF SHOTS -- James's Funeral

A) Grace stands at James's coffin, flanked by her sons.

B) Stoic expressions and dark attire.

C) A dozen FAMILY MEMBERS stand near Grace. Five middle-aged unaccompanied MEN stand near the back of the gathering.

The bagpipe MUSIC intensifies.

D) A receiving line passes in front of Grace.

E) Marah stares at Grace as she approaches the casket alone. She turns to the casket and places a dried, pressed, dead rose on top. She glances at a perplexed Grace as she glides away.

The bagpipe MUSIC grows louder.

F) Family members and friends hug Grace and shake her boys' hands as they walk through the line.

G) The five unaccompanied Men bring up the rear. Each nods as he passes by.

H) Grace delivers a "go to hell" look to each of the Men as they pass. She knows the reason for their presence.

The bagpipe MUSIC nears a crescendo.

I) The last of the Men, MR. JONES, 60s, a pudgy wealthy city dweller and dressed as such, locks eyes on Grace as he takes her hand.

MR. JONES

Grace Sherwood. David Jones. So  
sorry for your loss. We should talk  
in a few months.

Grace yanks her hand free as the bagpipe music grows to a strained volume.

J) The Bagpiper reaches the grave. With a loud CLICK of his HEELS, the music and madness end.

CUT TO BLACK.

**INT. WHITE FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - (DREAM)**

Susan White lies in bed weak and feverish. Young Grace attends to her alone.

Young Grace wipes Susan's brow and holds her hand.

SUSAN

(struggles)

Grace, love your Papa. Serve the  
Lord. Always...

Susan struggles to breath and get her words out.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

... always help others.

YOUNG GRACE

Yes, mama.

Susan stares into Young Grace's eyes and loses all expression.

YOUNG GRACE (CONT'D)

Mama? No Mama, don't go!

Young Grace hugs her mother, lies her head on her chest.

Young Grace's Papa staggers into the cabin alone, apprehensive, drunk.

Young Grace sits up and their eyes meet.

PAPA

No one would come help.

YOUNG GRACE

She's gone.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

An oil lamp burns nearby as Grace lies in bed and sobs, the left side of the bed empty.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - NIGHT**

The fireplace lights Grace's face as she cuts vegetables and drops them in a stew pot.

In a mindless stupor, Grace's cuts quicken as tears surge. With reckless anger, she throws cuttings at the pot and rages more by the second.

SLICE. GASP! Blood drips onto a bowl of potatoes. The knife CLANKS as it hits the floor.

Grace grips her left hand. Blood oozes from her palm. She grabs a cloth, wraps her hand, and closes her fist.

She rocks, stares into the fire, and grieves.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT**

Grace sits on the steps and stares at the FULL MOON.

SNAP! RUSTLE! Grace awakens and stands from her stupor.

GRACE  
Who be there?

PAUL (O.S.)  
Grace, it's me, Paul.

Paul approaches the porch.

GRACE  
Paul, why you be out walking at  
night? Something wrong?

PAUL  
No, I just--

GRACE  
Won't you come inside?

PAUL  
I mustn't. I just wanted--

Paul notices her blood-soaked wrapped hand.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Your hand. Are you hurt?

Paul reaches in on instinct and takes Grace's hand, as a husband would.

GRACE  
It be small, from cutting potatoes.

Their eyes meet for a split second.

PAUL  
You best put some salve on it.

Hesitant, Grace nods and pulls her hand back. A pregnant moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I'm so sorry about James. It seems  
calamity has befell us both.

Grace avoids Paul's gaze.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I wanted to thank you for all your  
help with Barbara.

GRACE  
Your children? Who--

PAUL

My sister from Norfolk has moved in to help, just until other plans can be made.

GRACE

Barbara was a good woman, a good friend.

Grace and Paul stand for a moment, unsure.

PAUL

I must get home. There is much to do. I only wanted to thank you.

GRACE

Take care Paul. I will bring flowers soon for Barbara's grave.

Paul nods and shuffles away.

Grace lingers in thought as Paul disappears.

#### **MONTAGE - SHERWOOD FARM HARD WINTER**

A) Firewood Area--Heavy snow falls as Richard splits wood.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

There be little time to mourn their loss in the seasons that came, Spring too distant to hope for.

B) Open Field--Coby lifts clothes out of a cauldron.

C) Cabin Hearth--Grace and her boys huddle and eat around the fireplace as the wind howls outside the windows.

D) Horse Barn--Grace scatters chicken feed over snow. She stops for a moment, bent over in pain. She reaches under skirt to reveal a smear of blood on her fingers.

END MONTAGE

#### **INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

SUPER: EARLY SPRING 1702

Pregnant Grace serves a cup of tea to Mr. Jones. John stands near with his rifle in hand. Grace sits across from Mr. Jones, cold.

GRACE

Mr. Jones, I have no need of a man,  
other than my boys.

MR. JONES

But how shall you survive? You're  
in no shape to work a farm. I could  
make life so much easier for you.

GRACE

I be surviving out here for twenty  
years, with or without child. I  
hardly need you now.

MR. JONES

Miss Sherwood--

GRACE

Enjoy your tea Mr. Jones. Then  
leave.

MR. JONES

But Miss Sherwood!

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Mr. Jones steps out the front door and turns back. John and  
his rifle back up Grace.

GRACE

Mr. Jones, I shall not be marrying  
you, nor any other man.

MR. JONES

Miss Sherwood, I never--

GRACE

No, I suppose you haven't.

MR. JONES

Mistress Sherwood, it's been nearly  
a year. You're a widow. You must--

GRACE

I mustn't do a thing.

WHAM! The door slams in Mr. Jones's face.

**INT. HORSE BARN - DAY**

The trusted work horse flails on the floor, lame and ill.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)  
 At times life be harsh for the  
 lass.

Pregnant Grace stares and raises her flint lock. John's hand reaches in and removes the rifle from Grace's grip. As Grace slow marches away from the stall a FLASH and GUNSHOT resounds. Grace squeezes her eyes shut, tears roll out.

**EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Grace's hand feeds a wild RACCOON near her back door.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)  
 At other times, life be simple.

The BLACK CAT studies the raccoon from a high perch of stacked firewood. Grace pats and reassures the Black Cat.

GRACE  
 (whispers to the cat)  
 Be not jealous. I love you most.

**EXT. MUDDY CREEK BANKS - DAY**

WHACK. Pregnant Grace splits firewood near her cauldron. In mid-swing, Grace is struck with sharp pains. Her boys run to her side.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - TREE GROVE - DAY**

Grace mourns alone by a small, fresh grave.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)  
 Adversaries ever present, ever  
 near.

Grace notices Anthony and Marah stare as their wagon rolls past on the nearby road. Marah flashes the fig sign, a flagrant rejection of Grace.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - TOBACCO FIELD - DAY**

Three green TOBACCO WORMS slam onto the soil and squirm. A worn work boot grounds them into the dirt.

Grace and her boys, broiled by the heat, weed and de-worm fledgling tobacco rows. Grace notices Paul Nash and his horse appear from the trees. The Sherwood's take notice as Paul trots up and dismounts.



PAUL  
Boys. Grace.

JOHN  
Sir.

GRACE  
Mr. Nash, everything be well? The children?

PAUL  
Fine. Everything is good. I was hoping I could speak with you.

Grace nods.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
Walk with me?

Grace glances towards her boys as Paul leads the horse by the reins. The couple amble toward the end of the field.

John and Richard return to their chore. Coby watches.

COBY  
I wonder the nature of that.

Richard stops to watch. John continues his work.

JOHN  
Nary a man has been on this farm in the past year that hasn't been after the same thing.

#### **TOBACCO ROWS - WALKING**

Grace and Paul stroll in silence as the horse trails.

PAUL  
It seems like yesterday that Barbara was here, taking care of the children, me. Same for you?

GRACE  
A lifetime ago. There been little time for mourning. The farm consumes me.

PAUL  
If not for my sister, I'm not sure what would have become of us.

GRACE

My boys and the Lord sustain me.

The two walk on.

PAUL

The weather has been very good for  
the tobacco--

Grace stops.

GRACE

Mr. Nash, you be not here to speak  
with me about the weather, tobacco,  
nor our dead lovers.

Paul hesitates at Grace's blunt nature.

PAUL

No, you're right.

#### **TOBACCO FIELD - WEEDING**

The boys continue to weed and de-worm the plants. Coby and Richard glance up to check on Grace and Paul. John remains focused on the crop.

RICHARD

Do you think Ma would do it?

JOHN

Never.

COBY

But what if a man came along...

#### **TOBACCO FIELD - END OF FIELD**

Grace contends with Paul.

GRACE

I be humbled by your proffer, Paul.  
Any woman would. But when I be  
gone, the farm will be all my boys  
have.

PAUL

But Grace I wouldn't--

GRACE

Your assurances and proposal be not  
unwelcome.

(MORE)

## GRACE (CONT'D)

But I live a strange existence and  
I take not my future for granted.  
This place be my boys' and no other  
man's. Not even yours, Paul.

**TOBACCO FIELD - WEEDING**

John stops his weeding and peers at Coby and Richard.

## JOHN

There are but a few things that Ma  
needs. Another man is not likely  
one of them.

Coby and Richard nod and take notice of Paul and Grace.

John stops and also views the couple.

**END OF FIELD**

Paul and Grace embrace for a moment. Grace pulls herself back  
and gazes into Paul's eyes.

## GRACE

Let this rest a bit, Paul. But be  
not a stranger.

Paul nods, mounts his ride and trots into the thicket.

**TOBACCO FIELD - WEEDING - MOMENTS LATER**

Grace rejoins her boys who stop their work. Grace nods. The  
boys nod, glance at each other, work resumes.

**MONTAGE - GRACE SERVES PUNGO**

A) A large fire licks the bottom of Grace's cauldron as she  
pours in lye and holds her apron over her nose.

B) Grace presents a basket of homemade candles for the  
congregation and notes to the nonplussed REVEREND where each  
should go.

C) In a matter-of-fact manner, Grace instructs a YOUNG WIFE  
on irrigating her kitchen garden.

D) Grace waits cross-armed as LOCAL FARMER #1 expresses his  
displeasure with her animal husbandry suggestions.

END MONTAGE

**EXT. LUKE HILL FARM - FOREST CLEARING - DAY**

SUPER: 1705

Grace hikes as if on a mission and strides from the narrow deer trail into the open clearing.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Try as she may, even in times of danger, petty hatred or severe sickness, the lass could not hold herself back.

Smoke trails from the chimney of a small dwelling at the clearing's far end.

**INT. LUKE HILL FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

ELIZABETH HILL, pregnant, ill, lies in bed. Like buzzing gnats, voice murmurs cause Elizabeth to stir.

Elizabeth steadies herself and lurches to the window.

**EXT. LUKE HILL FARMHOUSE - SIDE YARD - DAY**

Grace and Luke face each other.

GRACE

I got word that Elizabeth be taken ill with child.

Luke Hill nods and surveys Grace with roaming eyes.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You and Elizabeth need my midwife skills for the birth.

Awkwardness grows. Luke Hill stares at Grace's body, not her eyes. Grace removes her fabric bag.

Luke Hill's EYES take liberty with their view as Grace bends over and digs in her bag.

She pulls out a jar of oil and a sachet of powder.

**BEDROOM WINDOW**

Elizabeth peers out at the pair. A witches' ball hangs in the open window. Amulets occupy the frame. Elizabeth seethes at Luke's lustful, meandering eyes.

**SIDE YARD**

Grace offers the jar and sachet to Luke.

GRACE

If you refuse, I leave you these still. The oil on the temples for pain and the powder to drink with water for a temperate stomach.

Luke catches the glare of Elizabeth, now from the open doorway. He straightens. How long has she been watching?

LUKE HILL

I've heard how you deliver babies and their mothers--straight into hell!

GRACE

Mr. Hill--

KSSSSHHHHH! The bottle of oil crashes against the cabin.

LUKE HILL

We are a Christian family. We don't want any of your concoctions.

Luke shakes the sachet open and pours the powder out, the breeze whirls it though the air.

GRACE

I be a member in good standing of the same church as you.

LUKE HILL

That means nothing to us. You're an interloper, a meddler.

GRACE

I insist you need my help.

LUKE HILL

We want none of your help. Leave.

Luke marches past Grace.

Elizabeth's eyes penetrate Grace from the doorway as she clutches her stomach. She braces herself in the door.

Luke reaches to help her back inside.

SLAP! Elizabeth stuns Luke with a strike across his face.

ELIZABETH HILL

You bastard.

Luke raises his hand and Elizabeth flinches. Luke stops himself and stomps inside.

Elizabeth delivers the look of death to Grace and slams the door.

**EXT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCH - DAY**

Parishioners cluster in small groups and visit as Grace leaves the church followed by her boys. Bertha Thomas and Sarah Norris huddle with FEMALE PARISHIONER #1 as Grace passes by. Elizabeth Hill, bursting-at-the-seams pregnant and pale, and Marah stand in proximity.

BERTHA

Oh my! Grace is wearing a dress.  
Why don't you wear your dead  
husband's britches to church like  
you do the other six days of the  
week?

Grace stops and takes a step back toward the women.

GRACE

If you happened to be getting your  
velvet hands a wee bit dirty with  
the land, instead of just cooking  
and always laying down for your  
man, then you might take a liking  
to britches rather than a gaudy  
dress.

Bertha reels wide-eyed and speechless.

SARAH NORRIS

You are vile, uncultured, and  
unlike any lady, Grace Sherwood.

Grace no longer holds back for these miscreants.

GRACE

There be nothing lady-like about  
owning and running a farm. But you  
two be knowing nothing of the like.  
Your petty jealousies and  
slanderous gossip bore me. I pray  
daily for you.

John swoops in, tips his hat and nudges Grace's shoulders.

JOHN

Ma, we must be going. Ladies.

John leads Grace away. The women dither and stare.

MARAH

One day she shall answer for her sharp tongue.

**EXT. LUKE HILL FARM - EDGE OF CLEARING - DAY**

At the head of a small mound of dirt, Luke Hill drives a wooden cross into the ground that reads "Hill Infant". Luke and Elizabeth linger at the fresh grave.

Marah steps into view beside Elizabeth.

Tears of anger cascade down Elizabeth Hill's stone face.

Luke remains numb to the world.

MARAH

She must pay for this curse. She must pay most severely.

Luke and Elizabeth's eyes meet.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - MUDDY CREEK BANKS - DAY**

Grace's boys load their skiff with fishing gear and nets as Grace sees them into the water.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Revenge be a cruel mistress of those offended. She rests not 'til the deed be fully inflicted.

The Sherwood boys row away from the bank downstream.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS**

Alone, Grace clears the creek bank to where her cauldrons of wash and medicinals boil.

In the near corn field, Elizabeth and Luke Hill simmer in their wagon. Smashed corn stalks lie in their wake.

Elizabeth Hill bounds down from the wagon towards Grace.

GRACE

What be the meaning of this  
disregard--

TWHACK! A pine branch breaks across Grace's back.

The brawl is on, with Elizabeth's blows, flying mud, and a  
stumble by Grace through the cauldrons and fire.

Grace's dry wool pant leg bursts into flames.

Elizabeth moves in for the kill swing.

GRUNT! Her lunge breaks, stopped dead by Luke's grasp.

Elizabeth and Luke's eyes meet. Luke jerks the branch.

Enraged, Elizabeth dives on top of Grace, and unleashes a  
barrage of fists as the duo rumble in the mud.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Stop, for the love of God!

The flurry persists. Elizabeth's fists redden with blood.

Elizabeth grabs another branch and raises it overhead to  
drive it into Grace's skull.

KABOOM! Wood shards shatter over Elizabeth's head. Luke  
lowers his flintlock.

LUKE HILL

That's enough.

ELIZABETH HILL

I'm not--

LUKE HILL

I said that will be enough.

Elizabeth towers over Grace, kicks her in the stomach and  
spits on her.

ELIZABETH HILL

That was for my baby, you mongrel  
bitch!

As Elizabeth passes by Luke, she punches at and pushes him.  
Luke, unfazed, shoves her to the ground with force.

LUKE HILL

Get in the damn wagon.

Luke gazes back at Grace's crumpled heap.



Grace coughs up BLOOD through her pummeled face.

Luke CRACKS the reins. The wagon leaves and tramples the Sherwood's crop further.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - LATER**

A wet and bloody cloth dips into a wash basin. Dull red water wrings out.

John dabs the swollen, almost unrecognizable face. Grace's features swell as a mishmash of blackened eyes, puffy knots, bruises, and cuts.

Coby and Richard watch.

JOHN

Tell us who did this to you, Ma.

COBY

This needs to be made right. I'll kill the man who did this.

GRACE

That be why I won't tell you. I'll not lose any of you on my account.

RICHARD

No self-respecting man would do this.

GRACE

(to John)

Tomorrow you will take me to see Col. Moseley.

JOHN

Just let us be done with the bastard here and now.

COBY

Ma, everyone treats you like shit. But you hardly do nothing!

GRACE

You mind your words! An eye for an eye be not the way.

COBY

Pa sued half the people in Pungo. Look what it got us - ill will.

GRACE

You respect your Pa's memory!

COBY

Ma, I do, but--

GRACE

This is how I wish to do it, with  
or without you.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

Col. Moseley holds center court, flanked by the Justices.

The Hills listen arms length apart from Grace.

Marah stands nearby behind the bar.

COL. MOSELEY

Does either party have any final  
statements?

Elizabeth lurches forward.

ELIZABETH HILL

This woman did bewitch me while I  
was with child. And because we  
would not let her serve as our  
midwife, she did most assuredly  
cast a spell...

Elizabeth weeps, sees Marah, and then goes for the jugular.

ELIZABETH HILL (CONT'D)

... and killed my baby. I am  
therefore justified in striking her  
for her malice towards me. I am  
justified!

The Gallery murmurs and the Sheriff pounds his staff.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Sherwood?

Grace stands, alone and reluctant, arms crossed.

The room, in breathless silence save for a couple of wooden  
chair creeks, leans in to listen.

Grace looks like hell. Her swollen eyes and beat-down face  
speak for her.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
Mistress Sherwood!

She shakes her head, "No" and sits.

**LATER**

The gavel slams as the Seven Justices and Col. Moseley re-enter the court.

COL. MOSELEY  
Will the parties stand.

The Hills and Grace rise. Elizabeth Hill defiant; Grace's arms remain crossed. Marah watches in the gathering.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
It is the finding of this Court that Mistress Sherwood was beaten barbarously, bruised and maimed. It's therefore the judgement of this Court to find the defendants guilty of assault and battery upon Mistress Grace Sherwood.

A dull roar rises from the Gallery.

Elizabeth and Luke stiffen.

The Sheriff slams his staff with extra force.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
It is also the decision of this Court to award Mistress Sherwood fifty pounds sterling, payable by the Hills presently.

The murmurs arise to a loud clatter of voices and footsteps.

Marah slams her fist onto the bar. Insult to injury. She pushes her way to Elizabeth Hill and walks her out.

Luke Hill glares at Grace.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

The wind whips snow over the deep covered farm.

Grace's bare hand adds a powdered stick of firewood to her armful.

Grace plods amongst the whiteout towards the back door.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

When pride or revenge rule a man's  
heart, the demons' thirst be not  
easily quenched.

A ewe and lamb BLEAT as Coby and Richard herd the mother and carry the lamb into the farmhouse ahead of Grace.

Grace stumbles and spills her load, the wood sinks into the snow without a sound. John rushes out and helps retrieve the wood.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

With the winter did arrive a  
bitterness more frigid than the  
northern wind... A sour root to  
poison the minds and forever  
blacken the eye of Pungo.

Richard fights the door and wind as Grace and John enter and then crashes it shut to the world.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

The fireplace roars as Grace prepares potatoes at the table.

Richard mends clothing as John repairs a fishing net and Coby carves a piece of wood.

The wind outside, a constant winter howl, mixes with the bleating of a baby lamb next to its mother by the fire.

An unexpected POUNDING at the door breaks the isolation.

All eyes meet. John rises with Coby and Richard. Richard takes a glance out the window as John grabs the rifle.

RICHARD

It's a dark dressed man and a  
horse.

John opens the door. The wind and winter enter. The Court Servant shouts over howling wind.

COURT SERVANT

I'm a court servant of Princess  
Anne County!

JOHN

Good God, man! Get inside!

John pulls the Court Servant inside and slams the door.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Who did you say you were?

COURT SERVANT  
I'm a court servant of Princess  
Anne County.

John and Coby's eyes meet and creep towards the Court  
Servant.

JOHN  
What the hell's your business here?

Grace steps forward.

GRACE  
John!

COURT SERVANT  
I have a message for Mistress  
Sherwood.

John waits for the message, stares him down.

GRACE  
Boys, have you no manners?

With their stances, John and Coby impose their protective  
nature towards the Court Servant.

Grace crosses to the Court Servant.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Would you like some tea?

COURT SERVANT  
Oh, yes ma'am. That would be most  
hospitable. Thank you.

GRACE  
Your coat?

COURT SERVANT  
No. I cannot stay but to deliver my  
message and be on my way.

GRACE  
Warm yourself. You must be frozen.

John leaves only enough room for the Court Servant to get by  
on his way to the fireplace. John bumps his shoulder.

John maintains his stare as the Court Servant removes his  
gloves and warms his hands.

JOHN

Why do you bother us in the dead of winter?

COURT SERVANT

I have my orders from the court. I am entrusted to dispatch them.

Grace serves the steaming cup of brew.

COURT SERVANT (CONT'D)

Thank you again.

GRACE

Please sit.

Grace and the Court Servant gather at the table.

COURT SERVANT

I wish the news I bring were more suited to your hospitality, Mistress Sherwood.

The Court Servant removes a document from his inner pocket.

COURT SERVANT (CONT'D)

(reads)

Grace Sherwood is hereby summoned in Appeal by Luke and Elizabeth Hill to appear before the Court of Princess Anne County for the prior assault and battery conviction in the year of our Lord 1706, on--

Grace raises her hand and stops the Court Servant.

GRACE

Sir?

The Court Servant sets aside the summons.

COURT SERVANT

The Hills say they have new evidence and will appeal the guilty assault and battery verdict.

COBY

New evidence of what?

COURT SERVANT

The Hills are openly and publicly accusing your mother of being a witch. They say they have witnesses to prove it.

John steps towards the Court Servant.

JOHN  
Must we continue this mockery--

GRACE  
Stop!

Grace rises, steps to the hearth and grasps a poker. She pokes and prods the fire.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
I be fighting this fire for a half-  
dozen years or more.

Grace stirs the coals as if they were a stew.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
James Sherwood said we must fight  
every accusation in court lest we  
all be burned at the stake - and we  
have done so, many a time.

Grace stabs at the wood, coals, and flames with vengeance at the mention of each offender.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Richard Capps. John Gisborn. Marah  
Barnes. Luke Hill. All the back  
biting. The pointing fingers. Even  
at church! The whispers. The  
gossip!

WHOP! SMASH! Grace slams the red hot poker onto the table and smashes the Court Servant's tea cup. Tea and shards splatter over the Court Servant.

The Court Servant freezes wide-eyed.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Even when justice be favoring us,  
it does not!

John and Richard take a step towards Grace.

Grace points the poker at her boys and the Court Servant.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
What be your name, son?

COURT SERVANT  
Ah, Stephen Thomas, ma'am.

GRACE

Stephen Thomas. That be a good Christian name.

COURT SERVANT

Yes, Mistress Sherwood.

GRACE

I have a message for you to deliver, Stephen. You tell the Hills, the Barnes, the Magistrates, anybody, everybody! I be in court no more. If I be wanted in court, they will drag me there themselves!

Grace slams the poker onto the table. CLANG! An awkward, silent moment persists.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Would you be liking some more tea?

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

SUPER: FOUR WEEKS LATER

MAXIMILLIAN BOUSH, 40s, the tall, commanding and cocky prosecuting attorney for the Queen, rises. In the full courthouse, the Box of the Accused lies empty.

BOUSH

I make a motion to judgement based upon the absence of the defendant.

COL. MOSELEY

Motion denied. Mr. Boush, we will convene this evidentiary hearing one way or the other. Whereas the Hills summoned Grace Sherwood to this court on suspicion of witchcraft, she failed to appear. It is therefore ordered the sheriff to arrest Grace Sherwood and answer to said summons. The Sheriff shall summon an able Jury of Women to search Grace Sherwood bodily on suspicion of witchcraft.

Col. Moseley pounds his gavel.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

This court is adjourned for discussion. Clear the court.



**MOMENTS LATER**

Col. Moseley occupies the bench surrounded by the Seven Justices as the men wrangle and dispute each other.

JUSTICE #1

We cannot allow the slightest inference that witchcraft might exist in Princess Anne County.

JUSTICE #2

We must fully prosecute this.

JUSTICE #3

Are you actually prepared to burn a woman at the stake based on pure conjecture and unfounded accusations?

JUSTICE #4

We will become Salem itself!

The argument breaks into a shouting match.

Col. Moseley stands and strikes his gavel.

COL. MOSELEY

Gentlemen! I have no intention of allowing the debacle of Salem to be repeated! No one will be burned at a stake. Nor shall Mistress Sherwood be set scot-free, if guilty.

JUSTICE #1

But what if she is a witch?

COL. MOSELEY

Come now, gentlemen. We are all learned men. Do any of you believe Mistress Sherwood to be a witch?

JUSTICE #1

It's not what we believe that matters, but what the public believes.

Col. Moseley separates himself from the group.

COL. MOSELEY

The woman has been to court nearly a dozen times on virtually the same accusations.

(MORE)

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

I want this matter settled and to be brought up no more. There may be more at stake than just the community's unease.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - NEW TOBACCO SEEDBED - DAY**

White smoke wafts across a small clearing and hangs in the thick forest.

Images of human figures fade and appear through the smoke.

Grace, John, Coby, and Richard work a controlled burn of grass and fodder with a torch, broom and wet toe sacks.

Horse WHINNIES and ROLLING WAGON sounds alert the Sherwoods.

Through the hanging smoke and forest, a contingency of eight uniformed MEN ON HORSES and a wagon emerge.

John grabs the flintlock from a stump.

The parade pulls up along side the clearing. The lead horse with Col. Moseley astride saunters up near Grace.

COL. MOSELEY

Grace Sherwood. I believe you and I had an appointment a while back at the behest of Luke Hill. I so missed seeing you in court again.

GRACE

Col. Moseley, I run a farm. I believe I told your court servant I be coming to court no more.

COL. MOSELEY

I believe your exact words were, "They will drag me there themselves."

GRACE

Aye.

COL. MOSELEY

Gentlemen?

Three SHERIFF DEPUTIES approach Grace.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

You're due in court once again tomorrow. I plan to make sure you're there.

John, with his flintlock, and Coby take steps toward Grace.

Two other SHERIFF DEPUTIES, brandish rifles and block the boys' progress.

The trio of Sheriff Deputies bind Grace's wrists in shackles.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - LATER**

A contingency of horses and men surround the dwelling. Deputies travel in, out, and around the cabin.

A Sheriff Deputy digs a hole at the front door threshold.

Grace, in wrist shackles, rests in the back of the wagon, guarded by a Sheriff Deputy with John nearby.

JOHN

Why are they going through our things? What are they looking for?

GRACE

Something that does not exist.

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Col. Moseley waits in the center with the Sheriff as he surveys the contents and two Deputies. A third Deputy climbs down the ladder from the loft.

DEPUTY #1

Nothing up here sir.

DEPUTY #2 shakes his head at DEPUTY #3.

DEPUTY #3

Sheriff, nothing inside. Nothing out of the ordinary.

SHERIFF

Not even a horseshoe over the door.

DEPUTY #4 enters the back door.

DEPUTY #4

Nothing outside. Nothing around the house or the windows.

Col. Moseley views the Deputy as he digs at the threshold.

COL. MOSELEY

Deputy?

DEPUTY #5

If there's a witch's bottle here, I  
can't find it.

Col. Moseley stumbles on a chair as he walks toward the door.  
A startled BLACK CAT rushes from under a table and out the  
front door and jumps past the digging Deputy #5.

Deputy #5 scurries to his feet, makes the Sign of the Cross.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

Col. Moseley and the Sheriff stride to the wagon and meet  
DEPUTY #6 who whispers and points toward the creek.

John, Coby, and Richard stand near the wagon and Grace.

COL. MOSELEY

Very well.  
(to Grace)  
Mistress Sherwood--

GRACE

You be finding none.

COL. MOSELEY

And what might that be?

GRACE

I have no tools of witchcraft.

COL. MOSELEY

Apparently you don't, save your  
cauldrons by the banks and your  
black cat.

GRACE

Every farmer in Pungo owns  
cauldrons. Do you not own a few,  
Col. Moseley?

COL. MOSELEY

I suppose I do.

GRACE

Then you must be a witch.

Col. Moseley smirks.

Deputy #7 rushes up to Col. Moseley, whispers in his ear.

A wagon loaded with SIX WOMEN arrives.

COL. MOSELEY

Finally the "fillies" have arrived.  
Escort them over quickly, I want to  
be moving on soon.

DEPUTY #7

Yes, Your Honor.

The deputy hustles away and Col. Moseley receives a small  
SCROLL from the Sheriff.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Sherwood, by order of the  
Court of Princess Anne County, you  
are hereby ordered to be searched  
by a jury of women to decide ye  
said difference between you. Said  
jury is sworn to make due inquiry  
and inspection into all matters.

John moves in close to Grace.

JOHN

What does that mean, Ma?

COL. MOSELEY

It means the jury shall examine  
your mother for marks of the devil.

The Six Women trudge over to Grace's wagon.

Amongst this group travels Bertha Thomas and Sarah Norris.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Deputy, you shall assist our jury  
forewoman, Marah Barnes.

Zealous Marah makes certain and almost gleeful eye contact  
with Grace.

Grace stiffens and stares.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Remove the prisoner from the wagon  
and her shackles, and follow  
Mistress Barnes' requests.

SHERIFF

Yes, Your Honor.

Two deputies scale the wagon, remove Grace into the arms of  
two other deputies on the ground and release her shackles.

The deputies escort Grace a few feet away and encircle her. The jury enters the circle led by Marah.

MARAH  
Disrobe her.

Grace scans the eyes of the other women as they hesitate. John, Coby, and Richard jump to intercede. Three deputies block their advance with muskets.

DEPUTY #7  
Stand away.

MARAH  
Ladies, disrobe her that we might examine her for marks of the devil.

Two women, ANN BRIDGES, 30s, and JOAN COTLE, 40s, creep towards Grace and unbutton her outer garment as if breakable.

ANN BRIDGES  
I am so sorry, Grace.

JOAN COTLE  
Please forgive me--

MARAH  
Ladies quickly. With haste!

The rest join in.

COL. MOSELEY  
Mistress Barnes...

Col. Moseley motions for Marah to hurry along.

Marah pushes into the women, tears at the clothing, and drops Grace's pants.

MARAH  
Step out. Step out!

As Grace steps out of her pants, all her outer garments come off. She stands only in her shift.

MARAH (CONT'D)  
All of it.

Surrounded, Grace gives Marah a cold stare and lifts her shift over her head, her pale white skin exposed to all.

Most of the jury glance away. Deputies stare. Grace's sons' faces redden.

JOHN

What kind of debauchery is this?

COL. MOSELEY

Only a judicial formality, Mr. Sherwood.

Marah encourages the women to gather around.

MARAH

Out of the ordinary markings, moles, teats. If there be a marking you've not got, then it is suspect.

The women move in and search.

As the women probe Grace with their eyes, she stares at each deputy, who in turn cast their eyes downward.

COL. MOSELEY

Deputies, about face.

As the deputies turn, Bertha Thomas takes notice of a mark.

BERTHA

There, look! Two black teats near her nether region.

The women gather to see, a few stare, others only glance.

Marah moves in close.

MARAH

Yes, definitely. Like nothing I have, nor have I ever seen.

Marah stands up straight and leans towards Grace.

MARAH (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Since the day you stole my James...

Marah backs away and stares at Grace with a grin. Grace is speechless.

MARAH (CONT'D)

Any other marks, ladies?

The women look away, silent, and await instructions.

MARAH (CONT'D)

Very well. We are done, Colonel.

The women traipse away.

Grace stands stiff and bare, her clothing strewn about.

Ann Bridges stops and picks up Grace's shift, trods back and helps Grace dress. Joan Cotle joins her.

Humiliated tears sit on Grace's cheeks.

Col. Moseley marches up to Grace as a deputy re-shackles her.

COL. MOSELEY

Please accept my apologies, but this could not be avoided.

(to his deputies)

Load up and prepare to head back.

(to Grace)

I don't want you coming back to my court again, Mistress Sherwood. I plan to get to the root of this. Either you're a witch or you aren't. We'll deal with it and then we'll all move on.

GRACE

All of us?

COL. MOSELEY

We can certainly hope so, can't we?

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - DAY**

The cell door creaks open as the Sheriff escorts Grace inside. Grace surveys the dank, timbered space.

Inside lies a stained mattress on a dirt floor. In the corner rest two pots - one for washing, one for relief.

Light beams through a high exterior barred window. A single candle burns on the wall.

Grace freezes at the sight of her new square hell.

SHERIFF

A deputy will be by in the morning to prepare you for trial.

The Sheriff exits with the thud of the heavy wooden door.



**EXT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

A CROWD presses against the courthouse to peer in the windows and hear the proceedings. Stragglers rush to the swarm.

SHERIFF (O.C.)

Oyez, oyez, silence is commended in the court while Her Majesty's justices are sitting! Ye evidentiary hearing is called to order.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - DAY**

Col. Moseley, flanked by the other Seven Justices, slams his gavel and quiets the packed courthouse.

Grace inhabits the Box of the Accused, wrists shackled. Her sons observe from among the Crowd behind the bar.

Maximilian Boush controls the Petitioner's table as he listens and takes notes. Luke and Elizabeth Hill sit beside.

COL. MOSELEY

Will the forewoman of the Jury of Women please present the findings of your examination of Mistress Sherwood. Mistress Barnes?

Marah bolts up from the gallery and strides forward as she stares at Grace.

MARAH

We of ye jury have thoroughly examined Grace Sherwood and have found two growths like teats upon her nether regions, with several other spots.

COL. MOSELEY

Thank you, Mistress--

MARAH

These are most assuredly marks of the devil himself!

Col. Moseley gavels her silent.

Elizabeth Hill and Marah's eyes meet.

COL. MOSELEY

We will be the judge of that, Mistress Barnes. Thank you.

(MORE)

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Will the Sheriff please testify to his findings upon the search of the Sherwood farm and dwelling?

The Sheriff steps forward from beside the Justices.

SHERIFF

Upon the search of the Sherwood dwelling and property, no evidence of witchcraft nor its instruments could be found, save the presence of a few cauldrons near the creek.

Maximilian Boush lurches up.

BOUSH

Your honor, may I ask a few questions?

Col. Moseley nods.

BOUSH (CONT'D)

Sheriff, are you saying nothing was found at all? No amulets, witch's balls? No bottle under the threshold, beasties in the garden? No dolls for pricking?

SHERIFF

No sir. Nothing but washing and cooking cauldrons.

Boush plays to the Crowd.

BOUSH

Sheriff, forgive me, but, don't you find it strange that a woman repeatedly rumored to be a witch, and now outrightly accused of sorcery, would be found with no tools of her practice?

SHERIFF

I don't know sir.

BOUSH

Or perhaps the only person who wouldn't need the protection from a witch, would be... a witch?

Col. Moseley slams his gavel.

COL. MOSELEY

Mr. Boush! The Sheriff is merely reporting upon his findings. It is not his place to judge the meaning of his findings. You shall keep all such inquiries to yourself.

BOUSH

Yes, of course, Your Honor. My apologies.

Boush settles back into his seat, scans the faces of the justices, and grins.

COL. MOSELEY

Let us now move on to witnesses.

**LATER**

MONTAGE - TESTIMONY AGAINST GRACE

- A) Patrick Johnson is sworn in before the court
- B) A wild-eyed FEMALE GOSSIP #1 speaks.

FEMALE GOSSIP #1

I seen her talk freely with wild animals.

- C) Bazel Cummings weeps in anger.

BAZEL CUMMINGS

She just took her.

- D) FEMALE GOSSIP #2 speaks with flailing arms.

FEMALE GOSSIP #2

I once seen her dancing naked in a field...

- E) Richard Capps expounds.

CAPPS

I lost a flock of sheep and my best bull because of her.

- F) A scruffy-faced MALE GOSSIP #1 reasons.

MALE GOSSIP #1

What kind of a "woman" dresses like a man?

- G) Marah accuses as if fact.

MARAH

She can cast her specter for  
miles...

END MONTAGE

A HAND treads light and shakes upon the CLERK'S BIBLE.

COURT CLERK

... the whole truth, and nothing  
but the truth, so help you God?

Luke Hill glances over at his wife, Elizabeth, who is flanked  
by a glaring Marah.

LUKE HILL

Aye.

Boush approaches.

BOUSH

Mr. Hill, why have you brought this  
serious suit against Mistress  
Sherwood?

LUKE HILL

She murdered my infant daughter.

The Crowd gasps and murmurs.

BOUSH

I didn't know this was a murder  
trial, Mr. Hill.

LUKE HILL

Grace Sherwood cast a spell to kill  
my unborn daughter. Grace Sherwood  
is a conjurer!

The stacked courtroom erupts.

The Sheriff pounds his staff on the floor.

BOUSH

Let's back up, Mr. Hill. Tell me  
what led to your daughter's death.

LUKE HILL

Mistress Sherwood appeared  
unannounced at our cabin one  
morning, insisting to midwife for  
Elizabeth.

BOUSH

And you let her do that.

LUKE HILL

No. My wife and I refused her. We cast her potion and powder to the wind. And...

Luke Hill's eyes confer with a nodding Marah.

LUKE HILL (CONT'D)

Before Mistress Sherwood left, she offered me,... favors.

BOUSH

Favors? What kind of favors?

LUKE HILL

Favors only a wench could offer a man.

The Crowd explodes.

Mortified, Grace grasps the railing of her box.

GRACE

I would never!

Luke and Marah stare, unmoved. Elizabeth breaks her stare and glances to Marah. The Sheriff pounds his staff.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Sherwood?

Grace grips Elizabeth with her eyes. Elizabeth looks away, unable to maintain Grace's glare.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Mistress Sherwood. Do you have something to say?

Grace shakes her head in disbelief.

BOUSH

Mr. Hill?

LUKE HILL

Of course I refused her and she left.

BOUSH

Continue please.

LUKE HILL

A couple of weeks later after a very trying labor, our daughter was still born...

Luke Hill glances at a nodding Marah.

LUKE HILL (CONT'D)

... with red finger marks on her throat.

Crowd rumblings return.

BOUSH

And you blame Mistress Sherwood.

LUKE HILL

Undoubtedly. We rejected her and her witchcraft. And she returned her witchcraft upon us. She's a witch and should burn!

The Crowd reacts in a frenzy.

Grace looks out at her impossible situation.

Col. Moseley, Sheriff, pound the gavel, staff in concert.

SHERIFF

Order! Order!

The murmurs subside as Boush and Luke Hill sit down.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Sherwood, what defense do you present in the face of these accusations and charges?

Grace casts her eyes at the floor.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Have you not heard this flood of testimony against and yet you hardly offer one drop of opposition?

The room is silent as Grace whispers her reply.

GRACE

Lies. It all be lies.

COL. MOSELEY

Do you have anyone of no kin who would speak on behalf of you?

Grace surveys the accusing Crowd. No friends to be seen until her eyes meet Paul Nash's eyes.

The two stare unflinching.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
Mistress Sherwood?

Paul looks away as Grace holds her beam.

Grace's boys look on Paul in disgust.

GRACE  
Apparently not.

COL. MOSELEY  
Very well.

MALE CROWD MEMBER #1  
Put an end to her!

The Sheriff steps forward and strikes his staff on the floor.

SHERIFF  
Order. Order! This court will  
adjourn for a short recess.

**EXT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

Paul steps outside into the bright sunlight and leans against the wall.

A LOCAL HOUSEWIFE, 50s, waits near the same wall.

LOCAL HOUSEWIFE  
Why do you not defend her?

PAUL  
Pardon?

LOCAL HOUSEWIFE  
Why do you not defend "the witch?"  
Are you not in love with her?

PAUL  
Ma'am, I would never defend a  
witch, nor could I love one.

**INT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCH - DAY**

The Seven Justices and Col. Moseley convene near the alter.

JUSTICE #1

... Gossips hear what they want to hear.

JUSTICE #4

None of this testimony proves anything one way or the other.

COL. MOSELEY

One thing it does prove is that the people want something done. To do nothing may give rise to mobs, self-imposed justice.

JUSTICE #5

I say we indict her and carry on with a trial. Put it in God's hands to determine the outcome.

COL. MOSELEY

If we put her on trial, a jury will convict her and sentence her to burn at the stake. Do you want to quiet the masses with murder?

JUSTICE #1

Mistress Sherwood leaves us no options.

Col. Moseley pauses.

COL. MOSELEY

There are always options.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

The Crowd behind the bar stands silent as Col. Moseley rises.

Paul stands away from Grace's sons, all behind the bar.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Grace Sherwood, it is the finding of this court that there exists more than enough testimony to indict you of the crime of witchcraft and immediately move to a trial by jury...

The Crowd applauds with shouts and talk.



COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

But it is also the desire of this court, due to the unique nature of the charges, to offer you a second option - you may choose a trial by water - a ducking.

Grace listens as Col. Moseley glides towards her.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Once ducked in the water, if you float, you will be found guilty as a witch, as the purity of the water will reject all evil. If you sink, you will be deemed innocent of all charges.

Grace searches and makes eye contact with her boys.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Whichever trial you choose, prior to it, you will be given the single opportunity to stand before your God and church to confess sorcery and beg for forgiveness... which will likely end this whole charade. Do you understand?

Grace nods as she looks straight at Paul.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

What say you, Mistress Sherwood?

Grace scans the distorted faces of the Crowd.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Mistress Sherwood, what is your decision? Jury or ducking?

Grace turns and stares at Col. Moseley.

GRACE

I trust nature over human nature. I rather die than admit to being something I be not. Duck me!

Paul drops his head.

The Crowd explodes with mixed reactions and shouts.

The Sheriff shouts and bangs his staff.

SHERIFF

Order!

COL. MOSELEY

Court Clerk, let the record read that Mistress Sherwood's trial by water shall commence tomorrow, July tenth, in the Year of our Lord, 1706, at ten in the morning at the Lynnhaven Parish Church. Court is adjourned.

**EXT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - NIGHT**

Paul paces outside the courthouse and jail. John, Coby, and Richard lumber out.

Grace's boys ignore Paul as they pass, until John sees Paul approach the courthouse.

JOHN

She does not wish to see you.

Paul continues through the courthouse doors.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - NIGHT**

Deputy #1 blocks Paul's entry into the dark jail area.

DEPUTY #1

Only a few moments then I'm locking down for the night.

Paul finds Grace as she stands in her jail cell, back to her jail door.

Paul creeps to her cell.

GRACE

What do you want, Paul?

Paul hesitates.

PAUL

I want you to live.

Grace steps further away from Paul.

PAUL (CONT'D)

If it means me pushing you to "confess," then so be it.

Grace spins and marches toward Paul.

GRACE

Confess? What be I "confessing,"  
Paul?

PAUL

They will drown you at the bottom  
of the Lynnhaven. And if they don't  
drown you, they'll burn you at the  
stake. Don't you understand?

GRACE

I understand everything! If I  
confess, I lie to me, I lie to my  
boys.

PAUL

And if you die?

GRACE

Then I die! I be so weary of  
fighting this fight, these  
people... and now you! I am at  
peace with my Lord. He will take me  
home.

PAUL

Grace, you must confess, true or  
false. It's your only chance to  
survive. In the name of God!

GRACE

Please... depart from me.

**EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - NIGHT (DREAM)**

Hundreds of people with torches encircle a giant stack of  
timber. Eerie silence, save the CHIRPS of a few crickets.

Grace, in all white, glides through the Crowd with a torch.

The Crowd parts. She moves toward the mountain of wood.

Grace passes familiar faces: Marah, Richard Capps, the Hills,  
other accusers, Maximillian Boush.

A familiar voice calls out.

RICHARD (O.C.)

Ma, don't do this!

Before Grace are her boys, bound to the unlit bonfire.

Paul Nash steps in front of Grace.

PAUL

You can stop this. You must confess  
and beg for forgiveness.

Grace watches her boys as they struggle to get free.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Grace, confess! You must confess!

Grace turns to face the mass of people and torches as  
emotions overtake her.

The drone of summer crickets fills the air.

Grace notices Young Marah. She stands near the front.

Panic flows over Grace as the cricket drone grows louder. It  
pierces everything.

The drone ceases as Grace screeches and drops to her knees.

GRACE

I be a witch! I be a witch! Oh  
please, I beg your forgiveness. I  
beg of you. Don't hurt my boys!

Grace sobs and gazes out at the silent Crowd.

Young Marah smiles and steps forward.

Their eyes meet and tarry for a long moment.

YOUNG MARAH

Alive.

Grace is puzzled a the statement.

YOUNG MARAH (CONT'D)

Burn her alive!

The Crowd/HORDE erupts, swallows up Young Marah, and hurtles  
Grace towards the now ablaze bonfire.

**EXT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - NIGHT**

An anguished SCREAM slashes the still night air.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - NIGHT**

Grace shivers and weeps as she sits against the wall, awash  
in moonlight, drenched in sweat from her nightmare.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - MORNING**

SUPER: JULY 10, 1706

A deputy opens the small door on the larger cell door.

DEPUTY #1

Your hands.

A pair of hands emerge through the small opening. Metal shackles clank upon them and the larger cell door opens.

Four deputies stand at attention to "greet" Grace, dressed in a long skirt, blouse and outer jacket.

DEPUTY #1 (CONT'D)

Come.

Grace stares the deputy in the eyes. No one blinks.

DEPUTY #1 (CONT'D)

Please, Mistress Sherwood.

Grace steps forward, escorted by the four on all sides.

**EXT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - MORNING**

The courthouse doors fling open and the quintet step into the bright summer sun, met by a silent Horde of hundreds.

Grace winds the passage next door to the church as a bell TOLLS ten times.

**INT. LYNNHAVEN PARISH CHURCH - MORNING**

The packed church rises as one, as the double doors open.

Marched down the aisle as if an illegitimate bride, Grace meets the same familiar faces from her dream.

Grace's boys make eye contact with her as she passes.

Paul catches glimpses of Grace from a corner as she moves to the alter and stops near a stool on the floor.

Rev. Saunders, in regalia, holds center stage, flanked by Col. Moseley, Maximilian Boush, and the Seven Justices.

Those who stand in the pews, sit down. Standing room only for the rest. The Horde peers through the open windows.

Col. Moseley steps forward and raises his voice for all to hear, inside and out.

COL. MOSELEY

Mistress Grace Sherwood, by your own consent, you have agreed to a trial by water. Before we take that drastic step, you may right your course yet.

Col. Moseley floats into the aisle and points at the stool.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

To do so, you shall stand on that stool, face your congregation and you shall confess to the charge of practicing witchcraft. And you will beg for the church's forgiveness.

Grace glances over to Rev. Saunders. He avoids.

Grace's eyes flash to Moseley. He nods.

Grace steps onto the stool, elevates herself, and gazes at her accusers and her boys.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Let us hear your confession now, Mistress Sherwood.

Grace's breathing deepens, her back stiffens. There is no turning back.

GRACE

It is true. I be a healer.

A few murmur. Col. Moseley's eyes bear down on her.

GRACE (CONT'D)

But no matter what you say or what you do to me--I. Be not. A witch.

## **OUTSIDE**

Several WINDOW VIEWERS spin to the gathered Horde.

VIEWER #1

She did not confess! She did not confess!

VIEWER #2

To the water! Duck her!

**INSIDE**

The congregation erupts with shouts of death. Chaos ensues.

Rev. Saunders bows his head.

Boush motions for the deputies to take Grace.

Grace glimpses Paul by the door as she is rushed out.

Marah, a sly smile on her face, and Elizabeth Hill watch.

ELIZABETH HILL

This is the right thing to do?

MARAH

This is more than right. It is sanctified.

ELIZABETH HILL

But what if she drowns? Killing a person--

MARAH

She's not going to drown. She's a witch!

Elizabeth isn't convinced as her resolve falters.

MARAH (CONT'D)

And if she does, all the better.

Marah joins the Horde and leaves an unsure Elizabeth.

**OUTSIDE**

Grace shoots out the door, pushed through the Horde and dropped onto the back of a waiting cart and shackled.

HORDE MEMBER #1

Duck the witch!

HORDE MEMBER #2

She's guilty! She's guilty!

**EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY**

The Horde moves toward the Lynnhaven as the horse-drawn cart moves past their pace.

Onlookers line the gauntlet to the water.

Grace's wagon passes the zealots and the curious as they hurry to the waterfront. Passersby hurl insults, rocks.

Grace is struck in the forehead by a stone. Blood trickles down her brow.

A group of SMALL BOYS chase the wagon. Their PARENTS yank them back and scold.

Grace notices what appears to be the Young Marah from her nightmares. She stands alone near a tree and shares a blank stare. She vanishes as a tree wipes Grace's vision.

**EXT. LYNNHAVEN INLET - DAY**

A circus atmosphere greets Grace's cart.

Tall pine and cypress trees, limbs loaded with onlookers, oversee the cove as hundreds line the banks.

Two wagons filled with the Justices and the Jury of Women flow into the grassy area as the masses arrive.

Two twenty-foot skiffs moor at the water's edge.

Grace is hauled from the cart and marched to the skiffs.

**WATER'S EDGE**

The Seven Justices and Jury of Women surround Grace as the Horde jockeys to see and hear.

Elizabeth Hill peers over the Horde.

COL. MOSELEY

Jury, examine the defendant for any instruments of escape.

The six women close in around Grace as the Seven Justices, Col. Moseley, and several deputies make their way to the skiffs.

MARAH

Strip her!

Grace hardens. Again?

Bertha Thomas and Sarah Norris tug on Grace's garments as Grace crosses her arms and grabs her clothing.



BERTHA

They're coming off one way or the other. Relent of your pride.

Grace's temperature rises. She drops her arms and fixes her eyes upon Marah and her smirk.

The Horde stares in silence.

Bertha and Sarah waste no time and pull off Grace's skirt, shoes, blouse, and leave only her white shift.

MARAH

Again, everything!

ANN BRIDGES

Marah--

MARAH

All of it. Now!

Ann Bridges and Joan Cotle hesitate before the Horde as they stand on either side of Grace.

Marah's impatience again overtakes her and she steps between Ann Bridges and Joan Cotle.

Marah thrusts her hands at Grace's chest and grasps the neckline of her shift.

Marah RIPS and pulls the undergarment downward. Exposed before the Horde, Grace's shift puddles at her ankles.

Elizabeth Hill is taken aback as people gasp and mothers turn their young children's heads away.

John, Coby, and Richard surge forward, blocked by two Sheriff Deputies.

Ann Bridges moves square in front of Grace to block the Horde's view of her naked body.

MARAH (CONT'D)

Stand away, Ann Bridges.

Ann and Grace lock eyes.

GRACE

Thank you. But they see what they want to see. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Ann nods and shrinks back from Grace.

MARAH

Sisters, look for any amulets or sharp instruments with which to cut or cast spells. Outside... and inside.

Bertha Thomas and Sarah Norris step in with Marah and scrutinize and touch everywhere below the neck.

Ann Bridges and Joan Cotle comfort and caress Grace's head and hair more than "search."

GRACE

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...

Grace flinches and her blood boils at a penetrating intrusion below by Bertha Thomas.

On instinct, WHAP! Grace strikes Bertha with both bound fists. Bertha staggers back, dazed.

Marah Barnes and Sarah Norris jump on Grace, soon joined by a bloody-lipped Bertha Thomas. The Horde is riled.

The women are separated by two Sheriff's Deputies.

DEPUTY #1

Off! Off! Finish the examination!

Elizabeth Hill cannot watch. Her guilt in this proceeding has come home to roost.

The Jury of Women finish the examination in short order.

GRACE

(whispers)

For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Marah leans in.

MARAH

May Hell welcome you with open arms.

Grace maintains her stare at Marah as she and the five women step back.

MARAH (CONT'D)

Your Honor, it is the finding of this Jury of Women that the bit--, defendant secures nothing of which we can find.

COL. MOSELEY

Bring Mistress Sherwood to the boats to be bound.

Ann Bridges and Joan Cotle swallow Grace with her torn shift as the four deputies hustle Grace to the boats.

**INT. SKIFF #1 - MOMENTS LATER**

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Deputies cross-bind Grace's thumbs, opposite big toes
- B) A canvas sack pulls over and down Grace's torso
- C) Horde members scream insults
- D) Grace's head pops through the open-ended sack and drawstrings pull tight around her neck
- E) Paul and Grace's boys watch in silence from the bank
- F) With Grace's bound hands and feet tucked inside the canvas sack, the bottom drawstrings pull tight
- G) A length of rope secures Grace's waist

**LYNNHAVEN WATER**

The two skiffs push away from the shore as the Horde screams.

Grace rides in Skiff #1 with Col. Moseley, the Sheriff, Rev. Saunders, and two Deputies.

Skiff #2 carries the Seven Justices and one Deputy.

**SKIFF #1**

Two Deputies bind the skiffs forty yards into the water as Col. Moseley raises his arms to quiet the mob and shouts to be heard.

COL. MOSELEY

For the charge of practicing witchcraft, Mistress Grace Sherwood has been cross-bound and will be cast into water above a man's depth.

The Horde celebrates.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Should the accused float, she will be deemed a witch.

The Horde roars and boos.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Should Mistress Sherwood sink and not surface of her own accord, she shall be deemed innocent.

The Horde falls silent.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Mistress Sherwood, do you have anything you would like to say?

From her hunched position, Grace nods. The Sheriff motions for the two deputies to lift Grace.

Grace views the shore and feels a shift in the wind. She studies the sky above the trees behind the Horde.

Dark clouds approach.

GRACE

You all be coming here to see me ducked. But I tell you this: Before this day be through you will all get a worse ducking than I!

The Horde erupts and Col. Moseley nods to the deputies.

Without ceremony, Deputies launch Grace into the Lynnhaven with a PLOP and she vanishes below the surface.

The Horde screams with excitement.

Bubbles surface for a few seconds and cease.

Boat occupants peer over the edges.

A hush falls on the Horde as Rev. Saunders signs the cross.

COL. MOSELEY  
Ready on the rope--

SPLISH! The white canvas pops upon the surface.

Grace's wet-hair-strewn face sticks up, gasps for breath.

Col. Moseley sighs and barks his orders as the Horde jeers.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
Pull her in, quickly!

Deputies drag Grace in. Bound, she coughs and chokes. Rev. Saunders stands at the bow with his ceremonial Bible.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
Your bible, Reverend. How much does it weigh?

REV. SAUNDERS  
About a stone.

COL. MOSELEY  
Give it to me.

REV. SAUNDERS  
I'm sorry?

COL. MOSELEY  
Give me the bible.

REV. SAUNDERS  
But--

The Sheriff yanks the Bible from the pastor.

COL. MOSELEY  
Around her neck. Now!

The deputies tie the parchment anchor as the chants grow.

DEPUTY #1  
Secured.

COL. MOSELEY  
Pick her up once again.

The deputies raise the dripping Grace for Col. Moseley to address. Grace seethes at the procession.

GRACE  
What malfeasance this be, you bastards.

COL. MOSELEY  
Mistress Sherwood--

GRACE  
One ducking be not enough, Colonel?

Col. Moseley waves his hand and Grace hits the water and vanishes.

Col. Moseley nods to the deputies. The deputies nod in response as the rope sinks.

#### **MURKY UNDERWATER DARKNESS**

The glow of canvas sinks downward led by the Word of God and trailed by flowing auburn hair. Muffled chants fade.

#### **SKIFF #2**

The boat riders lean further over the edge and search.

#### **MURKY UNDERWATER DARKNESS**

The glowing blob hits the sea grass and stirs the sediment.

Watery VOICES from nowhere come and go.

Grace's face strains, her eyes widen.

Internal GRUNTS, GROANS, and SCREAMS echo in the water.

The canvas fabric writhes with intense motion.

Grace's face reddens and vanishes in the muck water.

#### **SHORELINE**

The Horde grows silent as dark storm clouds rush in above the Lynnhaven.

#### **SKIFF #2**

Several Justices rise and peer into the water as a gust of cool wind hits the Horde and jostles the skiffs.

**SKIFF #1**

Beads of sweat appear on Col. Moseley's brow. Small but growing waves lap against the boats.

COL. MOSELEY

Damn it, pull her up now. Now!

The deputies pull the rope, but it will not move. They put their weight into it. Stuck!

The Justices all stand. Justice #1 jumps to Skiff #1 to help, along with the Sheriff.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

Oh my Lord.

Col. Moseley moves over to lend a hand and as everyone pulls.

TWAP! The rope releases from the depths. The deputies reel in the length with all haste.

The white canvas materializes and flutters like a ghost as it nears the surface.

Col. Moseley grabs the canvas bulk and pulls it up and over. He staggers back in anticipation of more weight.

The deputies and Col. Moseley shake the open canvas as the water-drenched bible tumbles out.

Col. Moseley throws the canvas aside, leans over the edge and searches the water's dark depths.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Jesus!

A couple of feet from the surface, Col. Moseley stares into the water.

Rev. Saunders again signs the cross.

SPLOOSH! GASP! Grace's face and torso burst the water's surface mere inches from Col. Moseley's face.

Col. Moseley staggers and falls backward into the boat.

**SHORELINE**

The Horde gasps.

Elizabeth Hill lets a out a puzzled sigh of relief.

HORDE MEMBER #3  
She's alive.

HORDE MEMBER #1  
She is a witch!

#### **LYNNHAVEN WATER**

Grace gathers her breath, swims on her back away from the skiffs. She stares at Col. Moseley, indignant.

Grace turns toward the Horde on shore and points skyward.

#### **SHORELINE**

The Horde scans the foreboding clouds.

Single raindrops ripple the water's surface.

A torrential rain unleashes its load upon the affair as a lightning bolt strikes the nearby woods. BOOM!

The Horde scurries for cover under trees and wagons; others dash down the muddying road as lightning flashes everywhere.

Paul Nash stands alone on the shore drenched as people scatter and panic around him. He stares at the water and slogs away.

#### **SKIFFS**

The deputies untie the two skiffs as the furious Col. Moseley picks himself off the skiff floor.

COL. MOSELEY  
Mistress Sherwood! In the boat!

Col. Moseley, instantly soaked, drips over the debacle.

#### **INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - LATER**

Grace shivers in her drenched shift and clutches her wet clothes. Several Deputies and Col. Moseley escort her into the jail cell. Thunder and rain rumble outside.

COL. MOSELEY  
(to Deputies)  
Leave us.



All exit the immediate area. Col. Moseley moves to the open cell door.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
Mistress Sherwood, you have created quite the impasse. Before today you were either a witch or you weren't.

Grace trembles and stares at Col. Moseley.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
But it really only matters what they think you to be.

Grace glares.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
You were never going to drown, Mistress Sherwood! All the public examinations? Merely for show.

GRACE  
Parading a naked woman for show?

COL. MOSELEY  
If you had sunk like any normal woman, I would have pulled you to the surface and declared you innocent.

Grace takes a step closer to Col. Moseley.

COL. MOSELEY (CONT'D)  
But instead, you floated. Even then I could have still saved you to be pulled to the top only at my word. But you would not have it. It had to be on your terms.

GRACE  
I be drowning twenty feet down!

COL. MOSELEY  
And so you will drown in this jail cell. To the good people of this county, you are a conjurer.

GRACE  
And as I be to you.

COL. MOSELEY

No. On the contrary. While I would not have allowed you to drown as an innocent woman, I will also not allow you to burn as a "witch." To me, you're a female landowner who owns land a man should own.

GRACE

My land? What then be my fate?

Col. Moseley considers Grace's question for a moment.

COL. MOSELEY

That's the quandary, isn't it? What to do with Grace Sherwood.

Col. Moseley stares, slams the cell door, and abandons Grace, cold, lost, and alone.

Grace maintains her proud and erect posture.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Uncertainty be a cold companion;  
time, a cruel accomplice. Death  
itself be better than waiting for  
its appearance.

FADE TO BLACK.

**EXT. LUKE HILL FARM - MUDDY CREEK BANKS - DAY**

SUPER: SPRING 1714

Elizabeth Hill, mid-40s, old beyond her years, a fatigued, empty stare with a furrowed brow, pounds and kneads clothing on a rock at water's edge.

Marah, 53, vigilant, stands knee-deep, wrings wet clothes, and tosses them in a basket nearby.

ELDERLY WOMAN (V.O.)

Some be held in bondage by walls.  
Others by their own bitterness,  
hatred, jealousy, or guilt. All be  
vile. All be long-suffering. Be it  
a bittersweet balm when wiser  
spirits prevail.

Elizabeth's three children run and play near her. Her oldest, DOROTHY, 7, sets a basket beside her.

DOROTHY HILL  
Mama, who's the Witch of Pungo?

Elizabeth whips her head around to face Dorothy.

ELIZABETH HILL  
What?

DOROTHY HILL  
The Witch of Pungo. Is there really  
a Witch of Pungo?

Marah notices and makes her way over.

ELIZABETH HILL  
Where did you hear this?

DOROTHY HILL  
At church. The older children were  
talking about her, saying you knew  
her.

Elizabeth looks down from her daughter at the wet, CLEAN  
CLOTHES and at the separate but still DIRTY CLOTHES.

ELIZABETH HILL  
Sometimes adults are foolish,  
hateful. Even vindictive. We can be  
a sorry lot.

DOROTHY HILL  
Mama?

Marah pauses and makes her move.

MARAH  
Little Dorothy, there certainly is  
a Witch of--

ELIZABETH HILL  
Stop.

MARAH  
Elizabeth, I'm just explaining--

ELIZABETH HILL  
Do not explain--

MARAH  
The girl needs--

ELIZABETH HILL  
Stop! My conscience will shelter my  
guilt no longer.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH HILL (CONT'D)

The lies, the self-delusion, the hatred--need to cease.

MARAH

Grace Sherwood is a witch. You and I did a great service by putting her away.

ELIZABETH HILL

I helped put her away, but it was no great thing. It was a lie, perpetrated by you and fed by my fear and the fear of a community looking to blame something, someone, for their misfortunes.

MARAH

Elizabeth, let's go inside, the heat is getting to--

ELIZABETH HILL

Do not patronize me. I don't know what Grace Sherwood was or is, but I know things have been done to her that no child of God should ever do to another.

MARAH

Don't be a fool!

ELIZABETH HILL

But I have been a fool - your fool. And for far too long.

MARAH

Elizabeth, we can work this--

ELIZABETH HILL

Go! Leave me! I don't want you in my sight. My guilt has consumed me for years. It devours me still.

Marah gathers her things, leaves Elizabeth with a cold stare, and marches away.

Dorothy ends her silence.

DOROTHY

Mama?

Elizabeth focuses on Dorothy as her anger subsides. A tear traces down Elizabeth's cheek.

ELIZABETH HILL  
No, sugar. There is no Witch of  
Pungo. Never was.

**INT. PRINCESS ANNE COURT HOUSE - JAIL CELL - DAY**

Haggard with slumped shoulders, gaunt and defeated, the auburn/gray-headed Grace, 54, sits on and stares at the dirt floor in the corner of her jail cell, despondent, broken, and vacant.

Grace does not react to the CLANGING of keys and the CREAKING cell door as it opens.

Elizabeth Hill, her daughter Dorothy, and a Deputy, with a rolled parchment, enter. They are flanked by John, Coby, and Richard outside the cell.

DEPUTY #7  
Mistress Sherwood.

Grace does not move.

ELIZABETH HILL  
Grace...

Grace revives disoriented and struggles to stand.

Elizabeth is stunned at Grace's debilitated physical condition.

ELIZABETH HILL (CONT'D)  
Grace?

Grace, perplexed by the voice, turns and freezes at the sight of Elizabeth Hill. The two stare at each other, unsure of this dance. Elizabeth Hill is overcome.

ELIZABETH HILL (CONT'D)  
... Oh Grace, forgive me!

Elizabeth Hill rushes out of the cell. Grace stands speechless and dazed. Dorothy stands by herself, smiles at Grace and skips out.

DEPUTY #7  
By order of the Governor of  
Virginia, I am hereby empowered to  
release you into the custody of  
your kin. Ms. Sherwood, you are  
free to go.

Grace does not move, confused.

John bursts past the Deputy and grabs Grace.

JOHN  
Ma, the charges have been dropped!

GRACE  
What do you mean?

Coby and Richard join John.

RICHARD  
We can all go home.

GRACE  
The Hills--

COBY  
Mistress Hill dropped the whole  
matter.

Stunned, Grace weeps as her boys embrace her.

**EXT. VIRGINIA WOODS AND WATERWAYS - DAY**

Above open beaches, waterways, herds of cattle and sheep, and thickets of pine trees, a brighter world is revealed.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - DAY**

SUPER: FALL 1740, PUNGO, VIRGINIA

A frail ELDER GRACE, 80, with white hair, sits in a wooden chair under a willow tree beside her farmhouse, surrounded by GREAT GRANDCHILDREN and ADULTS.

Grace holds everyone's rapt attention.

ELDERLY WOMAN/ELDER GRACE  
Those of vengeful accusing hearts  
soon were no more. And on that  
farm, by God's grace, the lass  
lived and worked freely the rest of  
her days.

The children and adults, with John, 59, Coby, 55, and Richard, 52, gaze in silence at their mother.

A GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER, 8, pops up at Grace's feet.

GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER  
Memaw, were you the Witch of Pungo?

Grace smiles at the sincerity, peers at her three grown boys.

Everyone waits for Grace's answer.

Grace reaches out for the girl and places her in her lap.

ELDER GRACE

No. I never knew of any witches in Pungo.

GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER

That's good.

ELDER GRACE

Witches around here be like fairy tales. They only exist in people's minds.

A GREAT GRANDSON, 7, steps up.

GREAT GRANDSON

Can you tell us another story, Memaw?

John steps in.

JOHN

Memaw is worn out from that last story... another time.

CHILDREN

Ooooh!

JOHN

Run and play, give Memaw a rest.

The children scatter. Adults return to prior chores, other conversations. Grace's hand shivers as she touches John's arm.

ELDER GRACE

John, could you fetch me my shawl?

JOHN

Ma, it's sweltering today.

ELDER GRACE

Please?

**INT. SHERWOOD FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - LATER**

Grace sits, wrapped in a blanket in a rocking chair in front of a small fire in the hearth.

John gathers belongings by the door. Coby attends to Grace.

COBY  
Ma, you ready for bed?

ELDER GRACE  
I think I be sleeping here tonight.

COBY  
You sure, Mama?

Grace nods.

JOHN  
Move to the bed if you get cold.

ELDER GRACE  
I'll be fine. You both go on home.

COBY  
Richard will be by in the morning  
to check on you.

ELDER GRACE  
Good night boys.

Coby and John lean in and give Grace kisses.

JOHN  
Good night Ma.

COBY  
Sweet dreams.

GRACE  
You too.

John and Coby leave.

Grace's shaky hands gather her blanket tight as she stares long at the fire and rocks her chair.

Grace fights a strange grogginess and her eyes come to a slow close.

Sounds from Grace's life bounce around the room.

SOUND MONTAGE - GRACE'S LIFE AUDIBLY PASSES BEFORE HER

Grace's rocking dwindles.

SUSAN WHITE (V.O.)  
Always be willing to help others.



The fire grows smaller.

PAPA (V.O.)  
When the leaf be bendin' like so,  
she be ready. Aye?

Grace's hands quiver.

BARBARA NASH (V.O.)  
Grace! Thank you.

Grace's eyes move about under her eyelids.

The fire wanes to but a few small flames.

GRACE (V.O.)  
Don't worry. I love you most!

Grace's rocking ceases and her quivering hands still.

RICHARD (V.O.)  
Ma, come quick! Pa's hurt bad!

Grace takes in a struggled breath.

GRACE (V.O.)  
I. Be not. A witch.

Grace's body releases the breath and is motionless.

The fire burns from a single tongue to an ember. A thin plum of smoke snakes upward.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - MUDDY CREEK BANKS - DAY**

John, Coby, and Richard rest on shovels and hold vigil over a fresh grave.

Other family members meander towards the farmhouse in the background as dark clouds roll in.

RUMBLE of a fast-approaching storm breaks the silence.

A strong wind kicks up and blows dust and debris. LIGHTNING strikes in the near distance.

RICHARD  
What is it about Ma and storms?

JOHN  
This ought to be a good one.

The three men hurry toward the farmhouse as sheets of RAIN douse the landscape.

**EXT. SHERWOOD FARM - OPEN FIELD/MUDDY CREEK BANKS - NEXT MORNING**

A shallow, glass pool of water covers the field, left over from the rain and flooded Muddy Creek.

At the end of the field, a dark object sticks above the surface - the top third of Grace's CASKET. A BLACK CAT, wet and matted, jumps upon the casket, turns, and HISSES.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END