

## **THE WITCH OF BLACKBIRD POND**

adapted by Y York

from the Novel  
by Elizabeth George Speare  
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Note: A slightly shorter version of this play is available from the playwright. The short version runs approximately 72 minutes. If you require a one-hour production, this play is not for you.

### Characters:

Kit, “Katherine” Tyler, female, 17: confident, intelligent, witty, kind, homely.  
Nat Eaton, male, 20: thoughtful, respectful, independent traveler, distrustful of the Puritan ways.  
Reverend Gideon Gish, male, 40s: religious, formal, narrow, powerful within the town.  
Goody Rebecca Gish, female, 40s: desperate to please, do the right thing, follow the rules.  
Prudence Gish, female, 10: energetic and curious.  
John Holcomb, male, 19: a divinity student; optimistic, open, boyish, innocent, religious.  
Matthew Wood, male, 40s: proud, his rationalism conflicts increasingly with the religion.  
Rachel Wood, female, 40s: loving, generous, fearful and superstitious.  
Mercy Wood, female, 19: kind, generous, loving, expansive, imaginative, she has a damaged leg.  
Judith Wood, female, 17: haughty, beautiful, narrow, confident, superstitious.  
William Ashby, male, 20: wealthy, confident, conservative.  
Hannah Tupper, female, 70: independent, strong, generous, fearless.  
Miss Cat, a cat, played with the help of a completely visible human puppeteer of either sex.  
Magistrate Talbot, male, 40s: an officer of the church, confident and thorough.

The action of the play is continuous. There are no blackouts between scenes.

(SCENE 1; 1687, A RIVER ON THE CONNECTICUT SHORE, A SPLASH. A SOAKED KIT DRAGS NAT FROM THE WATER. THEY ARE WET, COLD AND OUT OF BREATH. KIT CARRIES A PATHETIC CARVED WOODEN DOLL.)

NAT: That was, that was—

KIT: I'm freezing. I'm numb to the bone.

NAT: The stupidest—

KIT: (AGREEING) And the meanest.

NAT: What?!

KIT: What a cruel woman.

NAT: Who's a cruel woman?

KIT: Goody Gish. She's so mean to Prudence. Mean and stupid.

NAT: I'm talking about you! You're stupid.

KIT: I didn't know the water was this cold. How do people swim in this icy river?

NAT: They don't! ...I can't believe it. (CALLING OFF) She's all right!

KIT: I'm all right? (CALLING OFF) He's all right!

NAT: I jumped in to save you.

KIT: Learn to swim before you start saving people.

NAT: People in Connecticut don't swim. This isn't Barbados, Miss.

KIT: Well, I didn't notice you rushing in to save the doll.

NAT: ...This fuss is over a doll?!

KIT: Prudence's only toy!

NAT: I warn you, Kit, you mustn't swim here for any reason.

KIT: ...So you do know my name.

NAT: Of course I know your name. We were at sea eight weeks.

KIT: You never used it. You didn't once say "Good morning, Miss Kit. Howdedo, Kit?"

NAT: You never said my name, either.

KIT: How could I say your name before you said my name?

NAT: You didn't need my company. You spent every daylight hour with John Holcomb.

(ENTER PRUDENCE WHO RUNS TO KIT)

PRUDENCE: Kit! Oh Kit, you saved her, you saved her.

KIT: Precious little thing. Hold tight, never let her go.

(ENTER GIDEON, REBECCA, JOHN.)

REBECCA: Come away, Prudence.

(GIDEON, REBECCA, PRUDENCE STAND APART. JOHN GIVES HIS COAT TO KIT.)

REBECCA: Gideon, did you see, did you see her float?

GIDEON: I saw. Now quiet, please, Rebecca.

JOHN: Put this on, Kit.

KIT: Thank you, John.

REBECCA: She floated as if—

GIDEON: I saw, gentle wife. Please. Is that how you take charge of a longboat, Nat, by abandoning it?

NAT: (FIRM, BUT RESPECTFUL) You were in no danger, Reverend. The oarsmen secured the boat.

GIDEON: What do you suppose the captain will say about this?

NAT: My father will agree with me, Sir.

PRUDENCE: Can I have my doll, Ma?

REBECCA: You'll have your doll when you can take care of it.

KIT: It wasn't her fault, Goody Gish. It was almost herself went in the water and not the doll.

PRUDENCE: Yes, Ma. It was almost myself—

REBECCA: Prudence, be still.

GIDEON: Where's Matthew Wood, girl?

NAT: I signaled before dawn. He should be here.

GIDEON: He's not at the landing.

KIT: Well, clearly, Reverend, my uncle has been delayed.

GIDEON: Your uncle will not tolerate insolence.

KIT: Tell me the way, and I'll save him the trip.

JOHN: But you have so many trunks.

KIT: I'm sure they'll be safe among all these Puritans.

GIDEON: You'll not win friends by mocking us.

KIT: I didn't mean—

GIDEON: That's enough now. Rebecca, I'm going to accompany Miss Tyler to her uncle. John will see you and Prudence home safely.

JOHN: (WORRIED) Kit. You will come to meeting today.

KIT: I don't go to church. Grandfather said God is everywhere.

GIDEON: It would be good if people see you pray.

KIT: Why should anyone need to see me pray?

GIDEON: Because they've seen you float.

(SCENE 2; THE WOOD HOUSE, OUTSIDE. MATTHEW, MERCY, WHO LIMPS, JUDITH, NAT, GIDEON, KIT, HER TRUNKS.)

MATTHEW: I have a niece named Katherine Tyler, but I've never met her, and I'm certainly not expecting her.

NAT: She calls herself Kit.

GIDEON: Not expecting her?

MATTHEW: Not at all.

GIDEON: Didn't you send word that you were coming?

(THEY LOOK AT KIT.)

KIT: It takes months for a reply.

GIDEON: You take a lot on faith, Miss.

KIT: There was no time. I had to leave Barbados.

GIDEON: Why? Why did you have to leave Barbados?

KIT: I was desperate. I—

MATTHEW: Enough, now. Katherine, that's enough. Judith, get your mother.

(JUDITH EXITS. MATTHEW CHANGES THE SUBJECT.)

MATTHEW: Thank you, Gideon. I'm sorry your return has been spoiled by my niece.

GIDEON: No need to apologize, Man.

MATTHEW: We're anxious to meet your new pupil.

GIDEON: He's an enthusiastic student.

KIT: (HANDING HIM THE COAT) Thank John for the loan of his coat, Reverend.

GIDEON: I shall. You will be at meeting today, Kit.

MATTHEW: She'll be there.

GIDEON: Your niece is headstrong, Matthew. Ask her how she got so wet.

NAT: Stay dry, Kit.

GIDEON: You and your parents are welcome at meeting, too, Nat.

NAT: We know, Reverend. Goodbye Goodman Wood, Mercy Wood.

MATTHEW: Don't forget your trunks.

GIDEON: The trunks belong to her.

(NAT, GIDEON EXIT.)

MATTHEW: Are you traveling with everything you own?

KIT: I am.

MATTHEW: Take what you need inside. The rest we'll store in the barn.

KIT: My trunks will be in a barn?

MATTHEW: If there's room.

KIT: What about my books?

MATTHEW: We have a Bible. ...How did you get so wet?

MERCY: Did you fall in the river, Cousin Kit?

KIT: I didn't—I— ...I was knocked about. Somebody fell into me, and—as you see—soaked to the skin.

MATTHEW: Put on something more seemly when you change.

KIT: Seemly, Uncle?

MATTHEW: You can't go to meeting in prideful dress.

(ENTER JUDITH AND RACHEL.)

RACHEL: Judith is full of mystery; what is it, Matthew? (SEES KIT, STUNNED) Margaret, God in heaven, Margaret!

KIT: Aunt Rachel—

RACHEL: It cannot be...

MATTHEW: Rachel, what is it?

RACHEL: She's dead, I know she is—

KIT: Aunt Rachel, I'm not Margaret, I'm her daughter.(PAUSE.) I'm your niece, Kit.

RACHEL: Kit...Margaret's little girl...You're the image of your mother.

JUDITH: I'm sorry, Ma. I should have said.

RACHEL: Look at you. Judith, Mercy, this is exactly how my sister looked the last time we saw each other.

JUDITH: Did she dress like that, Ma?

RACHEL: Both of us, in beautiful satin gowns. But not wet ones. What happened, Kit?

MERCY: She fell in the river, Ma, off the longboat.

RACHEL: You might have been killed.

KIT: Oh, no...I was never in danger. None at all. Really.

RACHEL: You must write and tell your grandfather you're safe.

KIT: Grandfather's dead, Aunt Rachel.

RACHEL: When...?

KIT: He died from smallpox four months ago.

RACHEL: You poor girl. You've seen so much death.

MATTHEW: Who's looking after your farm?

KIT: It's gone. It was sold to pay our debts.

MATTHEW: Is that why you were "desperate" to leave Barbados?

KIT: Yes, and ...yes.

MATTHEW: Good. I feared something more sordid. What are your plans, Katherine?

RACHEL: She'll live here. Safe under God's watch now.

KIT: I was afraid you wouldn't let me stay.

RACHEL: Nonsense. You belong with us. Isn't that right, Matthew?

MATTHEW: (Brief pause) All right now. There's work to be done before meeting. Remember what I said about your dress, Katherine.

KIT: Please, Uncle. Call me Kit.

MATTHEW: As you wish. (KISSES MERCY ON FOREHEAD.) Work well today, Mercy.

KIT: Uncle...I have no plain clothes.

RACHEL: Do the best you can, Kit.

MATTHEW: (KISSES HER FOREHEAD) Don't be late for meeting, Judith.

JUDITH: Yes, Father.

KIT: Thank you, Uncle, for letting me stay.

(MATTHEW EXITS, CARRYING OFF ONE OF THE HEAVY TRUNKS.)

RACHEL: I have to get back to Goody Hamilton.

JUDITH: How is she?

RACHEL: Too sick to look after the baby. See you make your cousin welcome. (RACHEL EXITS.)

MERCY: Come inside, Kit.

KIT: Is there someone can carry a trunk?

MERCY: I'll help you.

JUDITH: No! I'll do it, Mercy.

(JUDITH AND KIT CARRY A TRUNK INSIDE; THEY TALK AS THEY GO)

JUDITH: We'll have to find a place for you to sleep.

MERCY: She'll sleep with me. My bed's plenty big enough.

JUDITH: But what if I get cold?

MERCY: (GETTING HER SPINNING WHEEL) Then you'll sneak in like you always do. Put the trunk there. We'll carry it up before dinner, Kit.

KIT: Up where?

MERCY: Up there, where we sleep.

KIT: There are rooms up there?

JUDITH: Two rooms.

KIT: They can't be very big rooms.

JUDITH: They are completely adequate rooms.

KIT: I'm sorry, I— I'm sorry.

MERCY: ...Tell us about Barbados, cousin.

(JUDITH SHREDS WOOL ON HER CARDING BOARD.)

JUDITH: Mercy, no idle chatter.

MERCY: Only when Father's here.

JUDITH: You'll give Cousin Kit the wrong impression of us.

MERCY: Judy, sweet Judy, this isn't idle chatter. It's Kit's history, and Father says history's important.

JUDITH: All right. Tell us your history, cousin.

KIT: (AS SHE CHANGES OUT OF HER WET DRESS) My history. Well, mother said Aunt Rachel was the most beautiful girl in their town; she could have married anybody, but she fell in love with the Puritan firebrand Matthew Wood and followed him across the ocean to Connecticut.

JUDITH: Father a firebrand!

MERCY: And your mother falls in love with the handsome boy from Barbados and goes to live on his magnificent farm.

JUDITH: Yes. The beautiful sister ends up poor in Connecticut, while the ugly sister ends up rich in Barbados—

MERCY: Judith!

JUDITH: ‘m sorry, cousin.

KIT: ...Mother wasn’t beautiful, but she had friends and filled our house with laughter. I’m like that a little— to make up for my own plain face.

MERCY: (TRIES TO PUT THE CONVERSATION ON SAFE GROUND) Was Nat your great admirer during the journey?

KIT: Nat never even said my name until today. I didn’t think he knew it.

MERCY: (SPINNING A TALE) But today, when he realized you were gone from his ship, he said your name.

KIT: Not exactly.

MERCY: Admiring you from afar until the last possible moment.

JUDITH: Mercy can make a fanciful adventure from the most dreary history.

MERCY: Kit sails the Atlantic with Nat secretly watching her every move from the mast. The sea breeze giving her cheeks a ruddy healthy glow.

KIT: (LAUGHS)I didn’t notice a ruddy glow, but I did love the sea.

MERCY: (GRAND INVENTION) Cousin Kit ties herself to the mast so she can watch the captain’s son as he guides the ship safely through the storm.

KIT: It wasn’t romantic in the least, certainly not between me and Nat. Or me and John Holcomb.

MERCY: Is that the minister’s new pupil?

KIT: Yes. John and the Reverend’s family boarded The Dolphin two weeks ago in Saybrook.

MERCY: John the minister boy and Nat the captain’s son come to blows, dueling for the affection of the young maiden Kit.

KIT: Mercy, you sound like a play I have. (LOOKING IN HER TRUNK) Do you know it?

MERCY: I don’t know a play.

KIT: (HANDS HER BOOK) You speak just like this wonderful play.

JUDITH: Mercy, put it down.

KIT: No, she must read it; it's about two very young people who fall in love and die.

JUDITH: Mercy, you can't— It's simply not allowed, Cousin.

KIT: I'm sorry. I only thought of it because Mercy spoke of dueling.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

MERCY: (QUIETLY) Who do you want to win the duel?

KIT: Boys don't duel over me; boys don't even notice me— ...except...

MERCY: (CONCERNED) What is it, Kit?

KIT: I wasn't going to speak of it— there was somebody in Barbados— a man.

MERCY: Oh dear.

KIT: Nothing bad, nothing sordid. A wealthy friend of grandfather's. He wanted to marry me and pay all the debts, but I couldn't do it. He was forty.

JUDITH: Is this why you were desperate to leave Barbados?

KIT: I was afraid I'd have to marry him if I stayed.

(JUDITH FINDS A BEAUTIFUL DRESS IN THE TRUNK.)

JUDITH: That's not what you said to Father.

MERCY: It's not possible to talk to Father about boys.

KIT: That's what I thought.

MERCY: Kit flees the embrace of the ancient and shriveled suitor to find a young, true love in Connecticut.

JUDITH: (WITH DRESS, HAPPY) Look at me, Mercy.

MERCY: Oh! Put it on, the color makes you sparkle!

JUDITH: Can I try it? Just over my dress.

KIT: Of course. ...Mercy, you spin so easily.

(JUDITH PULLS THE DRESS ON.)

MERCY: I've always been the spinner in our family.

JUDITH: Do you spin, Kit?

KIT: Goodness, no.

JUDITH: Weave?

KIT: I don't.

JUDITH: Do you cook?

KIT: I hate a hot kettle.

MERCY: What do you do all day?

KIT: I read. I swim. I am me. I am Kit.

JUDITH: How do I look, Mercy?

MERCY: The most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

JUDITH: I wish I could wear it to meeting so William could see.

MERCY: He would be filled with rapture at the sight.

KIT: Wear it. I don't mind.

JUDITH: Father will not allow it.

MERCY: If we change the neckline, he might.

JUDITH: Oh, Mercy, can you change it? Now, before meeting?!

MERCY: I can try.

KIT: Wait. I meant as a loan. To borrow. Not to cut it.

(PAUSE)

MERCY: Of course.

KIT: Maybe Uncle will let you wear it like it is.

JUDITH: He won't. ...Never mind. It was wrong of me to try it on. It was wrong to want to have it.

MERCY: Judy, sweet Judy. William doesn't need to see you in finery. He is driven to distraction by the mere sight of you.

JUDITH: Then why doesn't he ask father's permission to court me?

MERCY: He takes you on walks.

JUDITH: Those are unofficial walks, until he gets permission.

MERCY: He will, and then you will marry and live on Blackbird Pond in a fine fine house.

JUDITH: William doesn't need our land. He already has too much.

KIT: Grandfather said a man can't have too much land.

MERCY: No, it goes to waste.

JUDITH: They have slaves to work the extra land.

KIT: We didn't. Grandfather only kept bonded servants.

JUDITH: It's the same.

KIT: It's not. Slavery is forever. A bonded servant is free at the end of the term.

JUDITH: Fourteen years. They die before they're free.

KIT: They don't if the master is kind. My Serena, my bondswoman, I loved her like a sister.

MERCY: Did you bring her with you?

KIT: No, I had to sell her to the governor for passage money.

MERCY: Will he be kind?

KIT: I don't know— Of course! I wouldn't have sold her otherwise.

JUDITH: You loved her like a sister and you sold her for passage money?

KIT: It broke my heart.

JUDITH: Father says bonding is immoral.

MERCY: He and Reverend Gish had a big ...well, they...disagreed about it.

JUDITH: Loudly.

MERCY: ...Lay your dress by the fire, Kit.

JUDITH: Why didn't you sell your fine dresses for passage money?

KIT: I...didn't think to.

JUDITH: You dragged your trunks across an ocean for no reason.

KIT: My trunks aren't filled only with dresses. I have paper, books.

JUDITH: Reading is for meeting, and then only the Bible.

KIT: How do you fill your days if you don't read plays or poetry?

JUDITH: We pray. And we work. And then it's time to go to bed.

(MERCY SPINS, JUDITH CARDS, BRIEF PAUSE.)

KIT: Let me try the wheel, Mercy.

MERCY: You won't like it.

JUDITH: No, Mercy. She should learn how.

(KIT FUMBLES, THE WHEEL IS HEAVY.)

MERCY: Your foot pumps the wheel, and your fingers guide the wool into thread.

(KIT TURNS THE WHEEL.)

KIT: Oh! My fingers.

MERCY: Oh, no. (MERCY BINDS KIT'S FINGERS IN A CLOTH.) Here, cousin. Hold it tight.

JUDITH: Perhaps you'd like to try this.

KIT: What is it?

JUDITH: (SHOWING CARDING BOARD) Wool comes tangled from the lamb. I have to straighten it before Mercy can spin it into thread. First carding, then spinning, then weaving cloth, all to make a new seemly garment for you.

KIT: I'll learn to do it myself. Nobody has to do it for me.

MERCY: Don't worry. Nobody learns in one sitting, Kit. ...It's time to go, Judith.

JUDITH: Come on, Cousin, or we'll be late. We've four miles to cover.

KIT: Mercy. Are you coming?

JUDITH: She can't make the walk. Mercy stays home and spins.

KIT: Spins thread...and beautiful stories.