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Dramatic Publishing



A Play in One Act

by

JAMES L. BRAY

To Burn a Witch



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(TO BURN A WITCH)

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To Burn a Witch

A Play in One Act

FOR FOUR WOMEN

CHARACTERS

RUTH HANNAH SMITH

MARY ABIGAIL GENTRY

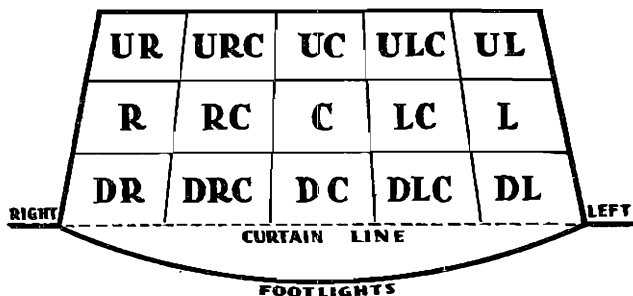
DAME STANLEY

WIDOW JONES

PLACE: Salem, Massachusetts.

TIME: 1683.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Straw, boxes, bench.

WIDOW JONES: Proclamation.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

To Burn a Witch

SCENE: The stage is almost bare. There is an entrance U C. The room itself has no windows, and with the exception of some straw U L and several boxes U R, the only furniture is a bench D L.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: Two young girls are on stage. MARY, an attractive young girl, with a serene face, sits on the bench. She looks down at the floor as though she is in contemplation. RUTH, a taller girl, stands U L near the straw. She is pretty and has zest for life that her present situation has subdued but not extinguished. The lighting is not bright and the room should give the appearance of a cell-like structure. The costumes of the young women are simple in style and should give the impression of Salem community in Massachusetts. The time is at that age when witches were burned--the young and the old.)

RUTH (coming down in back of MARY). How long have we been here?

MARY (not looking up). I've been here one week and two days. You've been here one week.

RUTH. How much longer do you suppose they'll keep us here?

MARY. Until we confess.

RUTH. You mean unless we confess and swear their lies are true?

MARY. Yes.

RUTH (walking to C and looking at MARY). Perhaps we should.

MARY (looking up). Should what?

RUTH. Tell them what they want . . . say anything-- swear that we are agents of the Devil . . . that Satan caused us to strike others dumb, and anything else they accuse us of doing.

MARY. I can't do that, dear Ruth.

RUTH. But it wouldn't be too bad, would it? It's only words, not deeds. Somehow the fact that we are here is the result of a lie, so why shouldn't we get out of this place with another?

MARY. Because God would know we had lied.

RUTH. Where was God when they brought us here?

MARY. Don't blaspheme, Ruth.

RUTH. I mean it. How can you sit there and think that God cares? He let them accuse us of being witches and lock us up in this horrible place. He doesn't help us. Why should we trust?

MARY. I don't understand everything about God, Ruth, but I know He would not have me lie.

RUTH. Then you will not confess.

MARY. I will not confess.

RUTH. But today is the end of the time they gave us.

MARY. I know that well indeed.

RUTH (very intense and moving closer to MARY). They will kill us, Mary. Don't you remember how the others died?

MARY. I remember it very well.

RUTH. And you are not afraid?

MARY. I am very much afraid.

RUTH (louder). Then let's just confess, Mary, and go free.

MARY. I have already told you why I can't.

RUTH (moving D R). I want to believe as you do. I wish I had your faith that what we do is right. Perhaps I am not as bright as you. I only know I want to live. (RUTH sinks down on stool and buries her face in her hands.)

MARY (getting up and moving to RUTH and gently stroking her hair). I want to live, too.

RUTH. But they won't believe us unless we make a confession. The only way they'll give us any sympathy or understanding is if we say that we lied and are witches. You know that.

MARY. No, I don't know that.

RUTH. Well, I'm telling you, Mary, they won't.

MARY. How do I know when or in what way God will touch their hearts?

RUTH (rising impatiently and moving to C). I try to give some sense to all of this. I've tried since the day they seized me and accused me before my mother and father. I've tried to find one reason, one appeal, that would send them all back through that door screaming, "We were wrong." But they won't do it, Mary. They won't come until they come to demand confession or until they come to . . . (She breaks down now in tears and moves to bench and sits.)

MARY (moving closer to RUTH). Don't be too harsh on them. They do what they think is God's will. They are wrong and I pity them when they realize this terrible thing.

RUTH (twisting her hands in frustration). But that will be too late for us. Either they admit now they are wrong or we have no hope.

MARY. We have hope as long as we put our trust in God.

RUTH. And you are sure He'll save us from them?

MARY. No, Ruth, I'm not. He permitted His beloved Son to suffer death.

RUTH (crying aloud). Then God is wrong, too.

MARY. Ruth!

RUTH. I don't want to die. Mary. I don't want to die.

MARY. I don't, either. If given a choice, I'd say--let me live. But is not all of life simply our prepar-

ation to die?

RUTH. How would I know? I don't even think about such things!

MARY (placing her hand on RUTH'S shoulder). Think about them now. It will comfort you. Hush. I think someone is coming!

(DAME STANLEY and WIDOW JONES, two older women, come into the room from the entrance U C. Both are severe-looking, with simple costumes of the era. DAME STANLEY moves down to and just right of the two girls. The other, WIDOW JONES, stands just inside the entrance.)

DAME STANLEY (to MARY). Sit down, witch! Sit there beside the other Devil's bride.

WIDOW JONES. Do you need any help, Dame Stanley?

DAME STANLEY. None, Widow Jones. I am armed with the shield of truth and I have my Bible tied to me.

WIDOW JONES. Then you are safe from their spells and enchantments.

DAME STANLEY. Look at them. Look at these two devils. Would anyone think that such fair skins and pretty faces would side with Satan? Would you think so, Widow Jones?

WIDOW JONES. Nay, Dame Stanley. That I wouldn't.

DAME STANLEY (to RUTH). You there, stand up. You heard me, stand up. (Takes RUTH by shoulders and lifts her. RUTH is afraid.)

WIDOW JONES. You are too kind with the witch, Dame Stanley.

DAME STANLEY. Read the proclamation, Widow Jones. Read it so these witches can hear.