

Jack Skeeter Dennis

Adapted from the short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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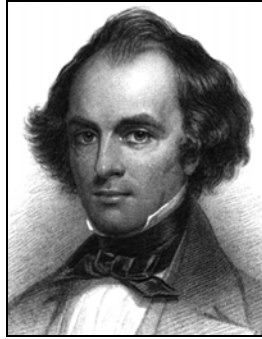
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Young Goodman Brown

CLASSIC/HORROR. This adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's gothic horror classic is true to the original story and provides a stunning stage experience. Goodman Brown, a Puritan who takes pride in his family's history and reputation in Salem Village, leaves his home one evening on a nightmarish errand in which he must travel into a dense, shadowy forest. Along the way, Goodman Brown encounters a mysterious traveler with a walking stick that resembles a large black snake. The traveler convinces Goodman Brown to continue on into the heart of the gloomy forest. When Goodman Brown arrives at a clearing in the forest, he is shocked to see respected townspeople from Salem Village participating in a fiendish ceremony in front of a flaming stone altar.

Performance time: Approximately 30-45 minutes.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1861

About the Story

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, MA, in 1804. His family is descended from the earliest settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Hawthorne is related to John Hathorne, who was one of the judges at the 1692 Salem Witch Trials and condemned 25 women to death. Ashamed of his family's history, Hawthorne added a "w" to his name when he became an author. "Young Goodman Brown" is considered to be one of Hawthorne's most popular works. As in his other works, Hawthorne seeks to expose Puritan hypocrisy and incorporates the names of two women killed during the Salem Witch Trials into his story: Goody Cloyse and Martha Carrier. "Young Goodman Brown" was first published anonymously in a magazine in 1835 and later in Hawthorne's 1846 short story collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Some of Hawthorne's most notable works include *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and the short story "Feathertop."

Characters

(6 M, 5 F, extras)

(With doubling: 5 M, 5 F)

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: Young, pious Puritan who takes pride in his family's history and reputation in Salem Village; male.

FAITH: Young Goodman Brown's wife, who he views as the embodiment of virtue, innocence, and purity; wears a cap with pink ribbons; female.

TRAVELER: An older man who meets Goodman Brown in the forest; has an air of worldliness and resembles Goodman Brown to the point where others might mistake him for Goodman Brown's father; wears simple, grave attire similar to Goodman Brown and carries a walking stick that bears the likeness of a great black snake; male.

DARK FIGURE: Bears a resemblance in garb and manner to a Puritan minister; speaks in a deep, sad, solemn voice; male.

GOODY CLOYSE: Elderly, "pious" Christian of Salem Village who Goodman Brown views as his moral and spiritual advisor; reveals herself to be a witch; female.

MINISTER: Minister of Salem Village, who is considered a respectable pillar of the community; male.

DEACON GOOKIN: Salem Village clergy member who Goodman Brown considers a good Christian; male.

MARTHA CARRIER: "Pious" Christian citizen of Salem Village, a hag who has received the devil's promise to be the queen of hell; female.

MOTHER: Goodman Brown's mother; non-speaking; female.

FATHER: Goodman Brown's father; non-speaking; male.

YOUNG GIRL: Non-speaking; female.

EXTRAS: As Townspeople.

Doubling Option

DARK FIGURE/TRAVELER (male)

Setting

17th-century Puritan New England.

Sets

Exterior of Goodman Brown's home. A cutout of a modest Puritan home may be used.

Path through a dense forest. There are many tree trunks that darken and crowd the narrow path. Overhead, thick tree boughs loom over the path.

Heart of the dark forest. At one side, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, there is a rock bearing some resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit. It is surrounded by four "blazing" pines with their tops aflame. [Note: The trees can be painted red with red lighting effects to represent fire.] Foliage that has overgrown the summit of the rock is on "fire." [Note: Lighting effects can be used to represent flames/fire here as well.]

Salem Village street. A backdrop can be used that depicts the village's church and meetinghouse.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Outside Young Goodman Brown's home, Salem Village, sunset.

Scene 2: A dreary, lonely path through a dense forest, that evening.

Scene 3: Deeper inside the forest, later that evening.

Scene 4: Deeper inside forest, later that evening.

Scene 5: Heart of the dark forest, midnight. The path has gotten wilder, drearier, and more faintly traced.

Scene 6: Heart of the dark forest, moments later.

Scene 7: Heart of the dark forest, moments later.

Scene 8: Street of Salem Village, the next morning.

Props

Cap with pink ribbons, for Faith	Hollowed rock basin bearing
Staff/walking stick that bears the likeness of a black snake	a resemblance to an altar or a pulpit that contains water colored red
Branch with leaves and twigs that can be fashioned into a walking stick	Veil, for Faith
	Pint of milk

Special Effects

Wind	Voices fading into distant laughter
Footsteps	Horse hooves retreating
Lighting effects can be used to make the Traveler's walking stick look as though it is twisting or wriggling like a snake, opt.	Flying effect, opt. (A harness can be used to achieve this.)
Horse hooves approaching	Wind tolling like a church bell
Tree boughs brushed aside (can be achieved with fishing line)	Trees creaking
Sound of a branch breaking off a tree	Wild beasts howling
Blue arch of light (lighting effect)	Wind roaring
Stars (lighting effect)	Hymn
Swell of voices	Chorus of wilderness sounds
Cries of grief, rage, and terror	4 "Blazing" pine trees (fire/flames can be achieved with lighting effects)
Scream	Smoky haze

*"The fiend in his own shape
is less hideous
than when he rages
in the breast of man."*

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Salem Village, sunset. Outside Young Goodman Brown's home. Stepping outside his front door, Young Goodman Brown turns and gives his wife, Faith, a parting kiss. The wind gently blows the pink ribbons on her cap.)

FAITH: (*Softly, sadly.*) Dearest heart, prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed tonight. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afraid of herself sometimes. Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: My love and my Faith, of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must be done 'twixt now and sunrise. My sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?

FAITH: Then God bless you! And may you find all well when you come back.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: Amen! Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk and no harm will come to thee.

(*Young Goodman Brown starts off on his journey. When he is about to exit, he looks back and sees Faith watching him with a melancholy look on her face. He exits. Blackout.*)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: A dreary, lonely path through a dense forest, that evening. The path is darkened by trees, which loom over and crowd the narrow path. Young Goodman Brown enters and makes his way cautiously as he does not know who or what may be concealed by the innumerable tree trunks and thick boughs overhead. Only his lonely footsteps can be heard.)

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: *(To himself.)* Poor little Faith! What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand. She talks of dreams, too. Me thought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no, it would kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth, and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven. *(Glances fearfully behind him.)* There may be a ghost behind every tree. What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow?

(Glancing behind him, Young Goodman Brown passes a crook in the path. He looks forward and sees the Traveler, who is seated at the foot of an old tree. Young Goodman Brown is startled by the sudden appearance of the Traveler. The Traveler's staff bears the likeness of a great black snake. [Note: With special effects, the staff can be made to look as if it is twisting and wriggling like a snake, but this is optional.] As Young Goodman Brown approaches, the Traveler rises and walks alongside Young Goodman Brown.)

TRAVELER: You are late, Goodman Brown. The clock was striking as I came through Boston, and that is a full 15 minutes ago.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: *(With a tremor in his voice.)* Faith kept me back awhile.

TRAVELER: Come, Goodman Brown, this is a dull place for the beginning of a journey...

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(Lights fade to black as the Traveler and Young Goodman Brown exit.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Deeper inside the forest, later that evening. Young Goodman Brown and the Traveler enter. Young Goodman Brown looks tired and weary and halts.)

TRAVELER: Take my staff, if you are so soon weary.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: Friend, having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter thou speak of.

TRAVELER: Sayest thou so? Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go. And if I convince thee not, thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way into the forest.

(Young Goodman Brown resumes walking.)

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: Too far! Too far! My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs, and I shall be the first of the name of Brown who ever took this path and kept—

TRAVELER: Such company, thou wouldst say. Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans...and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both. And many a pleasant walk have we had along this path and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: If it be as thou sayest, I marvel they never spoke of these matters. Or, verily, I

marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer and good works to boot and abide no such wickedness.

TRAVELER: Wickedness or not, I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me. The town council made me their chairman. And a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The Governor and I too – *(Stops himself.)* But these are state secrets.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: *(Staring with amazement at the Traveler.)* Can this be so? Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the Governor and council. They have their own ways and are no rule for a simple farmer like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day.

(Thus far the Traveler has listened to Young Goodman Brown with due gravity but now bursts into a fit of laughter, shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seems to wriggle.)

TRAVELER: *(Laughing loudly.)* Ha! Ha! Ha! *(Trying to compose himself.)* Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on! But, prithee, don't kill me with laughing!

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: *(Unsettled, rattled.)* Well, then, to end the matter at once, there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear, little heart, and I'd rather break my own.

TRAVELER: Nay, if that be the case, then go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for 20 old women... *(Slight pause.)* ...like the one hobbling before us... *(Points his staff at the figure of Goody Cloyse, who is on the path. Goodman Brown recognizes her.)* ...that Faith should come to any harm.

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness at nightfall. But

with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and where I was going.

TRAVELER: Be it so. Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path.

(Mumbling an indistinct prayer, the elderly Goody Cloyse makes her way slowly along the path. Young Goodman Brown steps aside but takes care to watch the Traveler, who advances along the path until he comes within a staff's length of Goody Cloyse. The Traveler puts forth his staff and touches Goody Cloyse's withered neck with the part of the staff that resembles a serpent's tail.)

GOODY CLOYSE: *(Screams.)* The devil!

TRAVELER: *(Leaning on his staff.)* Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?

GOODY CLOYSE: Ah, forsooth. And is it your worship indeed? Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old friend, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But would your worship believe it...my broomstick hath strangely disappeared. Stolen as I suspect by that unhanged witch, Goody Cory, and when I was all anointed with the juice of wild celery, and cinquefoil, and wolf's bane.

TRAVELER: Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a newborn babe.

GOODY CLOYSE: *(Cackles.)* Ah, your worship knows the recipe. So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it, for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion tonight. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling.

TRAVELER: That can hardly be. I will not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse, but here is my staff, if you will.

(Traveler throws down his staff at her feet. [Note: Staff can look as if it comes to life with lighting effects, if desired.] Young Goodman Brown looks at the staff with astonishment. Blackout. Lights up. Young Goodman Brown looks, and Goody Cloyse and the staff/serpent have disappeared. Traveler remains looking calmly at Young Goodman Brown as if nothing has happened.)

YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN: *(In disbelief.)* That old woman taught me my catechism...

[END OF FREEVIEW]