

THE EXECUTION OF THE BLAIR WITCH

WRITTEN BY
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Act I, Scene V

This script is a section of a historical play that I staged a few years ago titled "The Past Never Dies: A First-Person Anthology of Tales from Old Blair." This particular scene is a dramatization of the honorable Judge Jonathan Goodneighbor's journal entries, written just a few months before his death in 1785. Goodneighbor's journal was originally found in the walls of the Museum during Hudd's renovations. A rat had made its nest out of the pages, but the few sections that were still legible have provided a fascinating insight into the trial and condemnation of the alleged Blair Witch. While the lack of concrete information regarding the accused witch's death (those particular pages having been long since lost) forced me to take a number of creative liberties and make some educated guesses, all of the information on the directions that Goodneighbor took in the forest itself are accurate to history.

—A

Act I, Scene V

INT. JUDGE GOODNEIGHBOR'S QUARTERS - AFTERNOON

Goodneighbor paces the floor of his bedroom and crosses to his desk. Sitting, he prepares his journal and writes.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Writing, weary*) This is the journal of Jonathan Goodneighbor. Recorded this horrid evening, February 17th, 1785.

The townsfolk complain of witchcraft. Many children bear the same mark on their wrists from where she carved and siphoned blood. It was told to me that she collected the blood into several small bowls and arranged them in her cellar into some Satanic symbol.

I, being a Godly man as well as a man of the law, ordered an investigation to be conducted at once. An hour's walk into the forest, we discovered the old woman's home, encircled with fencing of wood bound in twine. Rushing inside and to the fruit cellar, we found her standing in the corner, as if expecting our arrival. I saw no sign of the ritual and no evidence of her working her craft. It made no difference. She had ample time to conceal her doings, and the children's testimony was damning enough.

We bound the hag in shackles and carried her to meet justice.

Goodneighbor leans back in his chair, deep in thought. He stands, crossing to the window to stare out at the town.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Aloud, foreboding*) We must put this witch on trial and submit her to her punishment with utmost haste.

[BLACKOUT.]



INT. JUDGE GOODNEIGHBOR'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Goodneighbor angrily storms into the room. It is dimly lit by a single candle. A storm rages outside the window. His desk is cluttered with books. He sweeps his arm across the tabletop, throwing the mess to the floor. He sits and furiously begins to write.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Writing*) February 21st, 1785. Though the children of Blair exposed her deeds, the old woman had nothing to say on the matter. Even when I bellowed at her in a most thunderous voice to reveal her true purpose, she said nothing.

Finally, I was left with no option but to take a hot poker to her skin. A reminder of the everlasting hellfire which awaits all those who refuse to repent. She did not so much as flinch.

No mortal could have withstood the searing pain of that fire, and so it was proven in her silence that she was indeed wed to the devil. The trial was complete.

The windows blow open, extinguishing Goodneighbor's candle. The stage is dark.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Shocked*) Damned storm.

A flash of lightning briefly illuminates the room, revealing an old woman watching Goodneighbor as he closes the window. He doesn't seem to notice her. The room returns to darkness, and when Goodneighbor relights his candle, she's gone. He continues.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Writing*) As I delivered the sentence, I expected some cry or protestation, and yet she sat staring at the wall with unfocused eyes. Come the morning, my companions and I shall bring the witch to a quiet place to carry out her sentencing.

With a heavy sigh, Goodneighbor lays down his quill.

[BLACKOUT.]

INT. JUDGE GOODNEIGHBOR'S QUARTERS - DAY

Goodneighbor appears exhausted. He has heavy red scratches on the left side of his face and neck. His robes are torn and his boots are muddy.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Writing*) February 22nd, 1785. And so the courts have done their work, and the law has been upheld.

Desiring to place distance between ourselves and the fair town, we traveled until we came upon a huge, bone-white rock. I suggested that we complete the deed there, as it seemed as good a spot as any. However, we soon began to hear a terrible noise: the sound of hundreds of crows cawing in the distance. I judged the birds to be an hour from our position at the rock, but their cries echoed in a most loud and ominous manner.

Doubtless, an omen. As they crowded in the distance, we pummeled the witch as punishment for summoning the beasts. Still she made no sound.

Though the witch was silent, the forest was not. The sound of cawing crows still echoed from a particular region of the forest itself, as if the land had taken on the cries of the birds and amplified them

a hundredfold. As the others clutched their ears in pain and fear, I found myself clutching at my greatest comfort, a locket containing a lock of my dear wife Propriety's hair, to compose myself as I recited the Lord's Prayer.

Unwilling to remain in the same vicinity as the beasts, we turned from our position at the rock and fled for five hours in total, going the opposite direction from which the cacophonous cawing had so ominously emanated. While we fled the noise, I noted that a certain region of the forest contained a number of trees that appeared to have been ravaged by a large creature of some sort, and I warned my men to keep their wits about them. I was quite relieved when we left this particular area behind us. Our group continued, straightforward on the course we had set away from the terrible noise.

When the last sounds of the crows had faded and the forest was silent as the grave, save for the sounds of our party's footsteps, the witch finally broke her days-long silence. She requested that, were she to be left to die, she would be left in a grove of trees that she often sat amongst in moments of silent contemplation. We, being an honorable and compassionate group of men, obliged. She turned at a slight angle and led us in a new direction, with myself directly at her back, keeping a keen eye out for any sign of treachery, and my men behind me. As we walked, I began to hear behind me my men murmur dreadful utterances about how we and our children would be doomed for our trespassing and our violence. I turned and ordered them to be quiet, but each and every man insisted that they had not uttered a word. After traveling for two hours in the witch's chosen direction, we came upon a hollow with a white tree at its center.

I moved to bind the witch to the tree—a twisted, dying thing.

Seeking out one final opportunity to sate her bloodlust, the witch clawed at my face and neck as I bound her, screeching all manner of hellish condemnation and tearing the locket from my neck. It was then that my companions fled, leaving me to carry out the deed on my own. Perhaps they feared she would soon break free of her bindings, and so I was left alone to complete the task. Her strength surprised me, but the power of all that is holy remained on my side, and I succeeded in my efforts to subdue her.

I completed the deed and, so full of fear that I momentarily forgot about the locket, turned my back on the witch to return home. As I left the hollow, I began to feel an agonizing sensation of burning on the back of my neck, as if two hot coals had been pressed into my very flesh. I did not turn around to see what was behind me. Instead, I began to run back to town, not slowing or turning back once for the entire journey.

Regretfully, I must leave my beloved locket behind. A fear grips me that, should I attempt to return to the forest again, I might not return home.

From outside the window, the figure of an old woman in a dark and heavy cloak slowly approaches, watching Goodneighbor.

GOODNEIGHBOR (*Writing*) I comfort myself with the knowledge that the witch's twisted heart will lie far away from civilized society forevermore.

Still, I confess that I cannot forget the sound of her final cries and of the terrible curse she uttered with her last gasping breath.

But I comfort myself with the knowledge that, at last, this horridness is behind us.

The old woman stands staring in through the window, no longer at Judge Goodneighbor, but at the audience.

[BLACKOUT.]