

# The Witch of Wellfleet

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A monologue / short play

by

Jim Dalglish

## Character

**Woman** - A marvelous storyteller who loves the story she tells

## Setting

**Place** - Wherever people want to hear a well-told tale - preferably next to a warm fire set in the hearth of an old tavern on Cape Cod.

**Time** - The next time you allow yourself a moment to realize that the history of a place is only alive as long as there is someone to tell it.

*The Witch of Wellfleet* tells the story of a mysterious woman who leaves her home on the craggy shores of Scotland to find her destiny on the far side of the world. This retelling of the tale of Goody Hallett, the notorious pirate Black Sam Bellamy, and their bastard child offers a fresh take on a famous Cape Cod legend.

Originally performed as a portion of the play *Dark Tales Told on a Cold Autumn Eve*, by Jim Dalglish.

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## WOMAN

She came from the north coast of Scotland, where the water is cold and the herring swim so thick they block out the sun. And while the water so far north is so very cold, her people had adapted to their remote home in ways that would alarm those unfamiliar with the Gaelic tales that have been told since the beginning of time.

The cold water never bothered her. She loved nothing more than to don her skin and swim days on end along the jagged shore. Like the rest of her people, it's what she had been born to. And she was happy.

But as she grew older, she became curious about the tales her people told of the tribes of the south and the strange worlds they inhabited. Tales told over night fires set at the center of a circle of standing stones. As she swam, she would find herself treading water... looking off into the distance... pondering what lay over the horizon toward the southern seas.

Then one day in the early years of the seventeen hundreds, as she swam off the frigid headlands of Callanish, she felt a thin finger of warm water crawl up her back, wrap round her neck, and tickle her chin. The water smelled of sargasso, felt thick with new life, and tasted like long days spent under a brazen sun. And suddenly she felt an irresistible pull to leave the cold, thin seas of the north for the warmer waters on the other side of the world.

Though they warned her of the wicked ways of those from the South, her people were unable to dissuade her of her folly. So she bid farewell, donned her skin, dove into the waves, and followed the stream to the west...swimming beyond the sheltered harbors... into the open seas... beyond the horizon... past the ice-capped volcanoes and geysers of Iceland... threading the icebergs calved by the cascading glaciers of Greenland. She swam by the snowcapped mountains that lined the inlets of the new world and - following the scent of the current - turned south towards the coral islands of the sun.

The scent was growing warmer... thicker... more exquisitely pungent. Only a few more days and nights, and she would be... she knew not where. She believed it was her destiny.

But when she swam over Georges Bank, a nor'easter rose and blew her off her course, west toward the hidden shoals of Cape Cod - the graveyard of the Atlantic.

She fought to right her course, but a strong current overpowered her and she surrendered to the pull of something beyond her control. As it dragged her along the treacherous coast of the Outer Cape... high up on a bluff... next to the extinguished Three Sisters Lights... stood a man... a mooncusser... a peering glass to his eye...

searching through the blinding rain for a ship in peril... a ship desperately seeking the extinguished beacon of the Three Sisters Lights. There the man stood... waiting for a ship to ground on the hidden shoals... a wreck he could salvage... cargo he could claim and resell to earn his fortune.

She saw the man.

The way he wore his oilskin slicker... the black hood pulled back... it looked as though he were emerging from his skin. She thought she had traveled across the world and found a kindred spirit... a member of her tribe. But in all her years surrounded by the people of the North Sea, she had never seen a creature more beautiful. Was this man... this coast where he lived... her destiny?

She shed her skin and fought the surf as she struggled to make it to shore. The riptide pulled the sand beneath her feet... tripping her... rolling her in a maelstrom of waves, stones and broken shell.

From high on the bluff, through his peering glass he had caught her naked form as it crossed the beam of his lantern.

He scrambled down the dune, threw off his black oilskin slicker and plunged into the surf. By the time he reached her, she had collapsed unconscious into the frigid waves... her right hand clutching her seal skin.

She woke the next day in his bed. The storm had passed. He was leaning over her, his eyes the dark blue of the edge of a mussel shell. His skin as smooth as mother of pearl. His long hair as black as a moonless night 200 leagues under the sea. Her people were so different in the new world.

When he smiled the sun burned through the morning haze and filled the room with golden beams and the warmth she felt that day in the water so many months ago, returned.

He leaned in to her ear.

*I saw... from the top of the cliff... I know what you are... Selkie.*

She looked to the door. Hanging on a hook was his black oilskin slicker. He had not emerged from his seal skin the night before. She had been fooled.

He overtook her as she stumbled naked to the door.

*I have your skin, Selkie.*

He pointed to an iron-frame chest locked and double-secured with two thick metal chains.

*You are now mine.*

Without her skin she could not return to the sea. She would be forever beholden to this trickster... this blue-eyed devil.

He said he would call her Maria... Maria Hallett.

He christened the name by kissing her gently... softly.... And though she was afraid, because by the years of her people she was so very young and because he was so very beautiful, in that moment she fell in love.

His name? Samuel Bellamy. But you may know him by another name...

He introduced her to the people of Wellfleet as Goody Hallett - a gentle woman cast into the sea from one of the ships sunk in the gale. Her memory gone from a blow she suffered in the wreck.

Her otherworldly beauty and peculiar ways didn't sit well with the good people of the village, neither did her living arrangement. She spent her days tending her small garden... her evenings walking the short trail across the Nauset Moors to view the ocean... gazing out over the far side of the eastern horizon toward her home.

Whenever he wasn't home, she'd search in vain for the keys to the chest. Pound it with her bare hands... try to pry it open with the claw of a hammer.

Bellamy would see the scrapes and dents and he would take her in his arms...

*You are my greatest treasure, Maria. How could I ever let you go?*

But for some men the greatest treasure is always the one that belongs to another.

Soon he was booked on a ship bound for the Caribbean to salvage gold coins from a sunken galleon.

He assured her that in a few short months he would return and the chest would be filled with gold pieces. They would leave this godforsaken stretch of sand and sail the seven seas.

She watched the horses draw his carriage away... the chest tied to the top... and she felt was as though she were being flayed alive.

Within a few days there was an odd churning in her gut. She began to fall ill in the afternoons. After a few weeks it passed and she didn't think of it again.

She received a letter from Bellamy. By the time his crew had arrived, the sunken galleon had been swept clean. But there were other prospects on the horizon.

In the market of Wellfleet she began to hear rumors of Black Sam Bellamy. The richest pirate to sail the high seas.

She was by herself in the cottage when her time came. Alone and afraid... with little knowledge of how to bring a child into the world... the whore of Wellfleet delivered a bastard son.

While the boy had Black Sam's blue eyes, she prayed his true nature was closer to her own.

With an infant in her arms, the prune-faced puritans of Wellfleet gave her a berth wider than ever. The people in the market refused to trade for food. Soon she was forced to live on the boiled roots of the flowers she dug up from her garden. In the moonlight she foraged through the woods looking for berries and edible leaves, her hungry infant swaddled to her chest. She gathered seaweed under the watchful eyes of the Three Sisters Lights.

During this times of hunger, no word came from the infamous Black Sam Bellamy.

Summer turned to fall, the temperatures dropped. No food in her larder. No wood for her stove.

Her milk dried up and her child went hungry. Soon he was too weak to cry.

On the final full moon of autumn, standing ankle deep in the water she had once called her home, her son in her arms...

She returned her child to the sea.

Within a few days they came to Sam's cottage looking for her. They invented wild stories... that she had hidden her child in a barn and he had suffocated under a pile of sea hay... that she had buried him in the garden... that she had sold him to the Wampanoags in exchange for bread.

A delegation arrived from Up Cape, they bound her hands and carted her off to the Barnstable Jail. And that's where she stayed for three months... alone... counting the minutes until the inquest.

But there was no body... no proof to any of the salacious rumors.

They had to let her go.

She returned to the cottage and waited for the Prince of Pirates.

A letter came. Black Sam Bellamy had made his fortune and was returning to the Cape on one of his prizes... the Whydah. He was returning to his love... to take her away... north and east... to her home.

On the day of his return, a nor-ester blew up. Maria donned Sam's black oilskin slicker and braved the gale to stand beside the Three Sisters. Through the driving rain, she saw the Whydah... caught on the furthest bar... beyond the reach of the breeches buoy the townspeople had set below.... de-masted... tilted to one side... a deep gash

in her side. A mortal wound. The wind picked up, changed directions, and dragged her further off into the deluge until she disappeared from sight.

The people who had gathered on the beach looked up and saw Maria on that bluff. *Casting her spells*, they would later say... revenge on the man who had left her behind.

And that is how she became known as the Witch of Wellfleet.

Only two men managed to make it ashore. Neither were Black Sam Bellamy.

(Laughing:) Foolish man. If he had understood the sea... if he had even an ounce of humility... if she had been more to him than just another trinket he could keep locked in a chest.... No, it was not for him that Maria was waiting.

The good people of Wellfleet ran her out of Sam's cottage. She built a lean-to near a salt marsh on the far edge of White Cedar Swamp.

After a few months she fashioned a cabin of sorts for herself. Planted turnips in the meadow. In the fall, she'd cart them to market in Wellfleet. And in the evenings - after she had tended to her field - she would visit the high bluffs along White Crest.

One day she stopped coming to the market. A month passed. People sought her out, but she had disappeared without a trace.

Well... she didn't disappear entirely... The people of the Outer Cape have been seeing Maria on and off for the past 300 years.

Wait for a full moon on a cloudless night. Around midnight... when the stars come out and turn the world into a beautiful indigo blue... venture out along the sands of the Back Shore... and look up. There on the high bluffs along White Crest, you will see her... in Sam's tattered oilskin slicker... looking out to sea.... waiting for the Whydah to return.

Or you may find yourself enjoying a frothy dram as you sit next to a warm fire set in the hearth of an old tavern on the Cape. A mysterious woman will enter, shake the winter rain off her slicker and hang it up on a hook beside the door. Your eyes will meet...eyes as dark as the bottom of the ocean. A sudden chill will run up the center of your back and you will find yourself beckoning her to join you by the warmth of the fire. And as the hours pass you will listen as she tells the tales and sings the old Gaelic songs of her people back on the rocky coast of Scotland.

But I have a feeling Goody Hallett will not be haunting the Cape much longer.

Some years back a modern day mooncusser found the Whydah in waters less than 15 feet deep a quarter mile off the Back Shore of Wellfleet. Silver and gold and casks and bones and a fortune in treasure. It's been slow work, but every so often they pull

up something new and bring it to the lab in Yarmouth. They submerge it in a tank, scrape the rock and sediment off, and put it on display.

One day they'll find what Goody's been waiting for. A chest... double locked with heavy chains. And they will scrape it clean... open it... and there it will be...

Her skin.

And if I know Goody, come hell or high water, she will get her hands on that skin. And when she does, she'll take it to the sands at White Crest. And there he will be, circling just beyond the breakers, diving for fish. She'll see his black shiny coat and the glimmer of something... a flash of blue... his eyes. She will know that he had taken after his mother... when she returned him to the sea.

She will don her black seal skin and dive into the waves. And they will head North and East. To reunite with her people after all these years. Swimming with her boy... her beautiful blue-eyed boy.